

M'hemm l-ebda post iehor bhad-dar
**(There's No Place Like Home): Maltese
Migration to French Algeria in the Nineteenth
Century**

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The Maltese islands have long been a place of movement.¹ Part of this tradition involves leaving the home islands to seek economic opportunities in neighboring areas.² The nature of this movement fundamentally changed in the mid-nineteenth century with the French invasion of Algeria. What had previously been a migration of limited quantity grew to encompass a much greater percentage of the population.³ The circular movement of Maltese to North Africa, particularly to Algeria, defined Maltese migration in the nineteenth century.⁴ Over the course of the century, Maltese came to form a significant part of the non-French European contingent in French North Africa. Fluctuating international and domestic forces in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms all influenced Maltese migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century.

The first records that provide any tangible indication of Maltese migration come from the period during the rule of the Order of St. John (1530-1798).⁵ Members of the European nobility comprised the knights, who traced their history back to the Crusades. Throughout its 250-plus years of rule in Malta, knights from various parts of Central and Western Europe came and served on the islands. The Order annually raided the North African coast and many of the native Maltese manned these vessels. Some of the first Maltese migrants to North Africa in this period

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¹ John Darroch Crawford, "The Maltese Diaspora: The Historical Development of Migration from Malta," Unpublished M.A. Thesis; University of Victoria, 1990, 5-6.

² Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, 177.

³ In this essay, I use the term "migration" to define the circular movement of Maltese to and from Algeria. Academics who have written on this topic have all termed the movement as "emigration." Evidence, however, suggests otherwise. For my purposes, "emigration" generally refers to the Maltese in motion in the 20th century, especially after World War II. I also use it, however, to refer Maltese movement in the 19th century when speaking of contemporary debates and where the historiographical terminology makes it impossible to avoid.

⁴ For a definition of circular migration, please see Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN., 1992, 126-31.

⁵ Ramiro Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, ed. Arthur Rousseau, Librairie Nouvelle de Droit et de Jurisprudence, Paris, 1911, 41.

may well have been those who were captured in the raids and forced into slavery. There does not exist, however, substantial accounts detailing the nature of migration under the Order of St. John.

As a result, one must look past the rule of the knights in order to study Maltese migration.⁶ The Order's rule in Malta abruptly ended in the summer of 1798, when Napoleon targeted the Maltese islands as the initial phase in the Egypt expedition. With almost no struggle whatsoever, the French took the islands. Napoleon only stayed in Malta for a few days, but he did manage to take a number of Maltese with him to fight in Egypt. French primary sources, however, offer only a limited amount of information due to the short period of French rule (1798-1800). The subsequent period of British rule (1800-1964) yielded significant records that allow one to scrutinize Maltese migration in this era. Studies of Maltese migration therefore focus almost exclusively on British Malta, or in some cases, the independent Maltese state.

The majority of this research concentrates on the twentieth century and the post-World War II exodus in particular. The islands were decimated in the wake of the war and the Siege of Malta. The general devastation, coupled with the traditional economic and demographic difficulties of Malta, led the islands to experience an unprecedented level of emigration during the post-war period; this exodus included the author's grandparents. In fact, Malta had the highest emigration rate of any European nation during this time.⁷ The waves of Maltese leaving the island traveled mostly to the Anglophone world, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Maltese also emigrated to France, albeit to a lesser extent. The enormity of this migration in the era of decolonization has rightfully drawn the interest of many scholars.

The nineteenth century, however, has not provoked nearly as much research as the twentieth century. The earliest work on this topic is Ramiro Vadala's *Les maltais hors de Malte*, published in 1911, which details Maltese migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Forty-three years later, Charles Price wrote *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration*, which engaged a similar topic in much greater detail. The most recent work on this subject is Marc Donato's *Elisa, la Maltaise* (2002), which draws heavily from his 1983 study, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie au XIXème siècle*. Thus over the past century, relatively little original scholarship has been published on Maltese migration in the nineteenth century.⁸ This understudied field provides a tremendous amount of room for further research.

For most of the nineteenth century, Algeria proved to be the destination of choice for the Maltese migrant. The French consul in Malta, Miège, noted that after the French invasion in 1830, a rush of Maltese came to see him to request the right of passage to Algeria. He estimated that 4,000 – 5,000 Maltese traveled to Algeria between 1830 and 1840.⁹ Price's statistical analysis supports this claim. For most years of his study, Algeria annually attracted two-thirds of all Maltese migrants. He estimates that about 5,000 Maltese, or 25% of the total population

⁶ Crawford, "The Maltese Diaspora," 15-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸ Donato's two books are so similar that I do not consider the latter an original piece of scholarship. He writes "[l]a version actuelle en sera très proche, rajeunie, cependant, et allégée de certains passages devenus désormais inutiles dans la perspective d'aujourd'hui, autre que celle qui en avait été à l'origine." Marc Donato, *Elisa, la Maltaise: Histoire des maltais d'Algérie 1830-1962*, Éditions Jacques Gardini, France, 2002, 9.

⁹ Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 81-3.

abroad, resided in Algeria in 1842, making it the top destination at the time.¹⁰ Approximately 10,000 Maltese inhabited Algeria in 1865, once again comprising 25% of all Maltese abroad. Algeria's popularity did not begin to wane until the late nineteenth century due to European imperial maneuvers in Tunisia and Egypt. Even in 1885, 15,000 Maltese still resided in Algeria, representing 27% of the total population abroad. French legislation targeting the non-French European community in the late 1880s effectively brought this era to an end. Without a doubt, the nineteenth century was one of significant movement between Malta and Algeria. Therefore, in order to understand Maltese migration in the nineteenth century, one must analyze the movement to Algeria. The nature of this migration is vital to the historiography of Maltese migration for the precedents that it set as well as for those which were later broken in the twentieth century. It is also of importance to studies on nineteenth century Algeria given that the Maltese formed a significant portion of the non-French European population in the colony.

A strong study of migration must be comprehensive in nature and analyze activity at the mesolevel, where migrants act. One needs to focus not only on the migrant, though, but also investigate this agent through what Dirk Hoerder defines as the *systems approach to migration*, which analyzes the:

position of a society of origin in the global order, its structures, the regional specifics, selection and self-selection of migrants from a reservoir of potential leavers and persisters, the process of migration itself, and – within the receiving society's structures – the insertion in to partly internationalized labor markets, the formation of ethnic enclaves or of transcultural networks, and the interaction with new social values and norms.¹¹

Through such an approach, one can develop a highly nuanced study of migration that considers the actions of migrants through the various movements that comprise a migration as well as the structures that influence this motion.

In the case of Malta, the economic and demographic factors are the classical means of analysis. Indeed, these two related forces have played a great role in shaping Maltese emigration during the modern era. They do not, however, constitute a comprehensive approach to Maltese migration. Researchers of Maltese migration have noted that cultural, social, and political systems also influence migration.¹² Therefore one must go beyond a simple economic and demographic analysis in order to engage with Maltese migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century.

Such a comprehensive approach is, however, difficult to take in regards to this period. Migration remains a relatively novel field of study. The fact that such little research has been conducted on the general movement of Maltese in the nineteenth century is no surprise, but it is exacerbated by the fact that the only original work published in the past fifty years – Donato's *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie au XIXème siècle* – is entirely devoted to Maltese migration to Algeria. In this study, Donato draws a significant amount of his information from Price's *Malta and the Maltese*. Donato notes the limits of his book, writing that Maltese migration to

¹⁰ Charles A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration*, Gregorian House, Melbourne, 1954, 113, 230, Appendix C. Other popular destinations included Tunisia, Tripoli, Egypt, Constantinople, and the Ionian Islands.

¹¹ Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium*, Duke University Press, Durham NC., 2002, 19-20.

¹² Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, xi-xii.

Algeria is a “sujet apparemment vierge” that “n’a pas été analysé avec autant de profondeur que nous le souhaitons.”¹³ While Donato does bring some new information to the debate, his heavy reliance on Price indicates that the source base for such a study has changed little in the past half-century.

A major obstacle to taking a comprehensive systems level approach to Maltese migration to Algeria is the fact that Maltese, the everyday language of the people, did not have a standardized written form before the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ In 1838, British officials wrote: “the Maltese language is a corrupt dialect of the Arabic, which has never been used for literary purpose, or even written in a uniform and stable manner.”¹⁵ While the educated classes were usually literate in Italian, the majority of Maltese migrants at this time appear to have been illiterate.¹⁶ This essentially renders a comprehensive study impossible. Until further sources reveal the experience of the Maltese migrant, one must concentrate on larger structures in relation to the movement to Algeria in the nineteenth century.

The transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century marked a major break in Malta’s history. The first change came in 1798 with Napoleon and the French. Effective French rule only lasted for a short time, though, from June to September of 1798. On September 2, 1798, a revolt began in the towns of Mdina and Rabat that quickly spread throughout the islands. The French troops under General Vaubois were forced to take refuge in Valetta. They maintained their position in the city until 1800, when they surrendered to the Maltese and the British under the command of Sir Alexander Ball.¹⁷ At this point, the status of the islands became unclear. The British became the *de facto* rulers of Malta after the French surrender. Over the next decade, though, Malta’s territorial status remained in question. Some suggested that the islands would go back to the Order of St. John, while others proposed that Malta become a Russian possession. This debate was not settled until 1814, when Malta officially became part of the British Empire under the Treaty of Paris.

The series of regime changes brought a new style of governance to Malta. For two and a half centuries, Malta was the headquarters of the Order of St. John. The latter had a vested interest in the islands and devoted numerous resources to ensure Malta’s stability. The Knights ruled Malta in a very paternalistic manner.¹⁸ They employed many of the Maltese and allowed them to hold important administrative offices. With the advent of British rule, this all changed.

The British took a much different approach to government. They believed in the *laissez-faire* model and therefore looked down upon the Knights’ paternalistic model.¹⁹ As a result, particularly during the early phase of their rule, the British did not employ as many Maltese as the knights had in the preceding centuries.²⁰ They also removed the Maltese from all high-

¹³ Marc Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie au XIXème siècle*, Editions Africa Nostra, Montpellier, 1985, 185.

¹⁴ Carmel Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta*, Mireva Publications, Malta, 2002, 171.

¹⁵ *Reports of the Commissioners on the Affairs of Malta*, printing order by the House of Commons, (London, 1838), Part II, 42. Price agrees with this analysis. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 20.

¹⁶ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 102.

¹⁷ Carmel Testa’s *The French in Malta: 1798-1800*, Midsea Books, Malta, 1997 and William Hardman’s *A History of Malta during the period of the French and British occupations, 1798-1815*, Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1909, provide the most detailed accounts of this period.

¹⁸ Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 33.

¹⁹ Arthur G. Clare, “Features of an Island Economy,” in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, Mireva Publications, Amsterdam, 1988, 128. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 2.

²⁰ Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 2006, 48.

ranking administrative positions and replaced them with British functionaries.²¹ These actions illustrate the fact that the Maltese experienced a new and greater level of subjugation from the outset of British rule. In typical imperial fashion, the British essentially treated the Maltese as an inferior group in their own homeland.²² Along with these changes, British rule meant that Malta lost a certain amount of import, going from the headquarters of an influential Catholic order to a small but still significant naval base in the expansive British Empire. The advent of British rule in Malta transformed the relationship between the governing power and the people.²³

Outside of the overt political change, British rule impacted cultural dynamics in Malta as well. The British brought a new language of administration – English – with them. Before this time, Italian had served as the language of administration. In order to communicate with the new ruling authority, the Maltese now had to learn a new language. Protestantism also came with the British. The Maltese were wary of any non-Catholic influence on the island. The British, however, realized the mistakes that the French had made by reducing the status of the Catholic Church in Malta. In turn, they attempted to build a close alliance with clerical leaders and discouraged Protestant missionaries from coming to Malta.²⁴ The new religion was still visible, though, through new schools and churches. Besides a new form of government, the Maltese had to adjust to the presence of a new language and practice of administration.

Economic fluctuation defined nineteenth century British Malta. The Maltese economy depended heavily on British expenditures since the government still employed a significant portion of the population.²⁵ When international conflict arose, the Maltese economy flourished.²⁶ This is evident during periods such as the Crimean War, which brought an increased amount of shipping traffic to the islands and also saw the British increase their spending in Malta.²⁷ Other international events, such as the American Civil War, brought temporary prosperity to Malta with the rise of cotton prices. The opening of the Suez Canal strengthened Malta's economy along with its strategic importance in a way that brought more long-term economic stability to the islands than any of these previous events.²⁸ These boom periods, however, did not lead to much-needed economic diversification.²⁹ As a result, the Maltese never moved past their dependence on international developments and British expenditures for their economic livelihood.

Outside these spurts of economic prosperity shaped by international forces, Malta's economy lagged. Times of peace in particular marked periods of economic downturn due to

²¹ Edward L. Zammit, "Aspects of British Colonial Policies and Maltese Patterns of Behaviour," in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 167. Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta*, 149.

²² Zammit, "Aspects of British Colonial Policies and Maltese Patterns of Behaviour," 174.

²³ Clare, "Features of an Island Economy," 128.

²⁴ Joseph Bezzina, "Church and State in an Island Colony," in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 48-9. Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta*, 173-5.

²⁵ Salvino Busuttil, "An Overview of Malta's Economic Development," in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 158. Crawford, "The Maltese Diaspora," 7. Zammit, "Aspects of British Colonial Policies and Maltese Patterns of Behaviour," 166.

²⁶ Busuttil, "An Overview of Malta's Economic Development," 155.

²⁷ Themistocles Zammit, *Malta; the islands and their history*, The Malta Herald, Valletta, 1929, 368. Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 185. Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta*, 159. Clare, "Features of an Island Economy," 148.

²⁸ Clare, "Features of an Island Economy," 149-50.

²⁹ Busuttil, "An Overview of Malta's Economic Development," 159-60. Agriculture formed the backbone of the Maltese economy until 1871. Activity in the Grand Harbour in Valetta also provided the Maltese with pay. Work related to the British imperial presence along with British-funded public works projects also employed Maltese.

reduced traffic in the Mediterranean and an abatement of British expenditures.³⁰ Other factors, such as disease and drought, also hindered Malta's economy. The cholera epidemic of 1813, which took the lives of about 5% of the population, brought an era of prosperity to an end. The epidemic halted commerce and prevented the Maltese islands from further exploiting the black market benefits brought through the subversion of Napoleon's Continental System.³¹ Other Mediterranean port cities took advantage of this opportunity to claim a portion of Malta's lost shipping traffic. Another cholera outbreak in 1837 weakened the economy, although not as significantly as the one of 1813. The drought of 1841 brought a short period of economic growth to an end, but the severe drought of 1845-1847 dealt yet another major blow to the island's economy.³² It is hard to see how Maltese migration in this period could have served as an effective means of risk diversification.³³ This constant state of fluctuation must have made it difficult for any potential Maltese migrant to take decisive action.

The sheer size of Malta's population also hindered the economic situation. Malta was very densely populated throughout this period. In the early nineteenth century, Malta had a population density of 900 persons per square mile.³⁴ That ratio rose to somewhere between 935 and 960 in 1842.³⁵ This figure is higher than that of Barbados, which claimed to have the highest population density in the world at the time. In the economic boom years of the Crimean War, Malta's population density jumped to 1,150 persons per square mile.³⁶ Malta's soil quality exacerbated the demographic problem. The islands are largely made of limestone, making it difficult to cultivate crops. This meant that Malta had to import large quantities of food.³⁷ Although Malta's population did not significantly rise in the first half of the nineteenth century, even a small amount of growth put additional pressure on a limited amount of land.³⁸ In the mind of British Governor F.C. Ponsonby (1827-1836), the only solution to the population problem was to encourage emigration.³⁹

London, however, proved reluctant when it came to officially supporting emigration. The British refused to finance any such project out of fear of the precedent that it would set in relation to its other imperial possessions. Even when Malta did not exhaust its annual budget, London would not allow the governor of Malta to use the excess funds to support emigration. This position mirrored Britain's *laissez-faire* approach to government at the time.

That said, the British did attempt to organize Maltese emigration, albeit unsuccessfully, throughout the nineteenth century. Emigration projects destined for Jamaica, the West Indies, Guiana, Grenada, and Australia either failed to come to fruition or quickly collapsed.⁴⁰ All of these destinations are quite far from Malta. While in some cases spatial distance is relative, it

³⁰ Ibid., 155.

³¹ Clare, "Features of an Island Economy," 133. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 48.

³² Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 6, 60, 106.

³³ Hoerder writes: "Migration permits risk diversification since potentially poor harvests or underemployment may be balanced by wage income from abroad and poor wages by food production on the farm." Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, 9.

³⁴ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, xiv.

³⁵ Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 177. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 29-30

³⁶ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 110.

³⁷ Crawford, "The Maltese Diaspora," 5.

³⁸ Cassar, "Everyday Life in Malta," in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 93.

³⁹ Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 48. Zammit, *Malta; the islands and their history*, 333-340.

⁴⁰ British support for these proposals did not include funds. For a detailed analysis of these failures please see Chapters 3, 5, and 8 of Price's *Malta and the Maltese*.

was not for the Maltese migrant.⁴¹ The Maltese did not migrate *en masse* to distant lands in the nineteenth century, even if the standard of living was clearly superior elsewhere. Indeed, 90% of Maltese emigrants in the nineteenth century went to North Africa or the Levant.⁴² The fact that British emigration projects required the Maltese to travel outside of the Mediterranean proved a major stumbling block for these endeavors. The long distance made any possible return difficult. While the British wanted the Maltese to emigrate, the majority of Maltese migrants apparently chose to temporarily move to other areas in the Mediterranean and then return to the islands.

It also appears that the Maltese themselves did not formally organize migration. A philanthropic migration society never existed in Malta. Many historians believe that this indicates that the Maltese did not necessitate such an organization due to the relatively low costs of travel to other lands in the Mediterranean at the time.⁴³ This, however, is a questionable assertion. First of all, it assumes a certain level of affluence amongst the Maltese. This position also fails to consider the fact that the British funded charitable institutions in Malta. In keeping with their *laissez-faire* approach, though, the government limited its charitable funding. British grants did not allow charitable organizations to aid all of the poor in Malta; they had to focus their efforts on the “most indigent.”⁴⁴ Moreover, if London would not permit the governor of Malta to fund migration even when the islands were under budget, why would it allow a charitable institution to do so? The fact that a philanthropic migration society never existed in Malta is more a testament to the relationship between charitable organizations and the imperial government than any real indicator of a relative ease of passage elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

Despite the lack of official conduits, the Maltese still made the voyage to North Africa. Between 1815 and 1842, 10-15% of Malta’s population settled abroad.⁴⁵ In 1842, 15% of Maltese resided overseas.⁴⁶ This percentage dwindled over the latter half of the century; from 1815 to 1885, Price estimates that 10% of Malta’s population migrated abroad, thus representing a drop in the percentage of Maltese abroad as one moves towards the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Maltese migration to Algeria, though, maintained a steady flow throughout most of the nineteenth century.

The Maltese had numerous motivations to go to Algeria. Miège believed that the Maltese left for the following reasons:

organisation judiciaire défectueuse, emplois réservés aux Anglais, tarifs en hausse, agriculture pas encouragée, marine marchande maltais languissante, instruction publique négligée pour les classes supérieures, pas d’instruction élémentaire pour le peuple, prêtrise et professions libérales encombrées pour la bourgeoisie.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, 14.

⁴² Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 189.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, *Malta and the Maltese*, 53. Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 115. Price and Donato seemingly suggest that philanthropic emigration societies were commonplace in regions where people required financial assistance in order to migrate.

⁴⁴ *Reports of the Commissioners on the Affairs of Malta*, Part I, 53.

⁴⁵ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, *Malta and the Maltese*, 61. Cassar, “Everyday Life in Malta,” 98. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 48.

⁴⁷ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 103.

⁴⁸ cited in Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 37.

While it would be easy to question Miège's sincerity due to the imperial rivalry between the French and British, he furnishes a comprehensive and balanced list in this case. First and foremost, the Maltese migrated to Algeria for economic reasons, which were directly related to the islands' high population density.⁴⁹ The regime change in Algeria seems to have encouraged this movement; 6,500 Maltese resided abroad in 1825 and this figure exploded following the French invasion with Algeria being the primary destination for the Maltese migrant throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Geographical and linguistic factors helped define this phenomenon. Algeria lies in close proximity to Malta and Maltese was similar to the Arabic spoken there.⁵⁰ Security factored into this equation as well. Despite ongoing violence in Algeria, it still proved to be a safer haven than other places in the Mediterranean.⁵¹ Maltese migration to Algeria was not merely a circumstantial choice heavily influenced by domestic factors;⁵² Algeria specifically appealed to the Maltese migrant.

The lack of space for upward social mobility may have also played an important role in the migration. At the time of the invasion, the Maltese could not hold important civilian positions and the British military only offered them limited opportunities. This reflected the superiority complex of the British, which the Maltese did not take well to.⁵³ British officials recognized this problem, at least in regards to employment in the civilian sector, in 1838 and recommended that the administration takes steps to improve education and open more prestigious posts to the Maltese.⁵⁴ The Maltese left their homeland for a variety of reasons and particularly chose to migrate to French-controlled Algeria.

Developments in the progressive French invasion of Algeria also significantly impacted Maltese movement between the islands of Malta and North Africa during the nineteenth century. In the wake of the initial invasion of Algeria, the French did not have a unified objective. The Polignac government of the Restoration had no plans to keep Algiers after the army conquered the city. The military felt otherwise; it did not intend to cede the land back to the Ottoman Empire. General de Bourmont expelled the Turks residing in the country in order to prevent such a maneuver. With the Revolution of 1830, France's future in Algeria became unclear once again. The stance of the military, however, made it apparent that the French army had no plans to leave North Africa.⁵⁵

French objectives in the colony remained blurred, though, until General Bugeaud assumed command in December of 1840. Bugeaud made it clear that Algeria would become a settler colony. His policy was to conquer Algeria by the sword and the plow.⁵⁶ To do so, he expanded French operations in Algeria and captured the fertile agricultural plain of the Tell in

⁴⁹ Ibid., *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 89. Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 176. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 191.

⁵⁰ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 53, 230 Appendix C.

⁵¹ Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 107.

⁵² Ibid., 93. Donato claims that the initial Maltese migration to Algeria was more the coincidental timing of push factors in "relief particulier" with the invasion. He does not, however, prove that the domestic situation in Malta drastically changed in the early 1830s. Furthermore, research suggests that Algeria did in fact have a particular pull.

⁵³ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁴ *Reports of the Commissioners on the Affairs of Malta*, Part II, 21-27.

⁵⁵ Charles Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria: A History from 1830 to the Present*, ed. and trans. Michael Brett, Africa World Press, Trenton NJ., 1991, 6-8.

⁵⁶ Patricia M.E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995, 6-7.

Northern Algeria.⁵⁷ Bugeaud realized that he would need to replace his soldiers with laborers in order to create a rural peasantry and successfully transform Algeria into a settler colony.⁵⁸ The military elite targeted the poor of Europe to achieve this aim.⁵⁹ They thus turned to not only their countrymen, but to the Spanish, Italians, and Maltese as well.

As we have seen, Maltese had been in Algeria before the French invasion, albeit in relatively small numbers. Some of these Maltese had been captured while raiding the North Africa coast with the knights and had been forced into slavery. Most of these slaves were concentrated around the Pasha of Constantine, in the east.⁶⁰ Individual migration, which began in the 1820s, also contributed to the Maltese presence in Algeria before the invasion.⁶¹ The Maltese maintained a marginal presence in Algeria before the French incursion.

Despite their desire for labor and European settlers, the French generally looked down upon the Maltese. The Maltese people appeared to have much in common with Arabs. Maltese, like Arabic, is a Semitic language that took shape during the period of Arab rule (871-1090). As British officials stated earlier, Europeans viewed Maltese as a “corrupt dialect of the Arabic.” The Maltese were also seen as quite devout Catholics, allegedly bordering on fanatical.⁶² Here, they shared another perceived common trait with Arabs, whom the French viewed as “fanatically religious.”⁶³ Since the French did not hold Arabs in high regard, it is not surprising that they formed a negative opinion of the Maltese, due to the apparent affinity of ethnic characteristics. This placed the Maltese at the bottom of the European colonial hierarchy.⁶⁴ The perceived resemblance between the Maltese and the Arabs rendered Maltese migrants suspicious in the eyes of the French authorities.⁶⁵

This animosity did not base itself solely upon constructed ethnic similarities. At the time of the French invasion, hostilities were on the rise between France and Great Britain due to the former’s growing presence in the Mediterranean.⁶⁶ As a result, the British did not want the Maltese to go to Algeria, and the French were suspicious of the Maltese given their imperial connection.⁶⁷ The French feared the Maltese not only out of the British link, but also for what Andrea L. Smith has defined as “Maltese liminality.”⁶⁸ The French reacted to the Maltese presence in Algeria by enacting repressive legislation that targeted the Maltese. In 1832, the French began to require any Maltese person entering the colony to have British documents attesting to their good conduct and possession of six months of subsistence.⁶⁹ An 1843 decree

⁵⁷ Mahfoud Bennoune, *The making of contemporary Algeria, 1830-1987: Colonial upheavals and post-independence development*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1988, 37-39.

⁵⁸ Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l’Algérie coloniale (1830-1954)*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 1994, 30. Ageron, *Modern Algeria*, 33.

⁵⁹ Ageron, *Modern Algeria*, 25.

⁶⁰ Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 42, 91.

⁶¹ Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 177.

⁶² Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 17. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 22. Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 95.

⁶³ Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 32-33.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 21, 83.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the distinctions the French made amongst different local groups and how these distinctions were constructed see George R. Trumbull, *IV, An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009 and Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*.

⁶⁶ Blouet, *The Story of Malta*, 174-5.

⁶⁷ Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 58, 77.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 23, 63-97.

⁶⁹ Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 73. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 58.

proclaimed that any Maltese who had served a prison sentence of one year or longer could not re-enter Algeria.⁷⁰ While the French needed European settlers in Algeria, they preferred the Spanish and Italians over the Maltese.

Despite the fact that the French did not openly welcome the Maltese, they still came to French North Africa. Many Maltese were eager to go to Algeria after word of the invasion reached the islands.⁷¹ The first wave arrived in the wake of the invading forces. They served as translators, soldiers, and some possibly as doctors.⁷² Outside of this, not much is known about the initial surge of Maltese migrants and it is impossible to calculate their number.⁷³ The French invasion of Algeria touched off a new era in Maltese migration

The Maltese had several options available to make the journey to Algeria. Some of the more adventurous types guided their fishing boats across the Mediterranean. Others took boats directly to Algiers or Tunisia. The voyage from Malta to Tunisia would have cost about two to four schillings, depending on tariffs.⁷⁴ Those who arrived in Tunisia would have then made the overland trip to Algeria. It is unclear exactly how these Maltese continued on to Algeria. Modern scholarship has produced little definitive information on the movement of Maltese between their home islands and North Africa.

Upon their arrival in Algeria, the Maltese tended to reside in ethnic enclaves. The first of these was a *quartier* of Algiers. This remained the primary destination for the Maltese until the late 1830s, when the French began to conquer the eastern portion of Algeria. As the French military moved in to supposedly pacify these regions, the Maltese followed. By 1842, 50% more Maltese resided in Constantine than in Algiers; in 1885, four times as many Maltese lived in this province than in the capital.⁷⁵ Maltese migrants tended to settle in eastern Algeria, the region closest to Malta. Throughout this period, Constantine and Algiers remained the centers of the Maltese community in Algeria.

The Maltese presence in Algeria proportionally diminished over the course of the nineteenth century. Throughout this period, though, they maintained a steady presence in the colony, constantly contributing to the diverse European colonial population.⁷⁶ In the initial decades, the Maltese migrants formed 15.5% of the total European population in the colony.⁷⁷ With the influx of other national groups, this number dropped. The Maltese comprised 11.1% of the non-French European inhabitants of the colony in 1851, being the third largest group behind the Spanish and Italians.⁷⁸ Their real numbers only diminished in the late 1880s, however, when the French enacted repressive legislation against the non-French European population in Algeria. An 1886 measure stipulated that only French citizens could fish the Algerian waters. This prompted non-French European fishermen to naturalize in order to maintain their livelihood. The renowned 1889 law took this repression to another level, imposing French citizenship in order to “naturalise automatiquement tout étranger né en Algérie s’il ne réclame pas à sa majorité

⁷⁰ Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 84.

⁷¹ Ibid., 18-9.

⁷² Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 67. Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 49, 92-4.

⁷³ Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 137-8.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 115-6.

⁷⁵ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, appendix C, 230.

⁷⁶ Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 53. Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 49, 103. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 19.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 70.

⁷⁸ Jean-Christian-Marc Boudin, *Histoire statistique de la colonisation et de la population en Algérie*, J.-B. Ballière, Paris, 1853, 4.

la nationalité d'origine de son père.”⁷⁹ The legal stipulations in this law made it extremely difficult for a non-French European in Algeria to retain his or her nationality. From this point on, the number of Maltese in Algeria steadily diminished due to the imposition of naturalization.

Academics who have written on this period claim that the Maltese spontaneously migrated to Algeria.⁸⁰ They cite the fact that the government never organized movement to North Africa to support this claim. The lack of a philanthropic migration society also buttresses this argument. Such an organization never existed because it was not necessary; the Maltese migrated to Algeria on their own accord when they deemed the conditions to be right. They could act as such because the voyages to Tunisia or Algeria cost very little. Social scientists use this evidence to illustrate the spontaneity of Maltese migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century.

Scholars also agree on the fact that the poor migrated to Algeria.⁸¹ Since passage to North Africa was inexpensive, the poor could afford the voyage. Algeria afforded them with many more employment opportunities than Malta. The majority of Maltese were not well-educated and worked as day laborers in Algeria.⁸² Others engaged in commerce, both legal and clandestine.⁸³ Contemporaries and historians of previous decades have made the assertion that few members of the educated classes migrated during this period because the Maltese apparently lacked initiative.⁸⁴ This claim, however, does not correlate well with the argument of spontaneous migration to Algeria.

One aspect of this migration that is abundantly clear is the high return of Maltese from North Africa to Malta. From 1840 to 1890, 85% of Maltese migrants returned to Malta. It appears that the Maltese movement to Algeria was a circular migration; Maltese left Malta, traveled to a North African port and moved on to areas that offered employment opportunities. After working for a certain amount of time, they returned to Malta. Contemporary observers claimed that the circular movement was not seasonal in nature.⁸⁵ Therefore, the Maltese migrated to Algeria on a temporary basis in this period. Unfortunately, a statistical analysis for the decade that preceded this period is not available. Did the Maltese who traveled to Algeria after the initial invasion permanently settle or did they also return to the islands?⁸⁶ This is an important question, given that France's Algerian policy became much more clearly defined after General Bugeaud took command in 1840. We do not yet understand the temporality of Maltese migration to Algeria for the duration of this period.

Domestic and international forces shaped the flow of Maltese between Malta and Algeria.⁸⁷ Events in Algeria prompted the Maltese to return. Periods of violence along with the

⁷⁹ Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale*, 32.

⁸⁰ Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 49, 57. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 19. Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 48, 103.

⁸¹ Ageron, *Modern Algeria*, 25. Cassar, *A Concise History of Malta*, 167. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 48. Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale*, 31.

⁸² Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 46.

⁸³ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 68-9. Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 87.

⁸⁴ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 24, 101.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63, 189.

⁸⁶ Smith, Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 67-8. Smith claims that the first wave returned. She cites only one source, however, to support her assertion, from the military archives in Vincennes.

⁸⁷ Donato has a fine chart that illustrates this flow in relation to particular events. Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 63.

outbreak of epidemics caused many Maltese to leave Algeria.⁸⁸ The situation at home also affected this migration. In times of economic prosperity, more Maltese would return to find work in the islands. On the other hand, drought and the outbreak of disease pushed more Maltese to depart and search for work in Algeria.⁸⁹ In times of economic boom both at home and abroad, a large number of Maltese returned while many others departed; the period of the Crimean War highlights this type of migration.⁹⁰ The circular movement between Malta and Algeria was a complex and dynamic phenomenon. It shows that the migrant had both the domestic and foreign situation to consider before coming to a decision and taking action.

The Maltese migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century is still a “*sujet apparemment vierge*” that offers several opportunities for further study. One possible topic is the memory of the French occupation. Before the French Revolution, Malta enjoyed a close relationship to France through the knights. Historian Victor Mallia-Milanes has even gone as far as to read Napoleon’s conquest of Malta as simply the culmination of a long process of Gallicization. French knights constituted a large portion of the Order and much of the organization’s holdings lay in France. Certain French members of the Order of St. John many have also conspired with Napoleon’s Republic forces to facilitate the French invasion in 1798. The Maltese profited from this relationship as well. In 1765, they began to enjoy the “right of citizenship” before French tribunals. Malta was virtually a French colony even before Napoleon’s arrival. The 1789 Revolution fundamentally undermined this relationship. France confiscated the Church’s holdings, including those of the Knights. This seizure led to a period of economic hardship in Malta.⁹¹ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the relationship between Malta and France began to deteriorate.

The violent insurrection of the Maltese against the French only three months after Napoleon left for Egypt must make one question the desire of Maltese to migrate to Algeria. Had the Maltese forgotten the French occupation or did the French invasion evoke old feelings of *amitié*, as Miège claimed?⁹² In Malta’s history, French rule represents a brief but integral period. By 1830, a new generation had reached adulthood that would have had no concrete memory of this episode. It is difficult, however, to believe that the French offenses, particularly those against the Church, simply slipped into the annals of history. That said, France itself had changed considerably between 1798 and 1830: did the regime changes of the early nineteenth century have an impact on public opinion in Malta? What is certain is that the Maltese migrated to Algeria in unprecedented waves after the French invasion. Donato speculates that the oppressive nature of the British occupation may have softened this memory over the years.⁹³ Ultimately, this issue has not been sufficiently analyzed in the historiography of Maltese migration to Algeria.

Another unresolved issue in this historiography is the question of those who left. Historians who have written on the topic unanimously claim that the poor migrated to Algeria.

⁸⁸ Crawford, “The Maltese Diaspora,” 35. Price, *Malta and the Maltese* 53-4, 59. Stora, *Histoire de l’Algérie coloniale*, 30.

⁸⁹ Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 37. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 60.

⁹⁰ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 114.

⁹¹ Mallia-Milanes, “The Genesis of Maltese Nationalism,” in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 5-7. One must be careful with the use of the term “citizenship” in this context. For a rigorous analysis of this issue, please see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA., 1992.

⁹² cited in Donato, *L’émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 103.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

The Maltese, in fact, constituted the poorest European group in Algeria.⁹⁴ Malta's poor, however, were destitute. The island was largely reduced to indigence in the early nineteenth century.⁹⁵ While the British did not keep statistics on unemployment, it is apparent that this problem afflicted a large part of the population.⁹⁶ Many farmers struggled to meet the necessities for subsistence in the first half of the century.⁹⁷ The 1851 census classified 49% of the Maltese population as poor, although it did not give the parameters for this definition. Perhaps the British Under-Secretary Sir James Stephen put it best when he remarked in March 1841: "it is notorious that almost the whole population must employ their whole annual incomes for the necessaries of life."⁹⁸ If the poorest segment of the population found it difficult to maintain even the most basic standard of living, it is hard to see how members of this group managed to save enough to allow for transit to North Africa.

This apparent contradiction means that we must reanalyze the Maltese migrant of the nineteenth century. This task is difficult, though, given that the written records only allow for a narrow interpretation of this movement. Did members of the educated classes go? The British had cut their opportunities for social advancement with the removal of the Maltese from higher positions in the islands' administration. Did some Maltese attempt to join the French military? Members of the Royal Malta Fencible Regiment, the island's militia, received the same wage as the lowest unskilled worker, thus very few enrolled. More profitable opportunities existed with the French army in Algeria.⁹⁹ Or did skilled and port workers migrate? They could earn up to two schillings a day, meaning that purchasing a trip to North Africa would have been more within their means compared to the unskilled laborer, who earned significantly less.¹⁰⁰ Port workers obviously had greater access to and a greater knowledge of the harbor and its frequenters. Thus one can speculate that numerous social groups migrated to Algeria in the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹

Finally, scholars must reconsider the perceived spontaneity of the movement to Algeria. While it appears that no one entity ever officially organized Maltese migration to Algeria, it is entirely possible that the Maltese informally organized movements amongst themselves. Research suggests that the Maltese were well informed about the situation in Algeria.¹⁰² The high return rate of Maltese migrants in the nineteenth century no doubt contributed to this knowledge base. With a fairly constant stream of migrants returning to Malta, people had access to first-hand accounts of those who had already made the voyage. Malta's high population density also facilitated the diffusion of this information. By the time that the British arrived, at

⁹⁴ Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 22.

⁹⁵ Cassar, "Everyday Life in Malta," 99.

⁹⁶ Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 45. Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 12, 19.

⁹⁷ Clare, "Features of an Island Economy," 145.

⁹⁸ cited in Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁰⁰ An unskilled laborer earned ten pence a day, with woman and children making less than half of this figure for a day's work. Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 47-8

¹⁰¹ Donato provides an Algerian mortuary table of Maltese (1849-50) which gives us some insight into this question. The majority of those on the table are men, although women and children formed a little less than 1/3 of this population. The dominant professions include *journaliers* (*non-précis*; 65 total), *sans-profession* (including all but one of the women; 57), *divers* (23), *jardiniers* (21), *profession de bouche* (20), and *transport* (20). This information given, there exists no indication of their occupation in Malta. If one could trace these Maltese back to the islands, it would mean significant progress for this field of study. For many cases, though, it is difficult to discern a migrant's the place of origin in Malta. Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 150-54.

¹⁰² Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 68-9.

least half of the islands' population already lived in an urban areas.¹⁰³ This process accelerated in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the suburbs rapidly grew due to internal migrants searching for work.¹⁰⁴ The fact that people lived in relatively close quarters in Malta helped facilitate rumor. Rumor played a major role in the Maltese uprising against the French in Mdina and Rabat.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, nineteenth century Malta was a "closely interconnected area of such small dimensions, where gossip and rumour were necessarily rife."¹⁰⁶ Malta's social structuring appears to have facilitated the oral diffusion of information in the nineteenth century. In addition, the British provided the Maltese with information on favorable places to settle abroad.¹⁰⁷ Did they take steps to organize their own movement? To answer this question, one must know more about those who migrated at this time along with their particular objectives.

Much has been made throughout this essay of the importance of nineteenth century Maltese migration to the overall history of Maltese migration. This subject, however, is also of particular interest to the history of French Algeria. As previously stated, the Maltese formed a significant portion of the non-French European population in the colony. The Maltese maintained a visible presence in Algeria from the outset of the French invasion, through the colonial period to the Algerian independence movement and their descendents remain in the country to this day. Therefore, one must understand the Maltese of North Africa in order to conduct a comprehensive study of French Algeria, especially when addressing questions of *pied-noir* identity. Maltese also figure prominently in the analysis of relations between the settler and indigenous populations, as well as that between the settler and ruling population. A thorough study of French Algeria must take the role of Maltese migrants into consideration.

In order to clarify these questions, further research is needed. The *Malta Government Gazette* would be a great place to begin. The colonial government published this newspaper weekly. It contained a register on the departure and arrivals of all passengers and vessels from Valetta. The 1838 *Royal Commissioner's Report on Malta*, however, indicates that the gazette had a bleak future because it was not proving to be a profitable enterprise.¹⁰⁸ From here, national archives may be enlightening. Governmental collections in Malta, Algeria, France, and the United Kingdom all could contain information on Maltese migration in the nineteenth century. Private collections, of familial correspondences, diaries or photos, could add to the source base for research on this topic. Finally, one could consult the Catholic Church archival sources. The Vatican or the archives of specific religious orders, such as the Knights of St. John or the Jesuits, may contain indicators of the movement of Maltese to Algeria. What about the priests that the Bishop of Malta sent to Algeria and Tunisia during the Lenten seasons of the 1830s and 1840s?¹⁰⁹ Did they write about their experience while in a foreign land? The archives have definitely not revealed all of their secrets about Malta migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Crawford, "The Maltese Diaspora," 6.

¹⁰⁴ Cassar, "Everyday Life in Malta," 94.

¹⁰⁵ Laurent Dubois gives a succinct analysis of the role of rumour in colonial revolt in *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Frendo, "Maltese Colonial Identity: Latin Mediterranean or British Empire?," in *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964*, ed. Victor Mallia-Milanes, 189.

¹⁰⁷ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ *Reports of the Commissioners on the Affairs of Malta*, Part I, 25.

¹⁰⁹ Price, *Malta and the Maltese*, 71. Vadala, *Les Maltais hors de Malte*, 83.

¹¹⁰ Donato, *L'émigration des maltais en Algérie*, 185.

Despite the fact that Maltese migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century is integral to the overall historiography of movement from Malta and the history of French Algeria, scholars have not critically analyzed this phenomenon. The passage of Maltese to Algeria marked a new development in Maltese migration. Similarly, the post-World War II exodus from Malta marked another break in the flow of Maltese abroad. Unlike the movement to Algeria, this emigration was en masse and permanent. Furthermore, the Maltese comprised a major element of the non-French European population in Algeria during the nineteenth century. To date, no one has conducted a comprehensive study on this topic. In order to better understand both of these subjects, scholars need to further research Maltese migration to Algeria in the nineteenth century.