

Generational habitus of youth during the ‘swinging’ sixties: A case study in Malta

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present common attitudes, perceptions and dispositions of youth in the 1960s in Malta. Building on Bourdieu’s habitus theory and Williams’s study on the ‘structure of feeling’, this paper makes sense of the meanings of everyday experiences of these youth in relation to education, employment, the situation of young women and popular culture. This paper presents primary data collected using in-depth, ethnographic interviews with retired participants who experienced their youth in the 1960s in Malta. The presentation of youth’s account cannot be studied divorced from the local and global social, economical and cultural situation. In effect, the intention here is to move towards a greater understanding of the interplay between the historical and socio-economical structural framework in society, as a key factor in the formation of youth generational habitus.

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'I did not quite understand my father when he used to say, 'Love God and your Queen and you'll be fulfilled (Charles)'¹.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the life chances, attitudes and dispositions of Maltese participants experiencing their youth in the 1960s. The theoretical motor in this study is the Bourdieuan concept of habitus²; adopted to explain the social determinants shaping the biographies of these youth. However, instead of seeing these structures as only class-based, this paper emphasises the importance of the 'structure of feeling' produced by a generation (Williams, 1965[1961], 1977)³. Williams's study is specifically relevant because it focuses on the common perceptions and values shared by a particular generation. It presents an understanding of any social formation through examining social practices and taken for granted behaviour and beliefs. Undoubtedly, one such factor that cannot be ignored when examining Malta's youth habitus in the 1960s is the hegemonic condition of the Catholic Church. Herein, the Gramscian hegemonic notion is used to describe the process of cultural socialisation for the young in the 1960s, which limited, most of the time, their sense of adventure and individuality.

However, it is not my intention to present an over-deterministic view of youth; as a passive generation completely manipulated by the socio-economic and cultural conditions. Nor is it my scope, on the other hand, to present a perception of a 'rebellious' generation which gave rise to moral panic. More specifically, the intention here is to make sense of the life experiences of youth in the 1960s, by relying specifically on the memory of participants. Emphasis is put on the construction and interpretation of memory as an epistemological tool for a better understanding of what it was like to be young in the 1960s. Hence, the research methodology is based on qualitative research methods with an emphasis on in-depth ethnographic interviews. The advantage of ethnographic interviews is that they allow respondents the necessary space and time to explore issues they consider important. The use of interviews as a research method in this study goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in the form of a conversation, but it focuses on careful questioning and listening with the intention to present an interpretation of more than fifty years ago.

Following Tonkin's (1992) view that the memory of an event modifies itself in relation to the person's reflections and understanding of that particular event, this paper makes sense of the different interpretations of 'truth' of youth experiences⁴. Memory is not studied in a vacuum but in relation to social interactions with public structures and the presentation of 'official' historical 'truths'. Supplementing such knowledge, this paper is riddled with

¹ The names of participants are fictitious to preserve the participants' confidentiality.

² Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of A Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, 1977, 78-87.

³ Williams, Raymond, *The Long Revolution*, Penguin, 1965(1961).

Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, 1977, 64-65.

⁴ Tonkin, Elizabeth, *Narrating Our Pasts: the Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge, 1992, 107.

excerpts from interview transcripts with participants who experienced their youth in the 1960s.

The structure of feeling of a youth generational habitus

Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) structural works on habitus is used here as a tool for empirically understanding how one's dispositions is embedded in his/her social milieu. In effect, this study is grounded in the idea that the actions of youth needs to be studied interrelated to their social and historical context; cultural particularities, wider social structures and socio-economic manoeuvres. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus is not regarded as something static but as constantly changing in relation to its interaction with social structure. In his own words, Bourdieu stated that:

'One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the *objectivity* secured by consensus on the meaning of practices and the world, in other words that each of them receives from the expression, individual and collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. The homogeneity of habitus is what – within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production – causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted'⁵.

Moreover, attention is put on the 'structure of feeling' produced by a generation (Williams, 1965[1961], 1977). Williams (1965[1961]) explained the concept of 'structure of feeling' in *The Long Revolution* by saying that

'It is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation. And it is in this respect that the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristics approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance. For here, if anywhere, this characteristic is likely to be expressed; often not consciously, but by the fact that here in the only examples we have of recorded communication that outlives its bearers, the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon'⁶.

In a later work in *Marxism and Literature*, Williams (1977) maintained that one should understand culture in terms of past and future aspirations as well as the present lived experiences of a generation⁷. In line with this, the understanding of a generation in this paper is framed by structural constraints that had significant impact on their lived experiences. The point of departure when making sense of youth in the 1960s in Malta is to deconstruct interpretations of youth by understanding how and why certain interpretations were constructed. Herein, the elicitation of memory is examined. Undeniably, the concept of memory is often, in commonsense parlance, associated with the psychological information storage of an individual to recall the past. The scope of analysing memory here goes beyond this mere definition. Memory is more than an expression of individual consciousness. It is socially constructed and consists of an active process of using information from the past and transforming it to the needs of the present situation⁸.

⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of A Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, 1977, 80.

⁶ Williams, Raymond, *The Long Revolution*, Penguin, 1965[1961],64-65

⁷ Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, 1977.

⁸ Halbwachs, Maurice, "The Social Frameworks of Memory", in *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. L. Coser, Chicago, 1992, 35-189.

Key studies suggest that memory is related to the production of social identity and the narration of the past involves a process of producing the self. One seminal study, critical of the individualistic thesis of memory is Halbwach's 'On Collective Memory'⁹. This work is particularly important because it gives a vivid explanation on the development of collective memory of a generation. He argues strenuously that memory is socially constructed and should not be simply referred to as a property of the individual. Whereas, of course, it is the person who remembers past accounts, individuals are located within a specific group context or generation. On this stance, Halbwach maintains that one's conception of the past is affected by the mental images one employ to solve present problems, thus, the 'collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present'¹⁰. Recent works have linked the notion of collective, social or cultural memory with the notion of nostalgia to explain how memories are generated, altered, shared and legitimated within particular socio-cultural environments¹¹.

Socio-economic and historical background: Opportunities for higher education and employment

There is no doubt that opportunities for higher education and full employment were distinguishing factors for the creation of 'teenager' as a distinctive age in most of Western Europe during the 1960s. Young people in the West have experienced a 'Golden Age' of expansion and extension of education, which had a direct impact on their advantageous life chances¹². For instance, in Britain students coming from all social backgrounds benefitted directly from policies implemented to combat 'ignorance' and initiatives that opened doors to higher education¹³. Moreover, policies based on the principle of equality of opportunity offered student support grants. Such advantageous opportunities offered to British youth in the aftermath of the Second World War were a far cry from the life chances of youth in Malta during the same time. The delay of economic development in colonial Malta when compared to the situation of Britain during the 1960s manifested itself in the dissimilar life chances of youth in both countries.

Lack of financial and human resources in Malta delayed the process to build an educational system based on meritocratic principles and accessibility for all. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, a report presented by Ellis (1942) offered suggestions on measures needed to be implemented to (re)establish an adequate educational system in Malta. The newspaper 'Times of Malta' reported on Ellis's assessment, emphasising the fact that 'the immediate and most pressing duty of the educational reformer is to provide for the children of the islands the best schooling possible under siege conditions'¹⁴. Speaking on the situation of schooling during Post-War years, Ellis stressed the deficiencies in schools and the problem with lack of staff. Notwithstanding its limited resources, the education system in Malta made a

⁹ Ibid. 35-189.

¹⁰ Coser, Lewis (ed. Trans), "Introduction Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945", in *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. L. Coser, Chicago, 1992, 1-34.

¹¹ Keightley, Emily and Pickering Michael "The modalities of nostalgia", *Current Sociology*, vol. 54, no.6, 2006, 919-941.

¹² Hobsbawn, Eric, *The Age of Extremes*, Vintage Books, 1996, 320-343.

¹³ Heath, Anthony, "Education since 1945", in *Britain Since 1945*, ed. J. Hollowell, Blackwell, 2003, 296 -312.

¹⁴ *Times of Malta*, "Expert from Britain Surveys Malta's Educational System, Mr. C. Ellis Reports On His Visit", January 13, 1943.

substantial leap forward between the years 1946 and 1971. Prior to 1946, parents had to pay fees to educate their children. With the introduction of compulsory education up to fourteen years of age in 1946, parents with financial difficulties could apply for exemption from fees. Later in 1955, with the financial help from the British government new schools were built and the Minister of Education introduced free education for all.¹⁵

During the Post-War years, an obstacle in the Maltese educational system was the lack of training provision for teachers. It is worth mentioning, however, that solutions to this problem resulted in the design of teacher training courses. For the term starting October 1947, fifty students were present for their one year teacher's training course¹⁶. In the following scholastic years up to 1953, students attended a one-year residential training course, whilst plans were made to design a two year course instead. However such change required a much larger building to accommodate both first and second year students¹⁷. The Society of the Sacred Heart went ahead with the plan and 'Mater Admirabilis Training College' for girls opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1954¹⁸. In a state of urgency to open a similar institution for boys, grants from the United Kingdom made possible the construction of St. Michael's Training College which opened in the same year¹⁹. The two colleges, the one in St. Julian's for females and the one for males' teachers in Pembroke, were estimated to cost £51,000, however in reality the total cost of the buildings was four times as much²⁰. Furthermore, the Commonwealth Teacher Training Scheme in 1960 offered scholarships for academic and training courses in Britain to an average of twenty-three candidates every year²¹.

During an interview, Mary, a retired teacher, gave a vivid description of how it was like to attend the teachers college for young girls; 'Teachers used to follow a two year course as boarders, they used to sleep and eat there. They stayed away from their home; they used to go home only during holidays or something similar'.

Elise, also a retired teacher, always imagined herself as a teacher because teaching guaranteed independence and financial stability; 'It was the highest prestigious job that makes you independent and gives you status in society. It used to fascinate me because for me a teacher is someone who dresses up smart and have money. I also used to like the presence of the teacher in a class. Authority, power and success; I didn't see it as I do today to transmit what I feel is important for the well-being of students. At that time it was more to do with what this experience will give me. I am being honest here. Ultimately, I took the opportunity and it became something very close to my heart'.

Young women who were fortunate enough to have opportunities for post-compulsory education, like Mary and Elise, were still limited in their career choices. Elise emphasised this when saying that 'the only career paths were a teacher, a nurse or a secretary in a government department or a bank clerk. Those were the only options. There were university courses but it never crossed my mind to even consider them'. Similar to the teachers' college, girls had to attend a boarding college to follow a nursing course. Grace, relying on memory, maintained 'I had a friend who always wanted to become a nurse and she encouraged me to pursue the same

¹⁵ Zammit Mangion, Joseph, *Education in Malta*. MA.S, 1992, 8.

¹⁶ Brennan J., R.W.G.D. for 1947-1948.

¹⁷ Vassallo J.P., R.W.G.D. for 1948-54.

¹⁸ *Report of the Department of Education*, 1948/54.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *The Teachers' Magazine*, 1952, Vol. X No. s, April-May, p.101

²¹ *Report of the Department of Education*, 1960

career. It was the time when the nursing course was introduced. It was a three year boarding course’.

Although both teaching and nursing vocational courses became popular, opportunities for tertiary education for youth at the Royal University of Malta were scarce. Only a few hundred new candidates entered University per year between the 1950s up to 1970. One major reason for this is that the University generally admitted fee-paying students²². It was only in 1971, that Maltese students were exempted from paying tuition fees to follow a course at University²³. Charles explained how family background played a significant part on whether one could enter university or not; ‘My problem was mainly financial because you had to be from a well-off family to enter university. There were no student stipends and if I’m not mistaken, there was a period when you had to pay to attend University. But I do not remember that much since I focused on my University studies much later in life. But it was hard; it was no question of someone interceding for you, it was not that, you had to have the means and not everyone who came from a working-class background had the means’.

Moreover, opportunities for trade educational provisions were also limited. With the help of Italian grants, tools and equipment were donated to local trade schools²⁴. Apart from the opening of Trade Schools for boys over 14 years of age, a similar school was opened for girls, specialising in trades of dress-cutting, industrial sewing, needlework crochet and toy-making²⁵. The specialising of these schools manifested clearly the gender stereotypical roles.

The life chances of young women in the 1960s

‘Married women should, as a rule, avoid all kinds of employment. The consequences of the employment of married women on married life may be generally classified as adverse effects, such as the refusal to bear children or neglect the children’s education’²⁶.

By the end of the Second World War, the youth generation are said to have become more sceptical of traditional practices in general²⁷. The increase of young women entering the workforce in post Second World War was one factor which challenged the status quo of society²⁸. Nevertheless, structural determinants were still too strong to combat gender inequalities. One major institution which cannot be ignored is the Catholic Church and its all-male clergy. It was constantly discouraging women’s participation in the labour market, mainly through the use of the mass media which infiltrated public opinion enough to make them believe woman’s place is at home.

Ann, a retired career woman with more than thirty years experience in the banking sector, explains her struggles to overcome gender stereotype while pursuing a career along with

²² Galea, L. “Statistics in Perspective”, *The Sunday Times*, 2003, November 2, 15.

²³ Cassar, George, “Education and Schooling: From early Childhood to Old Age”, in *Social Transitions in Maltese Society*, ed. J. Cutajar and G. Cassar, Malta, 2009, 51-99.

²⁴ Zammit Mangion, Joseph, *Education in Malta*, M.A.S, 1992, 96-97.

²⁵ Sultana, Ronald, *Education and National Development: Theoretical and Critical Perspectives on Vocational Schooling in Malta*, Malta, 1992, 241.

²⁶ Social Action Movement, *Memorandum on the Employment of Women and their Role in Society*, S.A.M, 1956, 5-6.

²⁷ Pirota, Joe, *Fortress Colony: The Final Act, 1945-1964*, Vol.1, 1945-1954, Malta, 1991, 12.

²⁸ Ganado, Herbert, *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*, Vol.III, 1942-1955, Malta, 1975, 159.

juggling family obligations; 'First of all it was a disgrace to hear that a pregnant woman is working, it was a real utter disgrace. But I had the best thing, I was fulfilling my desires and at the same time I was satisfying the family...I am somewhat rebellious in a sense that I didn't follow the trend of people, I wanted to married and start a family, it was important to keep the house clean, yet still, I also felt that I have to apply my years of study to something and not throw them away'.

It is important to note that young women were advised that as 'good' Christians they had to give up their free time and independent social lives, away from entertainment and the associated 'permissive' environment. In addition, financial independence for women would translate into difficulties of financial management when they reach their presumed 'ultimate' goal in life – Holy Matrimony. This clearly manifests the hidden messages that this generation were receiving during their childhood and adolescence. Woman's employment rate increased for the so-called baby boomers' generation especially with the drive for industry plans in the late 1950s and 1960s to increase economic activity. Labour intensive industries investing in Malta created job opportunities for many young women²⁹. However, at that time, the reactionary Catholic agenda was working to counteract fear of the deterioration of the traditional family.

Young women were also discriminated by the 'Marriage Bar' legislation, in which up to December 1980, female workers in the public sector had to resign from work upon marriage. Apart from its aim to keep male unemployment low, the side effects of the 'marriage bar' was the promotion of unequal treatment between the sexes in a patriarchal family setting. Even in 'fortunate' situations, when the husband contributed to household chores and child caring, he was considered as 'helping out' rather than doing his duties as a husband/father. This is clearly evident in Ann's account in which with pride, she explained how her husband always lent a helping hand; 'My husband always supported me. If it meant preparing the sandwiches for the children for school while I dressed them up, he made the sandwiches, if it meant that I do the washing and hanging and he collected the clothes, whatever and whenever I needed help, he always supported me. I wouldn't have done it without my husband's help. I would be been half a woman without his help, because half of me was connected of the work place and half of me was at home to take care of the family, it a dilemma; a very big dilemma'.

Apart from traditional cultural constraints that restricted the life chances of women, it is worth noting that youth's life experiences were largely shaped by the socio-economic situation at that time. Malta's post-colonial socio-economic situation played a central role in the limited job opportunities for youth in the second half of the 1960s.

Rising unemployment and heavy migration

The majority of youth who did not pursue post-compulsory education in the 1960s were living in times of rising unemployment and heavy migration. Joseph explained the peculiarities of small colonial locations like Malta in the aftermath of gaining Independence and passing through a climate of economic instability, unlike Britain;

'The Maltese economy was going through a bad patch as hundreds of Maltese men who were employed with the military services were being made redundant due to the run-down of

²⁹ Pollacco, Christopher, *An Outline of the Socio-Economic Development in Post-War Malta*, Malta, 2003, 270-271.

the British forces. This was a big blow for the local government. The local authorities had talks with the British counterparts and tried to extend the period of the run-down so as to find alternative jobs to these ex-servicemen. These had some priority for certain jobs, most of them being breadwinners. It was very difficult for inexperienced school leavers to get a job. Although I had enrolled to a business studies training course, I remember I was reluctant to spend further years dependant on my family. It was different times then. Getting a number of 'O' level passes, which I did, was considered quite an achievement and seemed sufficient to get you anywhere in those days'.

He further commented on the way political parties were struggling to reduce the rate of unemployment. One of the attempts to reach this task was to expand the civil sector workforce; 'The problem was that jobs were scare and many people were jobless. The 1966 electoral campaign slogan of the Malta Labour Party was 'Jobs for All in Three Months'. They lost the election and the dream remained just a dream. If by chance you did manage to the interview stage they would eventually employ someone with experience. So it was hard for a school leaver at the time. The most popular jobs in demand were in the civil service but, personally for some reason or other I opted out. I did not fancy learning the typewriter to sit for an examination. It was too girlish. But many did take that path and to decrease the number of school leavers joining the jobless queues, the government absorbed a number of them on a yearly basis. No wonder the number of civil servants exploded in subsequent years. It was a buffer to shield unemployment figures'.

Joseph also referred to the incentives offered at the time for migration; a situation that was used as a safety-valve to the high rate of unemployment. He remembered with a sense of nostalgia his unplanned temporary migration to the UK.

'An opportunity arose for me in April 1968 when I accompanied a friend of mine to an interview in Valletta, held by representatives of the British Consulate and of the Malta House in London, to recruit prospective emigrants to the UK. Although I had no prior appointment for an interview, I managed to have the interview just the same along with my friend. The following day we were asked to have a medical examination and ten days later we found ourselves on a plane heading for London. Malta was still a colony and a member of the Commonwealth and the Maltese were somewhat given preference to immigrate to the UK up to a certain quota per year. My trip to UK only costed me two pounds 17 shillings (€6.60) since it was subsidised by the Malta government. I told my parents about me having the interview but I never thought that a decision to migrate would be taken so soon. I remember my father giving me twenty pounds, about €46, (more than two weeks wages) in case I wanted to return after a few days...I returned the money that he gave me after a month, knowing fully well that my family needed it more than I did'.

It was undoubtedly the case that the peculiarities of Malta, as a newly independent country in the 1960s and its struggles to build a sustainable economy, heavily influenced the life situation and expectations of youth. Notwithstanding the economic instability in the 1960s, most participants stated that jobs were guaranteed for those with post-compulsory education. Various participants like Paul who entered the workforce in the early 1960s embraced the mantra of finding a 'job for life'. Paul recalled how in the 1960s he felt rest-assured that his job was secure. In particular, working for the civil service provided such guarantee for job stability.

'Back then the emphasis was to find a stable job and working for the state provided job stability unlike today. I was never unemployed, not even my father because he used to work in

the civil service. Those who passed the state examination to work in the civil service had a job guaranteed’.

For Elise, graduating as a teacher meant that she had a job for life. John also regarded the teaching profession as a financial guarantee for life. Now, a retired engineer, he looked back at his job opportunities and maintained that he decided to work as a teacher for over forty year, irrespective of having an engineering degree, because of the sense of job stability. Elise also referred to this when she told me ‘when we got our certificate, we didn’t have the stress that we wouldn’t find a job because automatically the teacher’s certificate guaranteed a job’.

Having a ‘job for life’ provided these youth a sense of stability that was important for their transition into adulthood. They felt that they needed job stability before getting married; an event that signified their rite of passage into adulthood. The importance of marriage and family formation for this generation needs to be addressed in relations to the centre stage position of the Catholic Church as a socialisation agent. Marriage, for this generation, was an indisputable event, anchored on religious obligations to fulfil established gender roles.

Catholic hegemony in Malta

The religious instructions and their hidden messages in the education system cannot be left unnoticed when making sense of this generation. Pupils, from the lower classes of primary schools, to students attending teaching colleges and candidate’s admittance to the Royal University of Malta, all required to sit for a Religious Knowledge examination. The Church at that time was seen as instrumental in promoting good citizenship and social conscience.

The Gramscian hegemonic ideology rooted in the meanings and symbols that legitimate dominant interests and which create one concept of reality is clearly meditated and manifested by the Catholic Church in Malta. Frendo (1988), accentuates the importance and presence of the Church in Malta by arguing that:

‘The parochial structure was intact: religion was at the heart of Maltese life just as the church was physically in the centre of the village, and formed part of the strong social nexus by which the common people looked up differentially to the ‘respectable’ members of the community’³⁰.

Undoubtedly, this highlights the way the Catholic Church in Malta and its deeply rooted ideological web, permeates Maltese society. It works to socialise people from an early age to maintain not only mass consensus but the status quo. This is achieved through various means such as the media and educational foundations. Various organisations such as M.U.S.E.U.M, ‘the Catholic Action’ and ‘the Salesians’ were committed to a hegemonic form of youth socialisation, with the aim to influence moral behaviour. Charles clearly demonstrates the infiltration of religious organisations in youth leisure activities.

‘Youth movements were being formed in the 1960s. ‘The Teens and Twenties Talent Trust’, who together with the help of other persons from St Aloysius, including two clergies, discovered this niche’ that was phenomenal. They used to organise cultural and theatrical activities and above all, discos that we could also attend. And one thing about other discos

³⁰ Frendo, Henry, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, Malta, 1988, 188.

around the island, they used to warn us not pick a girl that patronizes the *Palace* or *Dragut* discos, because you were likely to pick up a street girl.’

Charles recalled, with great nostalgia, his experience in trying to persuade the village priest to organise a disco in the local village hall. ‘It was one of the hardest things to convince the local parish priest...to organise a disco at the youth club. We set our minds on this and after trying very hard to persuade the priest, we finally managed to organise the disco. The main problem was the slow dancing routine. In the past, dancing couples used to keep their distance, but the *Teens and Twenties* were the first to introduce it [slow dancing], but when we tried to similarly introduce it at youth centres we encountered great opposition. But we did it and today I look back and I laugh at the idea. The Parish priest finally conceded with the idea but he told me and the committee members not to play too many slow records. In fact we had to mark those ‘slow music’ records on the playlist and show it to him beforehand, because he did not know which ones were slow and which weren’t’.

Popular culture of Maltese youth in the 1960s

The religious kind of socialisation is often seen as smothering youth’s sense of individuality and adventure. Sultana and Baldacchino (1994) rightly describe this situation and maintain that ‘it could feel like growing up in a strait jacket of community surveillance, given the dense psycho-social atmosphere’³¹. Maltese youth, fully immersed into the religious dogma showed less signs of ‘rebellion’ than in other European countries. Having said that, however, it does not denote that there was no signs of changing patterns in their transition to adulthood. Although Charles highlights the importance of religion throughout the interview he admitted that his peers used fashion as a tool for distinction from laymen religious members; ‘It’s worth mentioning that the laymen religious society [‘M.U.S.E.U.M’] which is still very significant to this day, was also very influential during the 1960s. And not to be associated, personally in my case, with this society, we used to keep our hair long, dress in bell bottom trousers, high heel shoes, hipsters, and even wear a tie in the hot summer weather, so if you did not do these things you could be labelled as a member of the ‘museum’ society. The cigarette played an important part in one’s identity. If you did not smoke you were labelled as one belonging to the ‘M.U.S.E.U.M’ society. Not everyone though. Being young, although there was nothing wrong to be part of the ‘museum’, you have to appear as modern looking, more hip, so you leave your hair long, or wear a tie [museum members refrained from wearing one]. Yes as youthful girls and boys we were influenced almost immediately by the great changes that were instigated by the arrival of *The Beatles* era and the ‘swinging’ sixties’.

Undoubtedly, one cannot refer to the so-called ‘swinging sixties’ as a motor to the creation of youth culture without mentioning the importance given to fashion at that time. Exposure to latest fashion trends as well as the British top charts was made accessible to most young people in Malta by means of the Cable radio (Rediffusion). Youth oriented programmes in Malta started on the BFBS (British Forces Broadcasting Station), being the only wireless station transmitting on the time. Participants spoke about the significance of this medium as a communicative tool to keep updated with what was happening abroad. Richard told me ‘the cable radio was everything to us youths, at the time, and also to those that were not so young. But let me speak for myself, it was everything, for us, from information to entertainment. It was the trend setter for us. If you are listening to the top 20 charts, you can later talk about the recent records, even so for those who did not have a TV set at home. Even the dailies used to

³¹ Sultana, Ronald and Baldacchino, Godfrey, *Maltese Society: A Sociological Inquiry*, Malta, 1994, 17.

have a weekly 'variety' page, but it used to be out of date, if however you tune to the BBC to listen to the top 20 every week. Therefore the main influence on youth at the time was mainly the Rediffusion. It directed young people on which music to listen to. If it was played on cable radio, those who could afford could buy the records from the local record stores. If the DJ Victor Aquilina [a radio presenter] praised a particular record, we used to say that it is a good record. If he plays it, everyone used to sing to it'.

The influence on youth by means of this medium, however need to be seen within a 'glocalisation' debate. Following Robertson's (1995) thesis of 'glocalisation', it is important to examine the relationship between the local and global/foreign³². It is too simplistic to assume that Maltese young people were passively adopting trends set in Britain. Instead, Maltese young people were more likely to adapt to such trends according to the local socio-economic context. Maltese young people in the 1960s were living in times of rising unemployment, heavy migration and fears for the future of the newly independent country. Such financial constraints left them little money in their pockets to spend on fashion, as opposed to their British youth counterparts, living in times of economic stability and a booming economy. Yet still, Maltese young people, with their limited resources, followed such trends by adapting to their different situations; for instance, by sewing their own clothes and imitating designs from magazines and listening to the radio.

Moreover, Charles highlighted the fact that the lack of money in their pockets did not inhibit their leisure activities; 'Still money to spend was scarce for the likes of me and it was not before I finished the fifth form when I started to spend some money that I earned in my summer job. Mostly on some cheap cinema tickets or to buy a vinyl record, however we could not afford to spend a lot. Absolutely, considering my family background, and even my big circle of friends, we had the same meagre spending pattern'.

During one interview, Joseph highlighted the close affiliation between fashion and music. He told me 'when it came to fashion, I followed the trends that most young local people were adhering to. Besides our social habits, which was timidly an imitation of what was happening overseas, particularly the UK, the dress culture for instance, of the Malta, youth was remotely different from that of the trends of the 1960s in the UK. Us boys were too keen to hold on to our ties and jackets and put on the Sunday's best whenever we have a 'big' occasion, like a date. Casual wear was for the few or the foreigners residing here. The influential wave of pop/rock music of the golden sixties also invaded our shores. I for one, sometimes used to wear a black or white polo neck under my jacket, just to be 'with it' and to look trendy! We were simply imitating the dressing style of *The Beatles* from pictures found in chewing gum wrappers, doing different poses in polo neck tops'.

Sewing was considered as a customary activity for young girls in the 1960s. All females interviewed referred to the significance of sewing, partly because it was cheaper to sew your own clothes rather than buying ready-made ones. For Grace, it seemed ordinary to sew her own clothes; she maintained, 'we used to make our own clothes. We were three girls at home. With one wage and seven children at home, it was difficult for my mother to buy us ready-made clothes'.

One particular leisure activity for youth in the 1960s that all participants referred to was the *passigata*; the stroll along the sea front in Sliema or the main streets of the capital city

³² Robertson, Roland, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity" in *Global Modernities*, ed. M. Featherstone, S. Lash, and R. Robertson, London, 1995, 24-44.

Valletta. The stress in analysing this activity is put on the sociability of walking for young people. Relying on her interpretation of the memory of such activity, Mary, nostalgically, elaborates on the 'death' of such 'innocent' fun. Herein, the concept of loss, or nostalgia, is simply ingrained in the concept of the irreversibility of time and to the perception of what is lacking in a changed present. Mary maintained how she 'used to stroll along Kingsway [former main street in Valletta and now Republic street] and if I meet someone I know, we chat near *Cordina* [a renowned coffee shop]. *The Premier* (a well-known open-air café) had music playing and singing going on and so the city was just fantastic in my days. Today it's lifeless and dull'. Ann also spoke about such activity by saying that they 'used to go to *Ghar id-Dud* [a central meeting place along the Sliema front] and we used to meet the clique, about twenty people or twenty-five people'.

Going to the cinema was also another very popular leisure activity for most young people. Mary referred to the cinemas and her experience and anticipation for going to the movies every Sunday; 'in Sliema we had five cinema theatres. We had the *Gaiety*, *Plaza*, *Alhambra*, *Carlton* and the *Majestic*. The quarter past four showing was for youths, and I used to wait for it eagerly'. Charles also explained that going to the movies was not just a means to meet up with your friends, but an informative event to keep in touch with events happening abroad. Charles gave a vivid account of the cinemas as exposure to what was hip; 'For instance when we first watched *The Beatles*, it was through the weekly newsreels that were shown before the main feature film. These were *Pathe* news or *Movie Tone*, screening the weekly news before the main film starts. There used to be small boards advertising what is showing on newsreels; *The Beatles* concerts or an important football match which was not shown on television, because when local television started in 1964 [the actual date was 1962] it was very rudimentary. If you wanted to see excerpts of *The Beatles* or *Rolling Stones* concert or an FA Cup Final, the newsreels poster used to give this information of what is showing before the main feature. The cinema was in a way a means of keeping oneself informed and we were influenced by these trends'.

Aside from the cable radio, televisions soon started infiltrating Maltese homes in the 1960s and especially in 1970s. Television was introduced in Malta in 1957 transmitting only Italian programmes for the first five years. On 29th September 1962, three minutes to eight, the first picture bearing the eight-pointed cross with the words 'Malta Television Service' appeared on national television for the first time.³³ It is no surprise that the Archbishop Micheal Gonzi was amongst the first speakers appearing on television to give his blessing and read a telegram of blessing from the Pope.³⁴ This clearly shows how the Church immediately put its hegemonic stamp on a device considered potentially evil. On that day, 'streets were deserted as people gathered in front of screens'. This does not mean, however, that everyone gathered at home to watch this event because only a few could afford a television set. Instead most people gathered in band clubs to watch this event. Herbert Ganado, writing in 1948, anticipated the increase of television in households; 'It won't be long before we will have a television set in our room, and we will be able to see and hear the world from our armchair, with a book on our knees and a pot of tea on the table! Much better than standing at the local club's doorway'³⁵.

There was a class gap in the persons who could afford a TV set and the others who could not. Television in the 1960s was a status symbol. Charles maintained that 'households in a higher income bracket could afford television, and television sets increased in the higher

³³ *The Times of Malta*, "Good First Performance", September 30, 1962, 1

³⁴ *Ibid*, 3

³⁵ Ganado, Herbert, *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*, Vol.III, 1942-1955, Malta, 1975, 242

middle class sector by the late 1960s, so the importance of cable radio diminished in a way. However, in my opinion, it still remained a powerful means, as television did not provide alternative offerings to young people at that time. We could not follow the Beatle mania as such, the beat boom, although there were some musical programmes on the Italian TV channel, still those who were keen on popular music then we were influenced by the films released in those years’.

Mary also remembers when her family bought their first television, because it coincided with a couple of years before her father died. Following Halbwach’s argument, it is evident in this excerpt that the individual’s memory is the intersection of collective influences from the family to the norms and values of a culture of an individual³⁶. Mary maintained that ‘when television started in those years there was only the Italian channel, then the Malta station opened. I remember my father telling us that the local station will soon open and I will get you a television set once it starts, and we were so excited, and we got it one year later, a black and white television set’.

In light of such accounts on youth’s adopting and adapting trends in the 1960s, it becomes evident that the peculiarities of a location, hand in hand with Western influences, were key factors shaping up the attitudes and dispositions of this generation. Their generational habitus cannot therefore be studied in isolation. Not only has the heavy input of social determinants on forming the habitus needed to be taken into consideration but also the reciprocal relationship between the local and global. Following Anthony Giddens’s (1994) argument:

‘Malta cannot be studied [...] as though it were an isolated unit. It is part of a wider global society and the influence of the wider global order appears almost everywhere [...] unless the analysis of Maltese society is situated in the context of these debates, it will be impossible to understand its own distinct characteristics, let alone relate these satisfactorily to the turbulence affecting the global order’³⁷.

Conclusion

This paper explores what it meant to be a young adult in the 1960s through relying on biographical memory of participants. Class and gender differences are central in the creation of diverse life chances and attitudes toward youth and adulthood. Nevertheless, the intention in this paper was to present a ‘structure of feeling’ of this generation of youth in relations to the historical, cultural and socio-economical structural framework in society influencing the (re)formation of habitus. Moreover, this paper presents the interpretation of participants intertwined with socio-economic and cultural situations. This paper also refers to what participants considered as ‘appropriate’ behaviour as youth. It makes sense of the customary activities of these youth, their life situation and their shared generational experiences.

Whilst it is conventional wisdom that a specific generational habitus shares common characteristics and trajectories by virtue of its specific contextual setting, this study does not assume a homogenous youth generation because such view ignores the various indicators such as family background and gender which are motors to different life chances in society.

³⁶ Halbwachs, Maurice, “The Social Frameworks of Memory”, in *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. L. Coser, Chicago, 1992, 35–189.

³⁷ Giddens, Anthony, “Introduction”, in *Maltese Society: A Sociological Inquiry*, ed. R. Sultana and G. Baldacchino, Malta, 1994, xxix.