

*Extract from*

**THE BRITISH COLONIAL EXPERIENCE 1800-1964:**

**The Impact on Maltese Society**

*Edited by Victor Malla-Milanes*

**Malta, Mireva Publications, 1988**

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**Everyday Life in Malta  
in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

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While describing the Maltese character, Frederick M. Lacroix observed that 'the Maltese are intellllgent, hardworking, clever and can surely succeed in all fields of work ... but the English Government looks at the occupation of Malta solely and entirely as an important fortress colony and is indifferent towards the interests of its inhabitants.'<sup>1</sup> Lacroix was writing in 1848, at a time when the French and the British were not exactly on friendly terms but his account seems fairly reasonable if compared to that of Senior Nassau who, in 1882, wrote that 'Maltese incomes are so small that the attempt to keep the appearance which the English think only decent, becomes a ruinous expense.'<sup>2</sup>

The Maltese maintained a cool relationship with the British, mixing very little at least until the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> The Sliema area was the first part of the island to adapt an Anglicized style and sub-culture. This was fostered by the dominant position of the Church. When writing on the matter in the early 1930s, Sir Harry Luke, Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, remarked that 'the Maltese are among the most devoted sons and daughters of the Roman Catholic Church.'<sup>4</sup>

The islanders, notably country folk, depended directly on the local priests, making the church the centre of village life, and the parish priest its first citizen. The priest combined teaching and several other advisory duties with his spiritual role. He was also the main link with the world outside, with the church acting as a meeting place, with the climax being reached during the feast of the patron saint.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, religion was entrenched in

the heart of the people, making the parish and the village one and the same thing, a situation that persisted at least up to the late 1930s. The position of the parish priest was therefore dominant. Herbert Ganado related that when, in the 1920s, he was invited by a friend to the Siggiewi village feast, his friend's father asked him whether he had first been to the parish priest.<sup>6</sup> In the village, doctor, lawyer, notary, pharmacist, police inspector, and sergeant all enjoyed an important social status, but the parish priest was the undisputed head.

This state of affairs could also be found, though to a lesser extent, in the harbour area. The British had, early in the nineteenth century, done their best to introduce the Protestant faith amongst the people, but without much success.<sup>7</sup> Protestant clergymen who visited Malta in the nineteenth century could hardly allow such a situation to pass unnoticed. One such pastor, the Revd H. Seddall, wrote in 1870:<sup>8</sup>

Religious fervour is one of the leading features in the character of the Maltese people, and it discovers itself ... in the building of churches and chapels; the erection of images at the corners of the streets, to be devoutly worshipped by the populace.

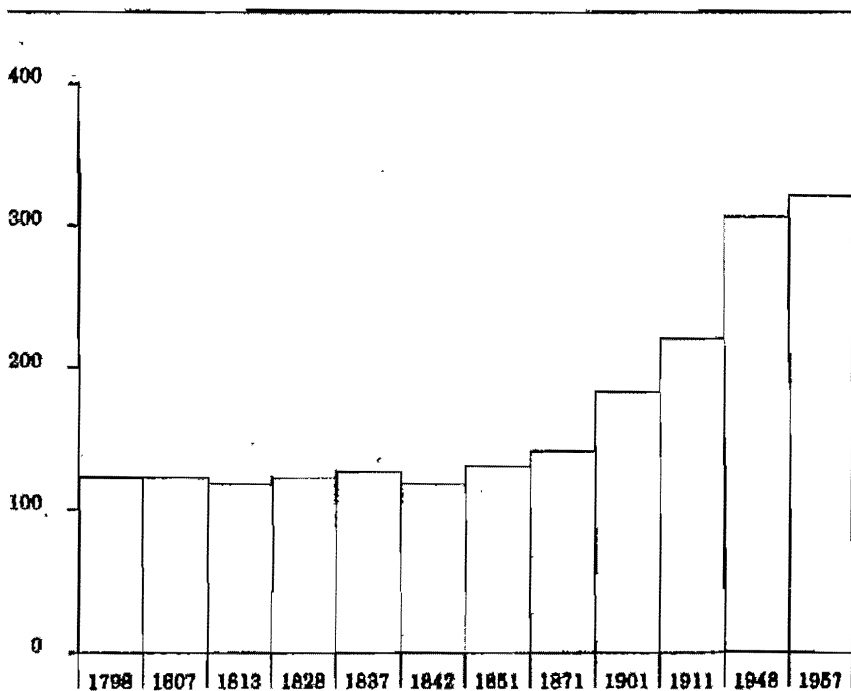
He further commented on the poor education of the Maltese clergy, and how 'they look with suspicion on everything that is stamped with the religion of England'.<sup>9</sup> Seddall pointed out that the religion of Malta was directed to the senses rather than prayer. Hence, 'it takes the gross form in which we find it in Italy, Spain, in South America, in all countries completely under the ecclesiastical domination of Rome'.<sup>10</sup>

What Seddall wrote, not perhaps without some bias, in 1870, applied also to the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> It was the Second World War which, to some extent, brought about a change in the mentality of the population. The war brought villager and townsman closer together. It also undermined the traditional respect for authority. The younger generation, which came out of the war disillusioned by conscription, had new ideals, including greater freedom. This meant the discarding of old principles and a more general indifference towards the clergy.

## I POPULATION, WORK, AND MIGRATION

When the Order of St John left Malta in 1798, the population of the Maltese Islands, which in 1530 had amounted to a mere 20,000, had gone up to 100,000. Although, in the two years that followed, Malta's population decreased slightly, owing to the effect of the uprising against the French, combined with hunger and the spread of disease, there was a gradual increase after 1800. The plague of 1813 once again checked this growth, but by 1828 the population was again on the rise.<sup>13</sup> The histogram below is a clear indication of how the number of inhabitants kept on growing throughout the British period. In fact, from just above 100,000 in the early nineteenth century, it surpassed the quarter of a million after the Second World War and rose to over 300,000 a decade later.

TABLE 1. Population Increase in Thousands  
1798-1957



SOURCES: L.H. Dudley Buxton, *Malta*; H. Bowen-Jones et al., *Malta*; E.L. Zammit, *A Colonial Inheritance*; various 'Descriptions' of Malta, and the relevant censuses

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the population of the harbour area grew slowly. Valletta, for example, had a population increase, reaching the 25,000 mark by 1861. During the 1860s, people were already seeking dwellings in the suburbs. Floriana's population grew steadily in the decade after 1861, but ceased to maintain the same rapid growth after 1871. The dependence of Malta's economy on foreign sources since the time of the Knights, linked with the presence of the British forces, further encouraged the shifting of villagers to the urban and suburban areas. Hamrun grew in importance to such an extent that the need to establish it as a parish was felt in the late 1860s. This new working-class suburb had a population of 1,500 in 1860; it went up to 2,500 by 1870 and to about 6,000 by 1890.<sup>13</sup>

Other suburban areas which had previously been larger villages, like Birkirkara and Qormi, experienced notable increases. Working-class suburbs which, like Hamrun, underwent a more explosive demographic growth, included Paola and Marsa. While in 1871 there were 3,200 persons living in the Hamrun, Marsa, and St Venera areas, by 1948 there were ten times as many. In Paola there had been only 488 inhabitants in 1861, going up to 14,793 in 1948.<sup>14</sup>

A similar demographic growth was taking place on the other side of the Marsamxett harbour. Sliema, which in 1861 had a mere 324 inhabitants, reached the 23,000 mark by 1957, while St Julians, which in 1871 consisted of 600 inhabitants, had 9,122 after the Second World War. By 1945 the suburban area of Sliema, St Julians, Gzira, Msida, and Pietà formed a continuous inhabited belt occupying the northern shore of Marsamxett harbour.<sup>15</sup>

The suburbs had undergone a rapid increase between 1850 and 1900. If taken together, the population of the suburbs, which in 1850 accounted for only 15,000, had by 1900 reached 54,000. Meanwhile, the population of Valletta and the Three Cities remained relatively stable. Population increase in the suburbs does not seem to have taken place at the expense of the old urbanized areas, but was due rather to the migration of people from the countryside to the developing harbour area in search of better jobs.

This phenomenon is explained by Dudley Buxton who asserts that, by 1921, about one-fourth of the population in Malta

resided in the towns around the harbour, i.e. Valletta, the Three Cities, and Floriana; one-third lived in the nearby suburban area, while the rest were scattered in the mostly agricultural parts.<sup>16</sup> Therefore; whereas from 1842 to 1901 the rural population comprised 33.6 per cent of the population,<sup>17</sup> it had become proportionately smaller by 1921, and even more so after 1945.

The growth of the suburbs and the strengthening of the non-agricultural element in rural areas, which had developed during the British rule, took root mainly through the modernization of economic life, a highly demanding dockyard and harbour activity, and improved internal systems of transport.<sup>18</sup>

From 1871 onwards, non-agricultural employment became dominant in the Maltese economy. This meant that the local industries tied to the old agricultural pattern had begun to die out, while more people were finding employment with the colonial Government. Malta was so important as a British base that it was felt desirable to provide direct employment for most of the population. This

influenced people's minds as it controlled their fortunes. This applied to civil servants, industrial workers, and especially to those enlisted in the Armed Forces and in ancillary services.<sup>19</sup>

More and more people became dependent on harbour activities. Between 1871 and 1881, the working population increased substantially, from 40,699 to 46,116. Functionally, the largest increase -- 100 per cent -- occurred among porters, carriers, and coalheavers; while the commercial group increased by 27 per cent. The building industry suffered a slight decrease. By 1891 the harbour boom was over, but Government expenditure and imperial military spending continued to grow.<sup>20</sup> The great increase of coalheavers is significant, especially since the majority, about 80 per cent, lived in Luqa, Qormi, and Zejtun. This suggests that, by 1891, the area of harbour activities extended to most of the eastern and central parts of Malta.<sup>21</sup> In the 1920s they were still mainly recruited from the Marsa, Tarxien, Qormi, Luqa, and Zabbar areas. There were about 2,000 who, for a slightly better-than-average pay, had to work under deplorable conditions.<sup>22</sup>

The most important industrial development during the British

period took place in the dockyard which saw a rapid increase in its working force between the 1890s and the late 1940s. The total number of dockyard workers at this period is here given at approximately ten-year intervals:

TABLE 2. Total Number of Dockyard Workers  
1896-1969

Year	Number	Year	Number
1896	3 000	1939	10 000
1906	4 000	1949	12 000
1918	13 000	1959	5 940
1928	7 500	1969	5 223

SOURCE: E.L. Zammit, *A Colonial Inheritance*, 42.

This mass employment of the Maltese with the colonial Government led to a situation where the workers felt committed to the British cause 'as a result of the fact that thousands of jobs were secured at a rate of pay... often rather better than that paid to workers in private enterprise ... or indeed in the lower ranks of the civil service'.<sup>23</sup> The Armed Forces and the Admiralty were in constant need of manpower, with the result that, until the Second World War, unemployment was not a major problem. This also helped in the urbanization of society because the sons of peasants, who were abandoning the land, were getting used to living in the towns around the harbour.

Work connected with the Navy had by the early part of the twentieth century become so vital to the Maltese economy. Following the Mediterranean fleet's reduction by six battleships, it was reported to the Royal Commission in 1911 that commercial activity was revived as soon as the fleet entered the harbour.<sup>24</sup> Employment with the Services was to decrease only after the Second World War. However, in 1957, 27 per cent of the working force was still gainfully employed in colonial establishments.<sup>25</sup>

As in other continental European societies, the Maltese family had traditionally assigned secondary importance to women. This was further stressed in the Mediterranean region, where they in fact had a great say in familial and household affairs, but very little influence otherwise.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, many rural women

worked as spinners and weavers in their homes, or as beaters and dyers of cotton at home or in small manufacturing factories. Often they even gave a helping hand in fields or on the farm. In 1861, out of 9,000 workers described as spinners and weavers, together with some other 200 beaters and dyers, 96 per cent were women, whose labour was generally used in the final stages of cloth preparation.<sup>26</sup>

Female work in the first three decades of the twentieth century did not differ much. The main difference was to lie in the number of school teachers. Of these, there were only 22 in 1901 and 50 in 1911, but there were 559 in 1921. The teaching profession was considered to provide both security and status to women. Another seemingly popular job with women was that of shop assistant. In 1891 there were only 20, but by 1901 the total had risen to 212.<sup>27</sup>

The Second World War led to a further increase in the employment of women. By mid-1944 there were 1,038 established and 1,234 temporary female employees in the civil-government list alone.<sup>28</sup> Until the 1960s, the Maltese tended to believe that a married woman should not go to work. Hence, by the late 1950s, 51 per cent of the girls under 25 were in gainful occupations, whereas only 8.2 per cent of women remained in employment after marriage.<sup>29</sup> Female emancipation was gradually achieved in the face of strong male opposition. The clergy were also overtly opposed to the idea of female employment. In the late sixties, the Maltese Church was still insisting that a woman's place was in the home.<sup>30</sup>

The Royal Commission of 1911 described the Maltese as

clever and adaptable; generally speaking, however, they appear to lack confidence in themselves and each other ... They are much attached to their native islands, and seldom migrate to distant countries.<sup>31</sup>

This attitude had already been recorded by many other visitors, whose comments are invariably very similar.<sup>32</sup> The Maltese first became attracted to migration in the early years of the nineteenth century. The migratory flow of Maltese to the Ionian Islands was rendered easier by the latter's annexation by the British during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1826 the first known organized attempt was made to establish a Maltese colony in Corfu.<sup>33</sup>



Other attempts to set up Maltese colonies within the Mediterranean region proved successful. A considerable number of Maltese settled in North Africa, notably after the French conquest of Algiers in 1830. In 1842 there were 20,000 Maltese emigrants in Mediterranean countries, which amounted to 15 per cent of the population of the islands. Of these, the majority settled in North Africa, mainly in Tunisia, Algeria, Tripoli, and Egypt. These Maltese emigrant communities increased rapidly as can be seen in the following table:

TABLE 3. Maltese Emigrants to North Africa 1842-80

Year	Algeria	Tunis	Tripoli	Egypt
1842	5000	3000	1000	2000
1865	10000	7000	?	5000
1880	15000	11000	3000	7000

SOURCE: J. Cassar Pullicino, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, 47.

British visitors were not always impressed by the Maltese. Seddall comments that 'everyone who has lived among the Maltese ... is aware that they are foolishly attached to the island ... The Maltese will not migrate. Young and old, rich and poor, literate and illiterate cling with wonderful tenacity to their island home.'<sup>34</sup>

Seddall's views were of course biased in favour of a northern way of life which he considered superior to the general Mediterranean mentality. Fernand Braudel points out that a Mediterranean native could travel from port to port, and would feel quite at home in any part of the region but would feel homesick and uneasy when leaving its shores.<sup>35</sup> The Maltese, too, found it hard to travel beyond the Mediterranean. Although the British Government tried to encourage them to settle in other parts of the Empire, all its attempts failed and the majority of the settlers had to return.<sup>36</sup>

According to the 1911 census, the majority of emigrants were still seeking other Mediterranean cities and ports, notably Tunis, Alexandria, Bône, Cairo, Philippeville, Tripoli, Corfu, and Constantinople. Up to the First World War, most Maltese

migrants remained in the Mediterranean where they formed relatively large communities till after the Second World War. The type of migration advocated by Seddall began to develop early in the twentieth century when a good number of Maltese left for the USA, Canada, Britain, Australia, and other English-speaking countries. It reached a climax between 1948 and 1966 when it rarely fell below the 5,000 mark annually.<sup>37</sup>

## II STANDARD OF LIVING AND EDUCATION

The economic and social pressures of demographic growth after the 1830s came at a time when the general standard of living of the Maltese was deteriorating. Malta, which up to the end of the Order's rule had largely depended on Sicilian grain, enjoyed a temporary prosperity as a result of Napoleon's Continental System. Then, from 1813 onwards, the island began to experience enormous economic difficulties which persisted until the 1850s. The King of Sicily and Naples had prohibited the exportation of grain to Malta at a time when Sicily enjoyed an abundant harvest. Therefore, while in Malta wheat was being sold at 60 shillings a quarter, in nearby Sicily it cost only 28 shillings. Senior Nassau blamed King Ferdinand II for not allowing the continuation of grain exports to Malta. It was very likely the result of the Neapolitan King's displeasure at losing his sovereignty over the islands.<sup>38</sup>

The misery of the Maltese was generally attributed to their lack of initiative and reckless birthrate.<sup>39</sup> Governor Hastings and his secretary blamed the Maltese for their lack of 'enterprise',<sup>40</sup> while G.P. Badger, an early nineteenth-century writer, refers to their 'entire want of spirit of enterprise'.<sup>41</sup> The French consul in Malta in 1840 concurred that the Maltese were more inclined to imitate others than to start things by themselves.<sup>42</sup> However, the official report of the Royal Commission blamed the Government for the poor state of affairs: 'The islanders were in a most miserable condition. Due to official policy, the educated among them were a handful; the Nobles were starving, the rest of the population was even worse!'<sup>43</sup>

On the whole, therefore, the islands in the early part of the nineteenth century had been reduced to indigence. This is best

shown by the subdivisions of Maltese society in the late 1840s. Two thousand families belonged to the professional and landowning classes, a substantial number of whom experienced difficulties in maintaining a decent standard of living. The wealthiest persons included a few large landowners, some merchant families, and a number of newcomers who shared trade with several British firms. Established in Valletta, these dealt mainly in cotton and cereals.<sup>44</sup> About 150 merchants, together with a few major industrialists and retailers, were to represent the apex of Malta's trading community. In 1842 this community numbered about 5,000 and included numerous small shopkeepers, dairymen, bakers, and the like. These probably earned little more than their friends and relatives in other occupations.<sup>45</sup> One can observe precious little difference between the conditions and customs of unskilled labourers and those of the numerous artisans on the island. It was a current complaint, for example, that numerous young 'tradesmen' could never rise beyond the level of unskilled labourers as they set up on their own far too soon, and with little training. Likewise, one could hardly distinguish between small farmers and agricultural labourers.<sup>46</sup> Taken as a whole, the profit of the unskilled labourer and the less able artisans in town and country areas is given as 6¼d. for a full day's work in the 1830s. Womenfolk could add to this by spinning or weaving.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1880s Senior Nassau remarked that 'Maltese incomes are so small that the attempt to keep up the appearances which the English think only decent becomes a ruinous expense.'<sup>48</sup>

The sharp lowering of standards can best be seen from an observation made by John Davy in 1842: in 1811, according to Padre Carlo Giacinto, the Maltese worker was receiving 18d. a day; by 1842, he received the equivalent of 6¼d.<sup>49</sup> Although the standard of living improved notably during the second half of the century, it was only after 1945 that it began to compare favourably with that of other countries in southern Europe.

The low standard of living of the Maltese was reflected in their food. Visitors to Malta from the 1830s onwards agree that both breakfast and dinner were of the most frugal type. Both consisted mainly of barley bread, cheese, olives, onions, garlic, dried fruit, salt-fish, oil, and similar foods. In season they ate freely of melons, prickly pears, and raw vegetables. They also

drank a moderate amount of wine and enjoyed cooked vegetables, or *minestra*, after a day's work. One commentator points out that, in spite of such a diet, the Maltese were a strong and healthy people.<sup>50</sup>

Bread was a staple commodity. More often than not, it was the main import from the urban centres to the countryside since most of the other food was home-produced. Meat was rarely tasted. In 1842, Davy remarked that in Gozo 'only one bullock was killed weekly for the market, and that was sufficient for the whole population, including a detachment of British troops who used a considerable proportion of it'.<sup>51</sup>

In many ways, the standard of living of the 1870s and 1880s remained quite similar to that of forty years previously. The Maltese working class still ate very little meat and not much more vegetables, cheese, oil, pasta, or wine. There was a marked difference, however, in bread consumption. The 1836 Royal Commissioners had reported that a field labourer ate 2 pounds of bread a day. Francis Roswell, a British Commissioner investigating the matter forty years later, concluded that in 1877 the same person ate from 4 to 5 pounds a day. Bread was now being made from a good quality wheat, even though the prices were double those of the 1830s.<sup>52</sup>

As bread was the staple food of the masses, the Lieutenant-Governor, William C.F. Robertson, argued in 1919 that a rise in price could easily lead to a riot.<sup>53</sup> The price of bread had in fact gone up from 2½d. to 7½d. per *rotolo* owing to the complete interruption of the Russian grain trade after 1914. This had led to a strike at the dockyard in 1917. The general atmosphere throughout most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries deteriorated; social conditions were poor, often verging on starvation. Such a situation was generally attributed to British colonial policy.<sup>54</sup>

Living conditions improved after 1919 and continued to do so up to the advent of the Second World War. The diet of the rural and urban poor only differed in that, while the latter used various forms of pasta, the former made more use of potatoes.<sup>55</sup> A very striking difference existed in the diet of the well-off classes. Ever since the early nineteenth century, these had adopted an Italian diet, distinguished from that of the poor by the inclusion of macaroni, meat, and good wine. The most

humiliating aspect was perhaps the queuing up for the *gaxin*, the surplus of army and navy rations, a common practice still in use even in the immediate postwar years, especially in the harbour area where most military activity was centred. The poor and the idle used to do their utmost to get the choice pieces of meat and of the other left-overs.<sup>56</sup>

In the 1950s, Maltese cooking was described as 'sub-Italian, monotonous, and drab'.<sup>57</sup> It included a high amount of starch which adversely affected the figure of the majority of Maltese by their mid-twenties. British-style food, such as fried eggs, bacon, and chips, quickly spread all over the island. Up to the late fifties, Kininmonth could only think of the Hotel Phoenicia as the place where one could eat in style, adding that the Valletta market had a wide variety of food, indicating that there were people who ate well at home.<sup>58</sup>

There was a striking difference between the social life of villagers and that of townsmen. In February 1910, Dr Alfredo Mattei, addressing the Council of Government, observed that

the men of the casals get up at four in the morning, go to hear mass of the *Parroco* and after that they go to Valletta or anywhere else where their work may happen to call them and spend the whole day laboriously at work. Then at the *Ave Maria* at 6.00 p.m., the poor labourer ... rejoins his family, says his prayers, his *Rosario*, and goes to bed.

The same pattern was followed at Rabat and the old capital, Mdina:

even at the *Città Vecchia* where you have a few learned gentlemen and a few *Canonici* ... they get up very early and the few who study and keep late hours prefer candles to olive oil.<sup>59</sup>

Life in the harbour area was more varied, but the lowest stratum of rural and urban societies suffered great hardships. The harbour area was intimately dependent on the Armed Forces. There were times when between 25,000 and 30,000 soldiers were stationed in the island.<sup>60</sup> The impact of British influence was probably greatest in this area where the troops were concentrated.

The general slump in the standard of living from the second decade of the nineteenth century was registered by the Maltese not only in their poor diet, but also in all other aspects of everyday life. The lower classes, which in the nineteenth century

amounted to over 90 per cent of the total population, had very bad housing conditions. According to MacGill, writing in 1839, the dwellings of the peasants seemed 'comfortable',<sup>61</sup> but other visitors gave different accounts of these conditions.<sup>62</sup> A typical rural habitation usually had two floors, the first consisting of one or two rooms where the family frequently slept on straw, covering themselves with rags and sacks.<sup>63</sup> The ground floor was usually occupied by quarters for animals with a dung room receiving all human and animal excreta, which were removed twice a year to be spread as manure.<sup>64</sup> Sewers were non-existent and there was no piped water supply. In the towns, the situation was not much better. Some sort of water drainage was only available in middle-class houses which had troughs of porous stone; poor homes had open sinks. Both in town and country, ventilation was poor, and ordinary houses possessed few windows.<sup>65</sup> The 1851 census gives a fair impression of Maltese households. It is in fact reported that only 17 per cent of dwellings were found to be filthy.<sup>66</sup> It appears that the population of both town and country did their best to keep their places of habitation clean. The people themselves were dirty in habit, displaying a marked reluctance to wash. In such conditions, it is no wonder that many diseases spread and frequently claimed numerous victims.<sup>67</sup> This had other repercussions on Maltese society, such as the death of nearly 50 per cent of the infants born every year.

A very interesting report drawn up by Attilio Critien in 1913, describing the *Manderaggio* in Valletta, which is known to have contained the poorest people living in the capital, gives an idea of the habitat of lower-class townspeople. The population of the *Manderaggio*, he says, was 1,200 but, by the end of the Second World War, it had fallen to 1,000. At that time, 5 per cent of the total population of Valletta is estimated to have lived in the *Manderaggio*.<sup>68</sup> This overcrowded area of the city was the most afflicted by disease, yet during the cholera outbreak of 1887, only 20 out of 282 victims came from the *Manderaggio*.<sup>69</sup> That year the Health Department closed down 99 rooms in the area. Only a few enjoyed the luxury of a toilet. It is hardly surprising that the majority of people never reached old age.<sup>70</sup>

Poor housing conditions were to a large extent the result of overpopulation. The worst cases of overcrowding were found in

urban and suburban areas. In 1891 the greatest overcrowding was registered in Floriana, where 1,249 persons lived in 241 rooms, an average of 5.18 persons per room. Valletta came second; in that year 4,571 persons lived in 885 rooms, an average of 5.17 persons per room.<sup>71</sup>

The spread of poverty is best reflected in the hordes of beggars, male and female, roaming the streets of towns, particularly Valletta, where one particular locality was named after them.<sup>72</sup> Beggars were an unpopular sight with the British authorities and there were various attempts to control them. Commissioners, such as Sir Penrose Julyan in 1880, noted that there was 'too much charity' in Malta.<sup>73</sup> In the 1850s, Valletta was described as 'a nest of beggars'.<sup>74</sup> In the 1851 census, 1,452 persons were classed as aged and infirm while 12,483 families, or 49 per cent of the population, were classified as poor.<sup>75</sup> By 1854, 2,018 persons received relief from public funds while 1,524 were kept in charitable institutions at public expense.<sup>76</sup> The situation does not seem to have changed much in the latter part of the century. Sir Penrose argued that anyone who lived by daily labour in 1880 was considered to have a claim to gratuitous medical assistance and medicines.<sup>77</sup> The situation remained pretty much the same in the early twentieth century.

Poverty was reflected not only in the quality of food and housing conditions but also in clothing. In the early nineteenth century, clothing was cheap and generally made from coarse local cotton. Later, when the cotton industry ceased to exist, the Maltese had to make use of cheap imported cotton. Shoes were hardly ever used: up to the late 1930s, it was still common to see town and country people walking barefooted. Badger says that country people had the habit of putting on shoes before entering Valletta and taking them off on leaving. Nineteenth-century visitors often mention the popular story of one country woman who asked her companion who was going to Valletta how long she had been using her pair of shoes. The answer was that she had worn them since the time of the plague (1813). 'Oh!', replied the other, 'mine are much older, for I have had them since the blockade of the French (1798).'<sup>78</sup>

Entertainment and medical care were almost non-existent and leisure time was a luxury the poor could not afford. This was in sharp contrast to the upper classes of society. Apart from a

healthier diet, these enjoyed a wide variety of clothes made of fine material, comfortable housing conditions, and a wide range of entertainments. Countryfolk dressed differently from townsmen, and one could recognize a person's class from the way he dressed. After the war, differences became less marked.

Sanitary conditions in nineteenth-century Malta were quite deplorable. Some progress was registered by the end of the century when, in 1885, a system of drains was installed throughout the harbour area. This was carried out just in time. Two years later, an outbreak of cholera killed 435 persons and would probably have caused the death of thousands more in the overcrowded parts of the island had these sewers not been installed.<sup>79</sup> Only after the beginning of the twentieth century was the drainage system extended to most of the villages.

There were also attempts to improve hygiene by conducting the main water supply to all parts of Malta. During Bouverie's governorship,<sup>80</sup> an aqueduct was built to bring water from Fawwara to Mqabba, Luqa, Tarxien, Paola, the Three Cities, Gudja, Ghaxaq, Żejtun, and Żabbar. It started functioning in 1845. Sliema, the fast-growing town in the northern shore of Marsamxett, was supplied with water in 1881. In 1856 the first borehole, as proposed earlier by Dr Nicola Zammit, was dug to meet the demands of an ever-growing population.

A domestic water supply was introduced in 1890; until then many people had to make use of public water-pumps and private wells. The Chadwick project, meant to ease the water problem, led to better hygienic conditions in most parts of the island. Personal cleanliness was still generally rare until the introduction of bathrooms and it was only in the second and third decades of this century that newly-built houses began to include bathrooms.<sup>81</sup> Houses with bathrooms were, however, still few in number, although they were to be found scattered all over Malta. The drainage system was not extended to the homes of the poor. In remote villages, like Safi, a domestic water supply was available but drainage was not introduced before 1945.<sup>82</sup>

A perennial health problem in British Malta was the heavy incidence of trachoma and undulant fever. Trachoma, an eye disease transmitted by flies, was endemic before the Second World War. Flies were to be found everywhere, particularly in the popular Valletta market, shops, and other such places. In



Gozo, where hygienic conditions remained backward, the population was more liable to infection. It was mainly due to the work of Prof. Bernard between the wars that trachoma was gradually controlled.<sup>83</sup> Undulant fever was also common in Malta. It was customary for milk vendors, even in towns, to milk goats outside their customer's front door. Some coffee shops in Valletta and elsewhere even had a goat tethered outside to show that fresh milk was available.<sup>84</sup> The setting up of the Milk Marketing Undertaking and the abolition of ambulant milk vendors in 1938 considerably reduced the incidence of this disease. It was only in the postwar period, however, that the older practices disappeared completely.

Education was described by the 1838 Royal Commission as 'small in quantity and bad in quality'.<sup>85</sup> Illiteracy was widespread. The *skola tan-nana* (nursery school) taught children folktales, nursery rhymes, and prayers, but hardly anything else. A Government department for primary schools was set up in 1840, but progress was so slow that by 1861, out of a population of 134,055, less than 8,000 males could read Italian and less than 4,000 could read English.<sup>86</sup>

The low standard of living discouraged parents from sending their boys to school. Boys were made to work at a very early age in order to earn some money. The higher the cost of living, the more was this liable to happen.<sup>87</sup> Girls fared even worse. The 1891 census reported that while 80 per cent of males between the ages of 45 and 50 could not read, 85 per cent of females in the same age-group were illiterate.<sup>88</sup> By the turn of the century, about 30 elementary schools had been set up in Malta and Gozo, together with some 20 infant schools, a few night schools, and one Sunday school.<sup>89</sup> The situation was not much different in most other European countries, including Britain. There were also four main secondary schools and a few small private ones. The Lyceum, which had 415 students in 1900, was by far the largest; the Girls' Grammar School had 120; the Technical and Manual School had a mere 15; while the Gozo Secondary School had 23.<sup>90</sup> Technical education was not encouraged by parents as it was considered lowly. The University, which catered almost exclusively for the well-to-do, had only 86 male students.<sup>91</sup> Only this class of people could afford private libraries. Up to the early twentieth century, such

libraries included mostly books of Italian literature, law, philosophy, and theology. Culture only began to extend to the lower classes towards the end of the nineteenth century and the study of English was gradually introduced then.<sup>92</sup> It was in the 1920s and 1930s, however, that the knowledge of English started to spread so consistently that eventually it even supplanted Italian.

By 1914, accomodation available in schools amounted to 29,000 places: 25,000 in Government schools and 4,000 in private ones. Even so, pupils rarely completed elementary education. Between 1908 and 1916, 43,000 children were withdrawn from elementary schools.<sup>93</sup> Of these, 17,000 left before reaching grade II. Only 3,000 followed a complete course of elementary education up to grade VII.<sup>94</sup> To make matters worse, teachers were insufficiently trained and badly paid, making the teaching profession unattractive for the more qualified people, many of whom resorted to it only when no alternative existed.

Primary education began to spread after the Second World War. The war itself had wrought havoc with Maltese education; some school buildings were destroyed while most of the others had been requisitioned by the Armed Forces, the Medical and Health Department, or the ARP. Furthermore, many teachers had been conscripted. As a result, compulsory education was completely disrupted and only a section of the population bothered to send their children to school, especially if they were girls.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, secondary education was accessible only to those children whose parents could afford to keep them at home or to pay their school fees, while tertiary education was practically limited to the well-off.<sup>96</sup> Elementary education was only enforced by law in 1947. There were still very few who attended school beyond that level. It was only in the late 1960s that secondary and tertiary education came within the reach of the masses.

### III LEISURE AND POPULAR CULTURE

There existed sharp contrasts in the modes of recreation of town and country up to the Second World War. In the countryside,

during the early part of the nineteenth century, where clubs did not exist, feastdays were given great importance. It was also the time when traditionally the young of the two sexes could mingle more freely than usual.

The main pastime of young men appears to have been that of shooting birds during the migratory season.<sup>97</sup> In the evenings of working days, men met in the wine shops, the only meeting places in the villages. For this reason, feastdays were socially paramount, for they provided an opportunity for people to meet, sell, and exchange products and farm animals, and for labourers to discuss work contracts with their employers. Most marriages were contracted on such occasions – a common enough phenomenon in Mediterranean villages.<sup>98</sup> On feastdays, women used to wear their Sunday best and all their gold. Gold was considered to be respectable, apart from being a form of investment.<sup>99</sup>

Every village was, as it still is, placed under the patronage of a particular saint. Festivities in his or her honour commenced on the eve of the feastday with fireworks.<sup>100</sup> Horse and donkey races were sometimes held while, on the feastday, young and old attended Mass in the morning and abstained from all manual labour. Time was spent in wholesome amusement, singing, and dancing to guitars. Food was of better quality on feastdays.<sup>101</sup> Girls stipulated in their marriage contracts that their husbands must take them to the *Boschetto* on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and to Marsaxlokk on that of St Gregory.<sup>102</sup>

Very little had changed by 1913. A popular pamphlet, published that year by Giovanni Battista Mamo from Luqa, relates how the Maltese enjoyed themselves on feastdays.<sup>103</sup> They preferred to pass their time near the sea, especially at Birżebbugia, Marsaxlokk, Għar Lapsi (off Siggiewi), St Paul's Bay, and Mellieħa, and at other places where, among other enjoyments, they sang popular tunes (*ghana*). A most popular form of *ghana* consisted of a flyting contest between two men. This usually ended up with a brawl, with people pelting each other.<sup>104</sup>

On important festivities, people from various areas would congregate at the village that was celebrating its feast. Mamo cites as an example the feast of Mellieħa, the northernmost village in Malta, yet he mentions people from Valletta, Qormi,

Zejtun, and other places. The majority, however, came from the last two villages, which were noted for their love of *ghana* as were those of the Valetta *Manderaggio* and of Cospicua.<sup>106</sup> One can best appreciate how keen the people were to visit such places if one keeps the rudimentary transport system in mind. Mamo recalls that, on this occasion, his uncle came with the mule-cart at two in the morning to wake him up. From Luqa to Mellieħa it was a long journey, and they arrived at dawn. He also mentions the food they carried with them: two three-*rotolo* loaves of bread, made of mixed grain (wheat and barley); a kerchief full of cheeses; half a dozen turnips; a *qolla* (jar) of home-made wine; dried figs; and other items.<sup>106</sup>

Apart from the feasts of saints, there was yet another social occasion — carnival — where people could meet and enjoy themselves. Up to the Second World War, carnival, although not so spectacular as the village feast, was a popular occasion which drew enormous crowds. Merry-making was mainly confined to Valetta, but villagers from all over the island came to watch and enjoy themselves.

Until 1860, villagers only had wine shops to while away their spare time. That year, however, the first band club appeared in Rabat. Band clubs soon became popular, and by the end of the century they had become a major social feature in both town and village. In Gozo, the phenomenon was limited to Victoria and its surroundings.<sup>107</sup> Originally, bands were non-religious organizations but they soon became identified with parish rivalries, even within Valetta itself. The bands' musical repertoires included excerpts from popular operas. Opera was very popular then; the young enjoyed its music and its theatrical scenes. The theatre was appreciated by all classes.<sup>108</sup> Even sacred music and oratorios played in the churches were much esteemed by all classes of Maltese society.<sup>109</sup>

The counterparts of the village wine shops in the towns, and in particular Valetta, were the coffee shops. Coffee shops, like the band clubs, were places where males could meet. High-society women would never dream of being seen in a coffee shop, and commoners even less so.<sup>110</sup> In coffee shops one met all types of characters, as in other European countries. They were centres for political discussions and all types of entertainment, including music. A cup of coffee cost 1d. during the earlier part

of the twentieth century and had been even cheaper before that.

Kingsway, or *Strada Reale*, in Valletta was, and still is, a popular street for strollers to look at window shops. There the theatre, a number of coffee shops, and all major places of entertainment were to be found. As the principal street of the city, it was popular with all classes of the population, townsmen and villagers alike. One of the most popular sights in this street, during British rule, was that of the military parades which formed an essential part of Maltese social life.<sup>111</sup>

The military regiments left their mark on Malta, mainly through the introduction of various sports. The most important of these was football. Football matches used to be held in the early years of this century at the Mile End ground at Blata l-Bajda, or at Corradino, where the Navy used to play most of its games. The Maltese took an active part, especially when the regiments played against local teams. By the 1920s, Sliema and Floriana had become the foremost of the Maltese teams and there was a great rivalry between them. By then, the Maltese had begun to participate fully in this sport.

Football was a popular winter sport but it had to stop during the dry hot summer season. The most popular recreation in summer was swimming. Waterpolo was later to develop into a popular summer sport. Badger, writing in 1888, points out that 'recreation was also provided by swimming in summer.'<sup>112</sup> Other activities included fishing and rowing. Swimming had become a popular summer activity by the end of the First World War when changing cabins were set up by the shore in Valletta and Sliema.<sup>113</sup>

Lacroix described the Maltese as a people with oriental habits who preferred the intimate pleasures and the *far niente* of their homes to mixing with foreigners. In the evenings, the women enjoyed staying on the terraces or verandahs of their homes with their children, or chatting with the neighbours, often in the presence of their husbands<sup>114</sup> – a custom which still persists in the villages.

After lunch, the Maltese, rich and poor alike, had the habit of indulging in a *siesta*. This was so common up to the 1930s that the then Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, Sir Harry Luke, observed that 'during this time the shops are shut, and to judge by the stillness which reigns in town and country from twelve

to three o'clock, one would suppose that the island was deserted.<sup>115</sup>

The little pleasures of the well-to-do were a shade more sophisticated. These led an easier life and sometimes gave elegant parties. Travel for leisure was then considered a privilege of theirs. Some even took a yearly trip. A typical tour in the first quarter of the century would include travelling by ship to Sicily, from where one would proceed to visit other parts of Italy, France, Austria, Switzerland and, less frequently, Spain.<sup>116</sup> Aeroplanes were not used extensively before the 1960s, when it was still far more popular to travel by ship via Sicily.

The Second World War was responsible for many changes. Feast celebrations were suspended during the war years and there were general fears that such activities would lose their popularity with the postwar generations. Furthermore, there was a considerable internal migration that upset earlier living patterns permanently. But by the 1950s feasts had regained much of the pre-war prestige.<sup>117</sup> The former popularity of feasts was usurped, in the war years, by the cinema and the dancing hall. Such places of entertainment were to multiply fast after the war. Football, too, was to play a vital role in amusement with the end of air raids.<sup>118</sup> Popular outings (*xalati*) were also organized. The day trippers used to embellish 'trucks' (lorries) or buses with palm branches, coloured papers, and rags, and drive shouting all the way to and from the beaches – those in the north of the island being preferred. Up to the mid-fifties, these *xalati* were held every Sunday or the day following the village feast and were extremely popular.<sup>119</sup> Opera lost most of its popularity after the war. The bombing of the Royal Opera House in 1942 had much to do with this. After the war, operas were staged in two theatres, the Radio City at Hamrun and the Gaiety at Sliema, creating two audiences which often overlapped.<sup>120</sup>

Cinema became by far the most popular entertainment, especially after the introduction of 'cinemascope'. The Church itself used to show films in parish halls and at the Catholic Institute. The influx of films coming from America and the continent gradually decreased the Church's hold on the habits of the people. As a consequence, it became somewhat rigid and

even set up a decency campaign. In addition to the band clubs, the larger villages had at least one cinema while more families installed Rediffusion receivers (the local cable radio network) at home. *Ghana* gave way to radio transmissions, followed in 1957 by Italian television. Bars and coffee shops replaced the old wine shops.<sup>121</sup>

#### IV INFRASTRUCTURE

The British period saw the appearance of the railway, the steamship, telegraphy, and the telephone. Nonetheless, early in the nineteenth century, the communication system was poor and the condition of roads bad. In fact, roads then consisted of numerous uneven and dusty paths and lanes that turned to mud with the first rain, making them almost impossible to use in winter.<sup>122</sup> The internal communication system developed gradually under the British. Some roads were improved for military purposes, while others were constructed to serve new settlements, but by and large the system of tracks, which the island had acquired over the centuries, was adapted to modern needs.<sup>123</sup>

Poor lighting had a negative social influence. All roads were deserted after sunset as everywhere would be enveloped in darkness. In 1853, a foreigner complained in a local newspaper about the inadequacy of oil lamps for street lighting. It seems that up to then this system was limited to certain places, or else some of the villages had only a few ineffective lamps.<sup>124</sup> Gas lighting was introduced in the harbour cities in 1857,<sup>125</sup> but the remaining villages had insufficient lighting. The Government increased the number of oil lamps in such places, since it was not possible to introduce gas light in all parts of the island.<sup>126</sup> This short-term solution, however, proved inadequate. Sums of money were voted regularly for street-lighting projects but, although such novelties were introduced relatively early compared to the rest of Europe, they were greatly restricted. Between 1882 and 1883 there were attempts to set up an electric power-station that actually began to function by 1896. Even so, the majority of village streets were still only lit by oil lamps well into the twentieth century. In Lusa electricity was

introduced in 1929, water in 1930, but the sewage system was not completed until after the war.<sup>127</sup> Smaller villages fared even worse. Although the Government had decided to light up the streets of Safi, in 1899 there was only one paraffin lamp. The number of such lamps was increased to 16 by 1910 and to 18 by 1927. Electricity was only introduced in 1927.<sup>128</sup> Generally speaking, the problem of street lighting was quite widespread even in the towns, at least up to the outbreak of the First World War, when such streets were still lit by paraffin even in Valletta and Floriana.<sup>129</sup>

By 1910, the Melita Telephone Exchange Company had set up a telephone system as a public service. At first only a few families enjoyed the luxury of a domestic set as the service was restricted to Government departments, the Armed Forces, banks, professional men, clubs, and businessmen.<sup>130</sup> In 1933 there were still only 939 telephones and it was only in 1957, when there were 5,159 private telephones, that an automatic system was set up. That year five exchanges were established. By then the telephone had become a social requirement; hence, while in 1958 there were 7,323 telephones, in 1962 the number had reached 13,200.<sup>131</sup>

In the early years of British rule, internal transport consisted mainly of *kalessi* – horse-drawn carriages which seated two passengers, increased to four by 1831.<sup>132</sup> In 1853 there were 278 *kalessi*, 14 of them in Gozo.<sup>133</sup> The *kaless* (*calèche*) remained in use up to the 1870s, although by then it had evolved into a slightly-improved and more comfortable model.<sup>134</sup> The *kaless* was an expensive means of transport which only a few could afford.<sup>135</sup>

The introduction of the horse-drawn omnibus in 1856 was beneficial to most of the population. Originally it was to run on a fixed timetable from Lija to Valletta, taking approximately 45 minutes for each trip. It carried 16 passengers and proved very profitable. But, although it was much cheaper than the *kaless*, the common worker could not afford it still.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless the omnibus service did well and it was extended to other villages in March 1857, when further vehicles with a capacity of 24 passengers were ordered. The new destinations included Mdina, Żebbuġ, and St Julians via Sliema.<sup>137</sup> The omnibus company was even entrusted to carry mail from 1859



onwards, which marked a general improvement in the postal service.<sup>138</sup> The omnibus continued to render this service continuously up to 1875 and during the 1880s.<sup>139</sup> Its popularity then began to wane to such an extent that by the 1890s, owing to competition from other means of transport, it had stopped functioning.<sup>140</sup>

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a more popular form of transport came into being. This was the *karozzin* (cab), a modern version of the *kaless*, with the coachman having his own seat and not obliged to walk beside his carriage. The *karozzin* was ideal for those who wanted to go to places not reached by the omnibus.<sup>141</sup>

The bicycle, at first mostly restricted to British officers, was also introduced around 1870. By the 1890s its use had spread and had become common among civilians.<sup>142</sup>

A novel means of transport was the railway, with fares everybody could afford. Introduced in 1883, it ran between Valletta and Mdina and at first it was thought that the Railway Company would create much work on the island. Although originally planned to fan out into most of the inhabited parts of Malta, only the original line was actually laid. On the whole, the railway was an extravagance, especially since distances were already being reduced thanks to the construction of new roads.<sup>143</sup> In 1892, the railway became Government property owing to financial losses and for a time it prospered.<sup>144</sup>

In 1903, the Electric Tram Company was established, which secured a more practical means of transport than the railway. Originally the tram was planned to provide a U-shaped route around the southern end of the Grand Harbour, but changes were made even before track-laying had begun. Services were run on three lines connecting Valletta with B'Kara, the Three Cities, and Zebbug. Although the Valletta-B'Kara line was functioning in direct competition with the railway, commuters actually preferred it.

The tram proved popular, to such an extent that it was strongly opposed by cab drivers<sup>145</sup> whose livelihood depended on the

number of passengers they carried. They even severed the overhead wires on the eve of its inauguration.<sup>146</sup> Like the railway, the tram soon found itself in financial straits. By 1929, the tram too was taken over by the State but the Company was allowed to continue operate the Upper Baracca lifts, which were installed at the beginning of the century and which remained popular until the 1960s.<sup>147</sup>

By the 1930s, both tram and railway companies were doing badly and the Government had to close them down. Meanwhile the harbour area had a system of *dghajjes* (passage boats) operating from Valletta to the Three Cities and to Sliema. Boat transport was of vital importance to both the Three Cities and the naval base of Tigne' (Sliema). Boatmen had a monopoly of transport in the harbour and in 1856 there were already 42 licensed boats.<sup>148</sup> These boatmen were to face strong competition with the setting up of the Motor Ferry Service in 1881. At first the ferries operated from Valletta (Marsamxett) to Sliema and, although harassed by protests from boatmen, it proved to be the best and cheapest means of transport on the island. A trip to or from Valletta cost only ½d. The ferry boats continued to function until August 1959.<sup>149</sup>

Though the ferry service proved to be of great convenience to the growing urban centre around Marsamxett, the need was felt for an even more efficient system of transport. By 1905, this was partly solved with the introduction of the Scheduled Bus Service<sup>150</sup> which relieved the Sliema people from their complete dependence on the ferries. Other scheduled bus services came into being to serve other parts of the island – particularly B'Kara and Cospicua. Transport facilities were to develop further after 1918 when the British Services sold their lorries and trucks to private individuals, who immediately adapted them for civilian use. By the 1920s the bodies of such vehicles started being built locally.<sup>151</sup> Up to this time, goods were still transported by *karettun* (cart) even if they belonged to the Services; lorries came into use for the first time in the 1920s.<sup>152</sup>

During the early thirties the bus service was extended even to remote parts of the island like Żurrieq.<sup>153</sup> Later on, secondary routes, like the one from Luqa to Paola and another to B'Bugia, began to operate during the summer months.<sup>154</sup>

At first, buses could carry only 20 persons who had to sit on

A very profitable business for the Maltese was that of ship-chandling. Certain families like the Mizzis, the Tabonas, the Bordas, and the Borg Costanzis were well established in the supply of provisions to the British Forces by the end of the First World War. Spiro Mizzi, the pioneer of modern industrialization in Malta, worked originally as a ship's chandler together with his father. In an interesting and stimulating interview, Mizzi relates how his family had to shift from ship-chandling to other enterprises with the coming of the NAAFI in 1919.<sup>171</sup> Mizzi started off with a scheduled bus service which, he admitted, was not profitable enough. This in turn led to the opening of a 'car hire' garage to cater mainly for British naval officers. Meanwhile the scheduled bus service was kept going. In 1924 the Mizzis started to import a new type of car – the Morris. In the early part of the century there were only two agents for cars, one importing Fiat and the other Ford cars. The importation of the Morris proved to be highly successful.<sup>172</sup>

## VI THE AFTERMATH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The war contributed towards the thinning out of the number of men who depended on agriculture for their livelihood, partly owing to the war conditions which had brought about a shortage of fodder for animals and subsequently a lack of fertilizer.<sup>173</sup> The war had also helped to change the attitude of the younger villagers. While the old farmer was content to spend the greater part of his time with his animals and in his fields, the young men had come to consider recreation in much the same way as the townsmen did. Furthermore, the young generation attached great importance to dress and personal appearance, making its members look very much like the town dwellers.<sup>174</sup>

Increased spending power, a more varied diet now including a variety of non-local foods, plus the replacement of home-produced cotton have all contributed to the extension of shopping facilities in the village ... specialized shops have also made their appearance ... The 1939-45 war brought flour and bread rationing and the end of home-baking.<sup>175</sup>

Buildings had suffered greatly during the war years. Besides churches, convents, hospitals, auberges, and other buildings, 5,524 private dwellings were totally destroyed; 5,077 were

extensively damaged and needed reconstruction; while 19,073 were damaged but reparable.<sup>176</sup> The worst-hit locations were the harbour cities, notably Cottonera, and the villages near the airfields. Housing problems were only partially solved in the immediate postwar years. Meanwhile, by 1947, the Maltese had gained self-government, which facilitated town-planning and helped to resolve some problems, notably in the harbour cities. The majority of slums in Valletta, Floriana, Vittoriosa, Senglea, and Cospicua gave way to better housing facilities. Streets were widened and hygiene was given prime importance. The Government had to provide residential areas with the essential services and could not yet build new housing estates.<sup>177</sup> It was only in the late 1950s that a new residential area was built – Santa Lucija. By then Governments could tackle the housing problem seriously.

The problem of housing was greatly eased thanks to migration. In fact, between 1949 and 1966, 105,146 left for Australia, Britain, Canada, and the USA.<sup>178</sup>

Elementary education played a significant role in reducing the number of illiterates. In the countryside the literate younger generation could now depend less on the more learned people of the village than their parents. They were also able to keep in contact with their migrant relatives while bus transport, the press, Rediffusion, cinemas, and television, put most of Malta, and the wide world, within easy reach of all. At the same time it was becoming easier to travel by sea and air. A further change was the spread of lay religious movements which had been rather few in number before the war but grew noticeably in the postwar period.<sup>179</sup>

Public health, completely disrupted by the war, improved considerably by previous standards, especially with the transference of the main hospital from Floriana to St Luke's at G'Mangia. But it took at least up to the early 1950s for the health system to reach an acceptable level.

All in all, the war helped to change the mentality of the Maltese. The new generation had developed new tastes and a different outlook on life. The standard of living improved for the great mass of the population. From the forties to the sixties, more and more families shared a better standard of living – a

condition which before the war had been limited to the privileged few.<sup>180</sup>

## VII BRITISH OUTLOOK AND POLICY

Conditions in Malta generally changed for the better in the course of the last twenty years of British rule. Nevertheless, the British still considered the island first and foremost as a fortress.<sup>181</sup> This was the main and constant theme of British occupation from the dawn of the nineteenth century down to the late 1950s.

It is often said that, Britain was slow at first, to appreciate Malta's strategic value. Nelson is reported to have considered it as 'a useless and enormous expense'.<sup>182</sup> In fact, Britain later considered Malta the first line of defence of its grand Indian Empire and did her best to consolidate its position in the Mediterranean by stationing troops and a fleet there. During the early years of occupation, Britain strengthened its legal claims on Malta which were indispensable to secure a greater stability for Britain's position and to establish herself securely on the island.<sup>183</sup> Malta was therefore to prove of the utmost importance as a fortress in the imperial defence system.

In the course of the nineteenth century, Malta's utility as a naval base grew constantly, especially during the Crimean War (1854-56).<sup>184</sup> This in part explains why it did not suit the British to allow much liberty to the Maltese; in fact the natives were excluded 'from all but the lowest offices' in Government, making them feel like 'strangers in their own country'.<sup>185</sup> The Maltese were excluded from high positions even in the Armed Forces and the Dockyard, causing constant friction and resentment amongst the more ambitious.<sup>186</sup> British outlook is nowhere better expressed than in Joseph Chamberlain's speech to the House of Commons in 1902:

We hold Malta solely and entirely as a fortress essential to our position in the Mediterranean. Not as an ordinary colony but as a fortress ... In a fortress anything like open agitation against the Government is a thing that cannot be tolerated on the face of it.<sup>187</sup>

The British were in Malta for its strategic value and they

adapted a 'mild apartheid' in their dealings with the Maltese.<sup>188</sup> Therefore, when Sir Adrian Dingli, perhaps the most influential of Maltese of the time, was excluded from membership of the Union Club, it was felt as a national insult by all Maltese; it even irritated King Edward VII himself and his brother, the Duke of Connaught, Admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet. In fact, both resigned from the Club at the announcement.<sup>189</sup>

Gradually, however, a new middle-class of educated Maltese, acclimatized to the British style, came to accept British rule and developed pronounced pro-British loyalties. These were relied upon to carry out 'acceptable policies' and most administrative posts in the civil service were entrusted to them.<sup>190</sup>

British influence took popular root among the populace in the early part of the twentieth century partly thanks to the stationing of troops in all parts of Malta. British families took to coming to Malta to enjoy the good weather. Meanwhile more Maltese were becoming dependent on the British in various ways. The Armed Forces employed a large force, not only as sailors, but on all sorts of odd jobs such as waiters, cooks, nurses, barbers, clerks, businessmen, coalheavers, washer-women, servants, and even fishermen and farmers. All classes of Maltese were involved in the maintenance of the Island Fortress.<sup>191</sup>

As a British possession and fortress, Malta did not have the characteristics of a nation-state in the full political sense, but socially Malta had the typical features required for nationhood. The islands, unlike several other British colonies, divided by race, religion, tribe, or cultural factions, were homogeneous and the inhabitants felt Maltese.<sup>192</sup> In the nineteenth century,

For a Maltese to be educated and for him to know Italian was one and the same thing: for countless generations Italian had been the language of town and gown, of court and cloister.<sup>193</sup>

Therefore one could not call the Language Question 'a struggle in which a privileged group in Maltese society attempted to maintain its position'.<sup>194</sup>

The prime motive behind the Language Question was defensive, the retention of those recognized cultural traits that historically distinguished Malta. This could be summed up in the motto *Religio et Patria*; that is the Catholic faith, as against

the Protestant rulers; and the Italian language – the official language of the island since medieval times – against the forcible imposition of English as an act of imperial *force majeure*. It kept alive in the Maltese a separate awareness and ultimately led to a full and separate Maltese nationhood with all the rights of a distinct people.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> F.M. Lacroix, 'Malte e le Goze', 11.
- <sup>2</sup> W. Senior Nassaou, *Conversations and Journals in Egypt and Malta*, ii, 261.
- <sup>3</sup> H. Ganado, *Rajt Malta Tinbidal*, i, 323.
- <sup>4</sup> H. Luke, *Malta: An Account and Appreciation*, 221.
- <sup>5</sup> H. Bowen-Jones et al., *Malta: Background for Development*, 345.
- <sup>6</sup> Ganado, ii, 19.
- <sup>7</sup> B. Fiorentini, *Malta rifugio di esuli e focolare ardente di cospirazione durante il Risorgimento Italiano*, ch.vii.
- <sup>8</sup> H. Seddall, *Malta: Past and Present*, 296.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.
- <sup>11</sup> A. Bartolo, 'History of the Maltese Islands', 155, where he criticizes the bigotry and partiality of Revd Seddall against the Maltese.
- <sup>12</sup> L.H. Dudley Buxton, 'Malta: An anthropogeographical study', 85.
- <sup>13</sup> W. Vella, 'Transport in the Maltese Islands, 1850-1890', 20.
- <sup>14</sup> B. Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 177.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Dudley Buxton, 85.
- <sup>17</sup> Vella, 15.
- <sup>18</sup> Bowen-Jones et al., 123.
- <sup>19</sup> E.L. Zammit, *A Colonial Inheritance, Maltese Perceptions of Work, Power and Class Structure with reference to the Labour Movement*, 11.
- <sup>20</sup> Bowen-Jones et al., 123.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Ganado, i, 329.
- <sup>23</sup> H. Frendo, *En route from Europe to Africa: Malta, her People and her History*.
- <sup>24</sup> Ganado, i, 324-325.
- <sup>25</sup> Zammit, 18.
- <sup>26</sup> Bowen-Jones et al., 124.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> J.M. Pirotta, *Fortress Colony: The Final Act*, i, 12.
- <sup>29</sup> J. Nicolas, 'The Position of Women in the Maltese Economy 1900-1974', 40.
- <sup>30</sup> Pirotta, 12.
- <sup>31</sup> H. Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony*, 1.
- <sup>32</sup> Among others, see J. Quintin d'Autun, *Insulae Melitae Descriptio*; C.A. Vianello, 'Una relazione inedita di Malta del 1582'; Giacomo Capello's account in V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Descrittione di Malta, Anno 1718*; and the more

recent ones, like J. Quintana, *Guida dell'isola di Malta e sus dipendenze*; G.P. Badger, *Description of Malta and Gozo*; T. MacGill, *A Guide for Strangers Visiting Malta*; and Lacroix, *supra*, note 1.

<sup>33</sup> D. Cutajar, 'The Lure of the Orient: The Schranzes, the Brockdorffs, Preziosi and other artists', 132-4.

<sup>34</sup> Seddall, 291.

<sup>35</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 237.

<sup>36</sup> C.A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 8; Cutajar, 133.

<sup>37</sup> L.E. Attard, *Early Maltese Migration*; Zammit, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Senior Nassau, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Price, 29.

<sup>40</sup> J. Bezzina, *Religion and Politics in a Crown Colony*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Badger, 75.

<sup>42</sup> D. Miège, *Histoire de Malte*, i, 168.

<sup>43</sup> S. Busuttil, *Malta's Economy in the Nineteenth Century*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Price, 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Senior Nassau, 261.

<sup>49</sup> J. Davy, *Notes and Observations on the Ionian Islands and Malta*, i, 416-7.

<sup>50</sup> MacGill, 34-5.

<sup>51</sup> Davy, i, 431.

<sup>52</sup> Price, 131.

<sup>53</sup> P. Bartolo, *X'kien gara sew fis-Sette Giugno*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> H.I. Lee, *Malta 1813-1914*, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Bowen-Jones et al., 347.

<sup>56</sup> Ganado, i, 328.

<sup>57</sup> C. Kininmonth, *The Brass Dolphins*, 119.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Frendo, *Party Politics*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ganado, i, 320.

<sup>61</sup> MacGill, 142.

<sup>62</sup> Badger, 300; Davy, 435.

<sup>63</sup> G.F. Angas, *A Ramble in Malta and Sicily*, 38, 70.

<sup>64</sup> Bezzina, 76; Price, 30.

<sup>65</sup> Price, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Bezzina, 76.

<sup>67</sup> Price, 30.

<sup>68</sup> A. Critien, *The Manderaggio*, 27.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> H. Frendo, 'Dimechianism', 43.

<sup>72</sup> *Nix Mangiaris* steps outside Victoria Gate, Valletta.

<sup>73</sup> Frendo, *Party Politics*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> E. Grima, 'Malta and the Crimean War', 120.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Frendo, *Party Politics*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Badger, 97; Angas, 36.

<sup>79</sup> Ganado, i, 22-3.

<sup>80</sup> See *infra*, Appendix I.



- 81 Ganado, iv, 319.
- 82 J. Micallef, *L-istorja ta' Hal Safi*, 86.
- 83 Ganado, i, 348.
- 84 *Ibid.*, ii, 21.
- 85 Frenedo, 'Dimechianism', 39.
- 86 *Ibid.*
- 87 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 91 *Ibid.*
- 92 Ganado, ii, 65.
- 93 D. Fenech, 'A Social and Economic Review of Malta during the First World War', 178.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 177.
- 95 Pirotta, 5.
- 96 *Ibid.*
- 97 Badger, 306.
- 98 Giovanni Verga, who lived in late nineteenth-century Sicily, gives vivid accounts of everyday life in his *novelle*. An example of life in the countryside is given in *Jeli il Pastora* (see *Vita dei Campi*). Here Verga tells the story of a boy who went to the nearest large village for the feast of the patron saint with the intention of selling his master's horses. A horse is injured on the way, and the boy loses his job allegedly for his negligence, and seeks a new one while hoping to marry a girl, once his childhood playmate.
- 99 Ganado, ii, 21.
- 100 MacGill, 33.
- 101 *Ibid.*
- 102 *Ibid.*, 108.
- 103 G.B. Mamo (ta Hal Luka), *Il-Ghannaj Kormi u il-Ghannaj Zeituni*. This pamphlet has been kindly brought to my notice by Mr Nathaniel Cutajar.
- 104 *Ibid.*, 7-8.
- 105 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 106 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 107 Bowen-Jones et al., 345.
- 108 Ganado, i, 399.
- 109 *Ibid.*, 92
- 110 Ganado, iv, 29.
- 111 Ganado, i, 11.
- 112 Badger, 306.
- 113 Ganado, i, 344.
- 114 Lacroix, 35.
- 115 Luke, 173.
- 116 Ganado, i, 150.
- 117 *Ibid.*, iii, 263.
- 118 *Ibid.*, 279.
- 119 *Ibid.*, 301-2.
- 120 *Ibid.*, 280.
- 121 Bowen-Jones et al., 347-8.
- 122 J. Micallef, *Hal-Luqa, Niesha u Graffietha*, 238.
- 123 Blouet, 180.
- 124 See R.M. Grech, 'The Development of Land Transport in the Maltese Islands', 20.

- 125 J. Bezzina, *Servizzi Pubbliċi f'Malta*, 21.  
 126 *Ibid.*, 21-2.  
 127 Micallef, *Hal Luqa*, 287.  
 128 *Id.*, *Hal Safi*, 66.  
 129 Ganado, i, 58.  
 130 *Ibid.*, iv, 323.  
 131 *Ibid.*  
 132 Bezzina, *Servizzi Pubbliċi*, 31.  
 133 Grech, 23.  
 134 G. Dimech Debono, *Il-Malti*, 37.  
 135 Vella, 11.  
 136 *Ibid.*, 10.  
 137 *Ibid.*, 13.  
 138 Grech, 29.  
 139 Vella, 15.  
 140 Grech, 29.  
 141 *Ibid.*, 30.  
 142 Bezzina, *Servizzi Pubbliċi*, 38.  
 143 For a detailed account on the railway, B.L. Rigby, *The Malta Railway*; J. Bonnici and M. Cassar, *Il-Vapur ta' l-Art - The Malta Railway*.  
 144 Rigby, 13.  
 145 A detailed account on the Tram Service is given in J.H. Price, 'The Malta Tramways'.  
 146 *Ibid.*, 271.  
 147 *Ibid.*, 277.  
 148 Vella, 17.  
 149 Grech, 71-2.  
 150 For detailed information on the Scheduled Bus Service, Grech, 'The Development of Land Transport'.  
 151 Price, 276.  
 152 Ganado, i, 62.  
 153 Grech, 53.  
 154 Micallef, *Hal Luqa*, 27.  
 155 Grech, 52-3.  
 156 *Ibid.*, 55.  
 157 G. Peto, *Malta and Cyprus*, 101.  
 158 MacGill, 24.  
 159 *Ibid.*  
 160 A.V. Laferla, *British Malta*, i, 198.  
 161 *Ibid.*, 160.  
 162 *Malta Mail*, 13 January 1854.  
 163 Vella, 16.  
 164 Ganado, i, 60.  
 165 *Ibid.*, 12.  
 166 Fiorentini, 115; Price, 2-5.  
 167 MacGill, 25.  
 168 Grima, 77.  
 169 Ganado, i, 13.  
 170 *Ibid.*  
 171 See 'Spiro Mizzi: Il-Karriera twila ta' l-Industrijalista Numru Wiehed ta' Malta', 134-6.  
 172 *Ibid.*  
 173 Pirota, 4.

- 174 Bowen-Jones et al., 346-7.  
175 Ibid., 348.  
176 Ph. Vella, *Malta: Blitzed but not Beaten*, 288.  
177 Ganado, iv, 247.  
178 Ibid., 248.  
179 Bowen-Jones et al., 346.  
180 Ganado, iv, 305.  
181 Pirotta, 7.  
182 Lee, 4.  
183 Fiorentini, 1, 10.  
184 Grima, 135.  
185 Lee, 19.  
186 Zammit, 11.  
187 H. Frendo, 'The Maltese Colonial Experience'.  
188 Ganado, i, 329.  
189 Ibid.  
190 Zammit, 12.  
191 Ganado, i, 323.  
192 Frendo, *Party Politics*, 1.  
193 Ibid., 2.  
194 Blouet, 196.