

Il-Gallarija Ta' Malta: The Maltese balcony as a socio-cultural marker of identity.

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of Master in Maltese Studies.

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Lill-mamma

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To my darling Tereza, my rock and inspiration.

Abstract

Il-Gallarija ta' Malta defines the character of Maltese urban landscape. Besides offering a remarkable visual experience, this balcony provides intangible Malteseness that documents society's past. A research gap has been identified on the socio-cultural aspects of the *gallarija* and knowledge is at times limited to misconceptions. This study contributes to a sociocultural dimension of an architectural element in the Maltese historical fabric. Collective memories have an inherent relationship with architectural objects that become social representations of identity. The study delved into the historical, ethnographic and philosophical aspects of the balcony concept, appraising the versatile and generic usages worldwide, to highlight the universality and uniqueness of the Gallarija Ta' Malta. The study employs qualitative and phenomenological methods of enquiry to explore the experiential narratives generated from nine unstructured interviews with residents and academics, thereby connecting humans with the *gallarija* and providing a voice for its cultural and social emergence. The participants' rich narratives affirm the *gallarija*'s unique role in the Maltese historical events and a symbol of adaptability and evolution of Maltese society. Besides its functional virtues the *gallarija* symbolises the nature of a people and their traditional attributes, highlighting the need for its preservation as an icon of the socio-cultural identity of the Maltese Islands

Keywords: *Gallarija*, socio-cultural heritage, identity, phenomenology.

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List of Abbreviations

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - IPA

Malta Environment and Planning Authority – MEPA

Malta Scheduled Property Register - MSPR

National Protective Inventory - NPI

Planning Authority - PA

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO

Note to Reader:

The terms Gallarija Ta' Malta and *gallarija* will be used interchangeably.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Preamble

L-identita kulturali Maltija hi ċivili u komunitarja. In-nies tkellem in-nies. In-nies tagħmilha man-nies. Min hu ta' waħdu hu stramb. Anki min joqgħod ġewwa jħares għal barra. Il-gallarija mhix biss gonta għall-arkitettura tad-djar tagħna: hi mudell ta' atteggiament. Gardjola^[1] mhux ġirandra^[2]. (Mifsud Bonnici in Cortis, 1989, p. xiii)

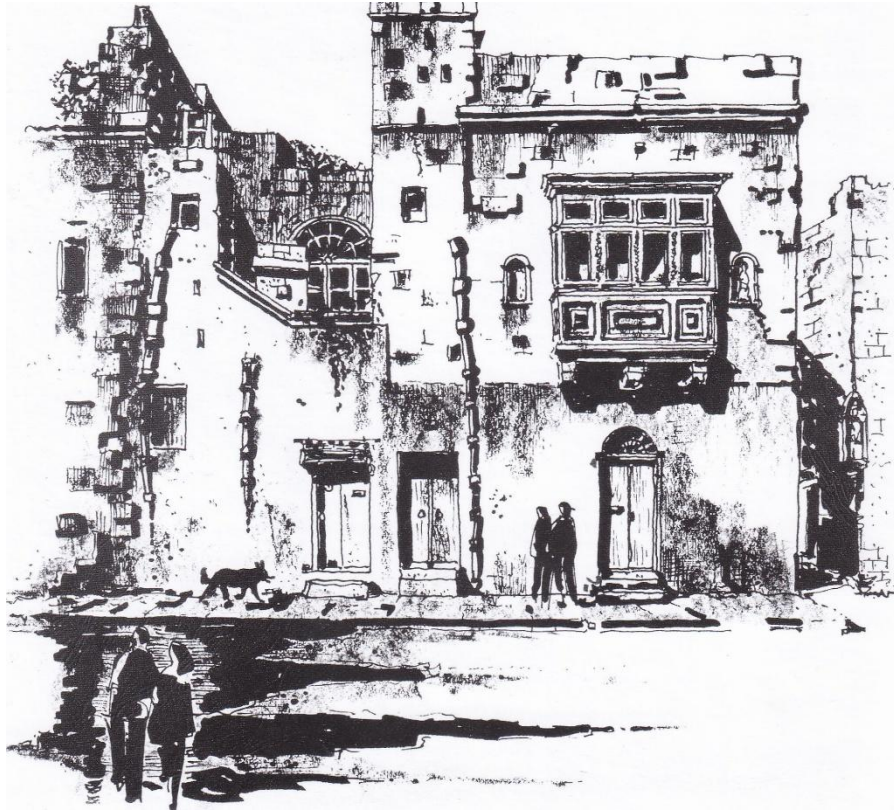
The then Minister of Education and Culture, Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici uses the concept of the *gallarija* as a figure of speech to illustrate how the Maltese cultural identity evolved through the interaction of its people with other cultures. The metaphor of the *gallarija* portrays the character of the Maltese who, although geographically isolated between mainland Europe and the African continent, are not socially or culturally insular in nature. A *gallarija* affords vantage views on the progressive changes happening worldwide. The *gallarija* is not merely an architectural appendage to house facades but symbolically models Maltese attitudes and way of life (Figure 1).

^[1] **Gardjola** - Sentry-box, guardroom, watch tower. [Italian *guardiola*] (Aquilina (1987) Vol 1, p. 424)

^[2] **Ġilandra** - A kind of ornamental throne with a revolving cover where the monstrance containing the Sacred Host is kept for public adoration on an altar. [Italian *girandola*] (Aquilina (1987) Vol 1, p. 403).

Figure 1

A traditional streetscape with local vernacular, including closed timber balcony. Richard England, 2022. Pen and ink.



Icons of cultural heritage can be symbolic of the geographical region in which they are found, traditions to which they are believed to belong and of the place they originated from. Malta's complex multi-period stock of heritage richness and socio-cultural icons are among the symbols that reflect the Maltese identity. Pace (2005) posits that social and cultural heritage in the context of the Maltese geographical and historical circumstances, are manifested in archeology and antiquities, urban and vernacular architecture, works of art, rituals and traditions, colours, music, food, narratives and folklore. The Gallarija Ta' Malta has become an integral part of the Maltese landscape, correlating with Tilley's (2006) reflection that cultural places are

contested, worked and re-worked by people according to individual, social and political circumstances.

The concept of Culture is broad and complex. UNESCO defines culture as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, n d). Cultures which were created in similar living environments in particular regions (e.g. the Mediterranean), distinguish one society from another with physical and non-physical elements, while bonding the members of society together in a single identity and common manifestation of behaviour.

A nation’s intangible heritage is demonstrated through the community’s values and beliefs, while architectural features reflect political and cultural forces in tangible form, relating the past to the present and linking communities to the land to discover their socio-cultural heritage (Cassar, 2019). Historical contexts show that architecture follows the needs, goals and preferences of society, and since every generation lives through unique experiences, its interpretation reveals the nation’s priorities and morals of the time (Parvizi, 2020). Architecture captures past and present memory but stands speechless until people interpret their design as forms of social representations and identity within a nation’s collective memory (Molina and Bovina, 2019).

National identities are mobile and constantly changing, hardly ever fixed and static, safe and unproblematic (Tilley, 2006). The phenomenon of identity embodying ethnicity, language, religion, and common memories, sentiments and experiences, is fraught with ambiguity and contradictions as it construes various meanings to different people. Collective memory is central

to how a society conceives its identity. Society engages in collective memory by mobilising social and historical resources and recollections of images, arranging them in chronological order, giving them names and meaning within a group (Halbwachs, 1992). The process of collective memory is essential to the formation of group identity, while groups are conceptualized as products of collective memories (Hamza et al., 2014). Moreover, the construction of a nation's social and collective memories is dependent on the communication of narratives of human experiences and historical facts combined with myths and legends rooted in places, passed on from one generation to another (Cassar, 2000). Knowledge, beliefs and opinions shared by a society regarding artifacts carry collective memories from the past to shape the present, thus ensuring a degree of continuity through time (Wagoner, 2015). Hence, there is the need to explore the memory of socio-cultural aspects of the Gallarija ta' Malta from narratives that constitute thinking, remembering and interpreting events related to architecture and cities, like Valletta.

The traditional wooden enclosed balcony typified exclusively as Maltese, 'Gallarija ta' Malta', provides a pathway to a deeper understanding of social history and cultural identity. Dingli (2018) describes the *gallarija*, "as a mirror to our way of life," (para. 1) a unique symbol of adaptability and evolution of Maltese society. Furthermore, the *gallarija* was a dynamic response to the social, political, religious, economic, and climatic needs, tied to the specific lifestyle and the development levels of Maltese society (Figure 2).

Figure 2

*Traditonal Maltese balcony. Winston Hassall, 2001.
Watercolour. (Personal collection)*



Research Purpose

The rationale of this study is based on the principles of Article 4(2) in the Cultural Heritage Act 2002 (Government of Malta, 2002), which specifically exemplifies the significance of cultural heritage as; ‘The cultural heritage is an asset of irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, social and economic value, and its protection and promotion are indispensable for a balanced and complete life’. This declaration invites an exploration of human experiences of the *Gallarija ta’* Malta, together with its historicity and cultural embodiment, considering the user and the environmental context. The *gallarija* functions best through its conceptual universality and national iconicity within the realm of cultural heritage for its ubiquity in the capital city of Valletta and streetscapes in the Maltese villages and towns (Figure 3).

Figure 3

View of Strada Reale from Porta Reale. Attributed to Giovanni Schranz. Before 1866. Watercolour on paper. In The Schranz Family of Artists, Heritage Malta.



Currently, research on the Gallarija ta' Malta is confined in what Tilly (2006) labelled the 'academic ghetto' (p.7) of the architectural discipline, however this work's purpose is to open this architectural feature in different directions. A research gap has been identified on the socio-cultural aspects of *gallarija* and knowledge is at times limited to misconceptions.

Interest with the Gallarija ta' Malta started from the visual seduction of its form, colour and craftsmanship. Similarly to art, architecture relates, mediates and projects meaning beyond the physical by transcending the onlooker into a spiritual being and helps one experience the world through the sensory and sensual qualities (Pallasmaa, 2008). Architecture can be experienced in various ways by different people, resulting in contrasting meanings and conflicting feelings about the place (Bender, 2006).

Research Question

This study reviews relevant literature from scholarly text and academic research to unearth the influences that led to the symbolic meaning of the Gallarija ta' Malta, in an endeavour to answer the research question; How did the *gallarija* become a marker of the Maltese identity? It resists clear theoretical conclusions which, like identity concepts (Tilley, 2006), and collective memory (Boyer, 1994), are constantly shifting and evolving. Therefore, the overarching epistemological inquiry focuses on the social and cultural value of the *gallarija*, by employing a subjective and heuristic conceptual framework to discover the relationship among what is known, believed, remembered and forgotten.

With a historical perspective this study takes a mnemonic journey to the past to understand the representation of the *gallarija* as a “prop” within the Maltese collective identity (Xuereb, 2014). This work provides a case study and questions the emotional, social and cultural significance of the *gallarija* from its intimate and close connection with the Maltese people (Lukito & Rizky, 2018). Historical artistic representations of the *gallarija* in social and cultural contexts illustrate this study.

Aims and Objectives

The research aims to provide a modest yet novel analysis on the dialectic dynamism of the Gallarija ta' Malta and the Maltese identity. Rather than attempting to objectively define the *gallarija* as a tangible heritage, this study aims to provide a medium to wider perspectives, by bridging its architectural and cultural values to examine the balcony's spatial characteristics in relation to society.

The objective is to explore how this iconic heritage reflects many design influences from layers of culture occupiers and immigrants, rather than pursue a quest to discover the origins of the balcony's typology. Another objective attempts to demonstrate whether the Maltese closed timber balcony is vernacular, has grown organically or form followed function. The goal to investigate the *gallarija* as an icon of social belonging and cultural identity was strengthened by literature that rendered confusing and contradictory information on its provenance and historical purposes.

Research Method

A qualitative methodology that connects humans with an architectural element will provide an opportunity for the emergence of the *gallarija*'s social and cultural identity. The study explores and interprets lived experience and perceptions, using the compatible method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which provides an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to explore the existential relations between people and the *gallarija* through interviews with residents and experts. Phenomenology has become a useful tool in the architecture discipline to understand how humans relate to urban buildings, traditional architecture and monuments (el-Moussaoui, 2020). The ultimate findings do not produce distinct descriptions of the phenomenon, rather aim to uncover the true nature, specific characteristics of the phenomenon as a presence in the lives and experiences of human beings (Seamon, 2002). The experts are professionals and academics coming from different disciplines of history, politics, architecture and archaeology.

Layout of the study

The following is an outline of the chapters. Chapter 1 conceptualises the Gallarija ta' Malta as a socio-cultural heritage, discusses rationale and purpose for the research study and clarifies the research questions, aims and objectives, within the framework of national identity and collective memory. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides background information to situate the phenomenon in context and discusses the relevant research studies and writings about the *gallarija*, as well as claims and speculations surrounding this phenomenon. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and rationale for choosing IPA discussed in depth, methods of data collection, choice of sample, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings supported by extracts from the participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretations. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research. The Appendices includes the consent forms, information letters, schedule of interview questions, and interview transcripts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The traditional Gallarija ta' Malta continues to elude those curious about its origin, social significance and relevance in Maltese culture. Repeated misinformation, devoid of academic research, perpetuates past perceptions created by previous generations of writers. The scope of the literature review is to uncover how the *gallarija* became a unique cultural symbol and a social representation of Maltese identity.

Overview

The chapter begins with background information on the physical characteristics of the Gallarija ta' Malta, exploring its evolution in connection with political and economic changes, artistic and architectural styles, religious and cultural ideologies that influenced its aesthetic and functional features. Cultural circumstances of the *gallarija* namely, decorative corbels, colours perceptions and notions of a gendered space are included. Foreigners' perceptions on the ethnographic value of the *gallarija* reveal views of the local culture.

Literature Search

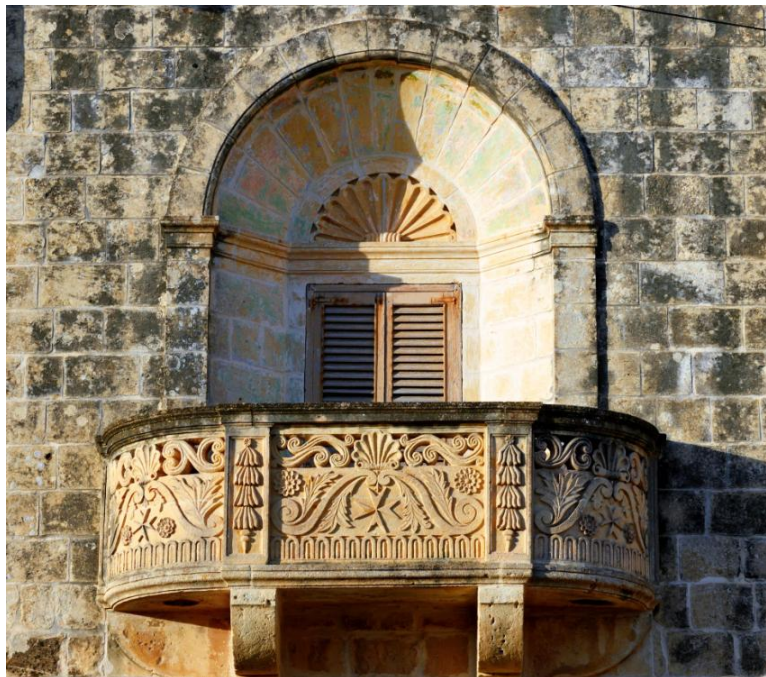
A cursory survey of the literature on the Maltese enclosed wooden balcony points mainly to the architecture discipline. Several authors attempted to specify the *gallarija*'s origin and aesthetic lineage, however, the socio-cultural aspects of the *gallarija* on the nuance of Maltese life lack academic research. A corpus of publications on Maltese architectural history follows stylistic observations, elaborates on architectural trends and focuses on vernacular dwellings, fortifications, military, palatial and ecclesiastical buildings. To date such publications are written

by architects and art historians, while contributions from social historians are rare. Nevertheless, the observations of the former contributed to this study as will be shown later.

Whereas the wooden closed balcony appeared in the 17th century to satisfy an architectural need (Bonello, 2003), Mahoney (1996) maintains that it is the early open, carved stone balconies that are often attributed as, “typical of vernacular Maltese architecture” (p. 93) (Figure 4). Victor Denaro’s (1967) volumes, ‘The Houses in Valletta’ provide historical accounts of buildings, record their uses, ownership, and interesting details on how the streets in Valletta changed names with occupiers, however information on architectural features on the houses’ facades is absent.

Figure 4

Example of an open carved stone balcony in Xewkija, Gozo.



References to the Gallarija ta' Malta in academic sources are scant, a handful of articles in Melitensia books and journals. Art Historian Giovanni Bonello (2003) who faithfully researched the *gallarija* states that 'hard facts are elusive, and knowledge is limited to several misconceptions' (p.7), especially as not much archival material unearth documentation on the first appearance of the *gallarija*. Popular literature is noticeably consistent with reprocessed information on aesthetic characteristics of the *gallarija*. Spiteri (2021) who researched the property redevelopment of the houses in Baroque Valletta in the 17th and 18th century, presents plans from the *Officio delle Case* at the National Archives of front elevations of edifices showing enclosed wooden balconies, and work contracts from the Notarial Archives and the illustrative survey of the *Cabrei de Villena* of the Order of St. John (Figures 5 & 6).

Figure 5

The facade of the palace of the Bali Gio. Luigi de Guerin Tencin showing closed glazed balconies. 1739. In Mallia-Milanes 2019, Valletta Malta's Hospitaller City.



Figure 6

18th century plan of Casa Gambalino and Del Brio. (from Spiteri 2021, The Houses of Baroque Valletta)



Dissertations on the Gallarija Ta' Malta, at the University of Malta hailing from the architectural discipline, sources of knowledge on the typology, materials composition and construction of the balcony, informs this study. Xuereb's work (2006) conducts quantitative research and comparative analysis to investigate the evolution of the design, statistical evaluation and environmental performance of the *gallarija* in the past, present and future. The latest dissertation investigating the typologies of balconies in a specific area in Valletta, undertaken by Nicola Von Brockdorff (2020), concluding with recommendations for researching the socio-cultural aspects of the *gallarija*.

Travellers' journals and diaries are relevant sources as the impressions and descriptions from travellers' accounts on the Maltese landscape may have shaped and even created narratives and ideologies that influenced how the "local intelligentsia" viewed their own heritage (Sant-Cassia, 1993, p. 352). Travelogues can influence the perception of a place; "the real and

imaginary coexist side by side; to foreclose on the multiplicity of places and peoples, to erect stereotypes and universal histories, to assimilate the unknown to familiar frames of reference” (Boyer, 1994, p. 205).

Historical evidence in iconographic images documents the presence of the *gallarija* across a panorama of time. Sant Cassia (1993, p. 354) states that a “painting fixes things” in an image, engaging the public to identify and relate with it. Harker (2000) affirms that old photographs “... aid recollections of factual accuracy as distinct from fantasy” (p. vii).

Background

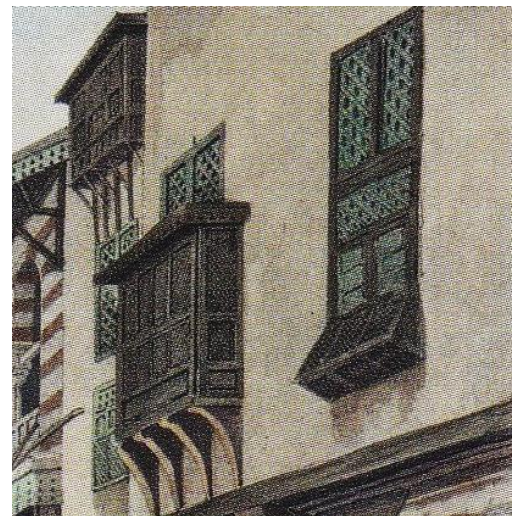
The origin of the *gallarija* remains ambiguous and yet appealing, since like other artifacts claimed as ‘Maltese’ creates more fake myths than hard facts. The concept of enclosed balconies was known to the Romans, around 40-30 BC as evidenced in preserved frescoes in Pompeii, subsequently spread throughout the Roman Empire (Mallia, 2013). Whereas its nomenclature denotes uniqueness and exclusivity to Malta, the term *gallarija* has confounded many historians with plausible suggestions on the design concept (Magro Conti, 2005). Although legends abound, Bonello (2003) does not mince facts when dating the appearance of the *gallarija*, tracing documented mentions of a closed wooden balcony to Sieur de Bachelier’s 1679 book. Bonello (2001) attests that, “Contrary to popular belief that closed wooden balconies in Malta are a relic of Arab domination, their appearance in Malta is very late. Not a single instance of the now ubiquitous glazed wooden box is recorded before the turn of the 17th -18th century” (p. 27).

Deeply seated assumptions perpetuate myths of Oriental origin to the Gallarija ta’ Malta, attributing it to the Arab *mashrabiya* by urban heritage enthusiasts. The *mashrabiya* is a type of oriel window enclosed in a carved wooden lattice box or screen located on the facade of a

building, commanding a view of the surrounding neighbourhood (Ashour, 2018). This Islamic architectural heritage responded effectively and dynamically to the religious, cultural, social and psychological requirements of the time and place in which they appear (Ashour, 2018). In the Muslim world the *mashrabiya* proved versatile and useful as climate control and in the social sphere to enforce the rigid gender segregation of the Arab culture, serving to conceal the females of the house from the public eye (Azzopardi, 2012) (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Street in Cairo, Egypt. Antonio Schranz, 1847. Lithograph. In The Schranz Family of Artists, Heritage Malta. Detail from top right corner showing latticed mashrabija



In Malta the concept of the Arab *mashrabiya* evolved into the corrupted word *muxrabija*, a small projecting aperture on the facade covered with perforated screen, made of stones or wood, found in rural areas used mainly to cool water or food (Jaccarini, 2003). The surviving *muxrabiji* in Malta are testament of the regional, social and historical realities of the Islands, since an alternative function was to spy and keep surveillance on the immediate vicinity, a

physical manifestation of constant perception of insecurity (Azzopardi, 2012). A small number of *muxrabiji* survived from the Arab period (9th-11th century) (Figures 8 & 9). To attest the popular speculation that the *gallarija* is a transplanted branch of the *muxrabija*, the physical characteristics of the *gallarija* are outlined before exploring other historical facts.

Figures 8 & 9

Surviving examples of timber and stone muxrabija in Malta.



Physical Characteristics

The typical *gallarija* consists of a rectangular platform projecting from the facade of a building surrounded by a roofed, box-like closed structure combining wood, stone and glass. The main components of the *gallarija* comprises heavy stone carved corbels [*saljaturi*], the timber framework has elements that divide the bottom structure in sections, [*pannew*], and the top part of glazed window panels [*purtelli*], with fixed glass panes [*kwardelli*] above them (Xuereb, 2006). Traditionally the floor of the balcony was made of stone slabs, [*xriek*], supported by

corbels. The earlier timber part was made of vertical pillars or columns as opposed to the later horizontal panelling with the carved roundels [*ružoni*]. The *gallarija* includes metal fittings like hinges [*ċappetti*], peg stays [*firrolli / ganċetti*] to enable the windows to be opened (Xuereb, 2006). The timber used, red deal wood, [*tal-Aħmar*], used to be protected and safeguarded against weather conditions with oil-based paint. The roof of the *gallarija* was composed of a mixture of lime and crushed pottery, [*deffun*], however due to heavy maintenance this was replaced by corrugated metal or plastic sheets (Xuereb, 2006) (Figures 10 & 11).

Figure 10

Labelled Diagram of gallarija. Adapted from Xuereb 2006, The Maltese Timber Balcony past, present and future.

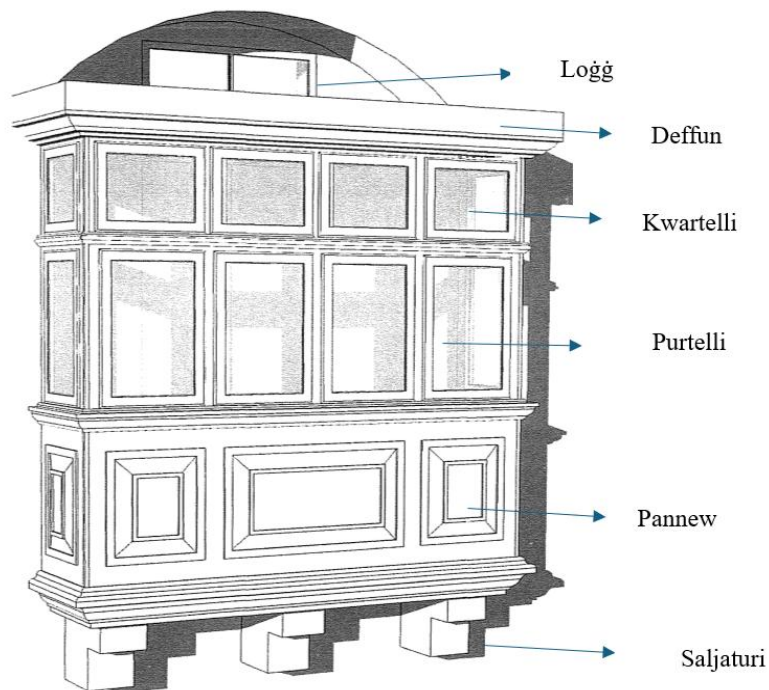


Figure 11

An image of a gallarija with persjani instead of glazed windows.



Several craftsmen contributed and collaborated for the construction of the *gallarija* namely, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths and painters (Mallia, 2013). Many *gallariji* had shading devices in the form of external removable wooden louvers, [*persjani*] with fixed horizontal slats attached instead of the glazed windows, to allow ventilation and block the sun in summer, thereby allowing seasonal control. Internal shading blinds were made of cane or rush called [*tendini*] (Xuereb, 2006) (Figure 12). Many early *gallariji* in Valletta were converted from open balconies as social development that put pressure on habitable space necessitating the shortening of the corbels (Xuereb, 2006) (Figure 13). The *gallarija* became an extension of the room that lies within, used as a domesticated space. The three-dimensional qualities of the *gallarija*, enriched by the visual aspects and different variations of polygonal, circular and semicircular forms, paints and decorative panels, dominated the Maltese urban landscape (Figure 14). In Lacroix's description of Valletta, in 1848, the *gallarija* is among the aesthetics of the cityscape;

“doors, streets, public fountains, cobbles, duelling streets”, [*Portes, rues, balcons, fontaine, publique, pavage, la rue aux duels*] (p. 27).

Figure 12

A gallarija with inside tendini.



Figure 13

An example of a gallarija with shortened saljaturi.

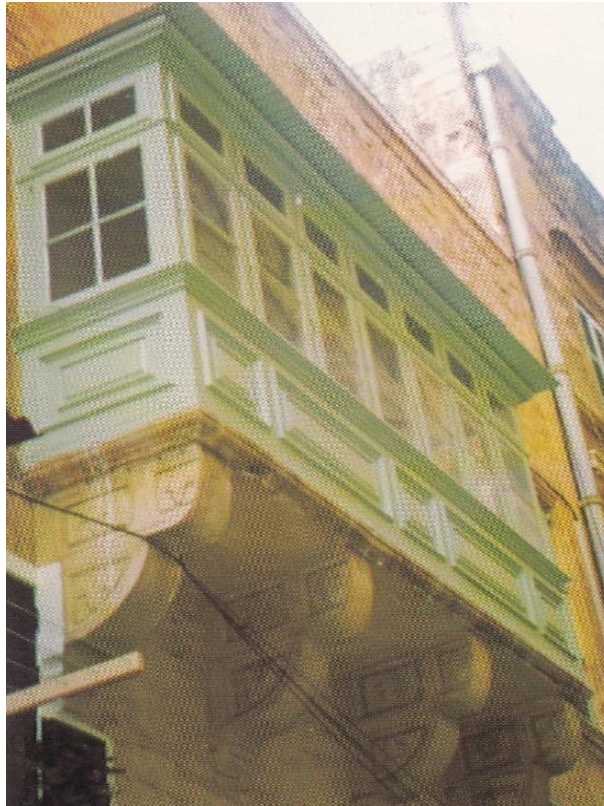


Figure 14

An example of irregular shaped gallarija.



The Etymology of *Gallarija*

Britannica defines ‘Gallery’ in architecture as any covered passage that is open at one side, such as a portico or a colonnade. In late medieval and Renaissance Italian architecture, it is a narrow balcony or platform running the length of a wall, functioning as a communicating passage, elevated and supported on columns or corbels. The etymology of the word *gallarija* explains the mystery why the Maltese typology acquired the term as opposed *balcone*; the Italian word for a balcony, tied to the debut of the closed wooden balcony of the Grand Master’s Palace in Valletta (Bonello, 2003). The earliest visual record of an enclosed wooden balcony in Malta dates to the late 17th century in engravings and in paintings depicting the transformation of the Grand Master’s Palace during the years of the Order of St John in Malta (Vella, 2008) (Figure 15). Bonello (2008) affirms that the enclosed balcony on the facade of the Grand Master’s Palace rightly merits the name of *gallarija* as it is a long passage wrapped around the Palace’s two front corners, serving as long glazed corridors to join the rooms inside. The term *gallarija* appeared when Italian was the ‘*lingua franca*’ of the Order and the urban population (Brincat, 2021) (Figure 16).

Figure 15

17th century painting showing The Palace of the Grand Masters on the right without the closed timber balconies. In Ganado, 2001. The Palace of the Grand Master in Valletta.



Figure 16

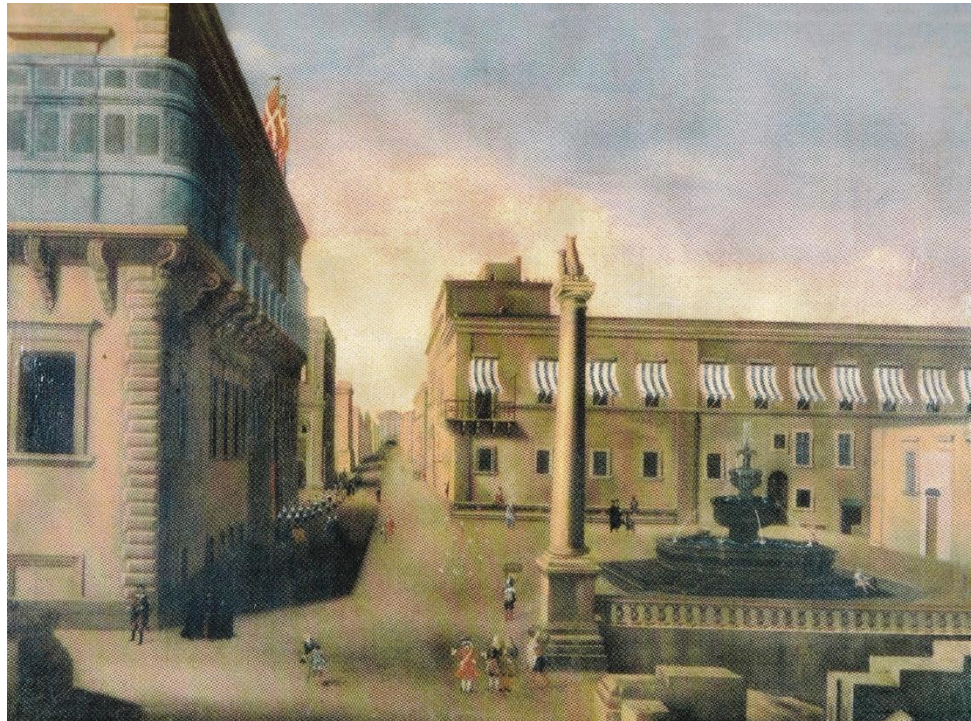
Another 17th century painting showing a development on the Palace of the Grand Masters with the addition of the corner open balconies. Ganado, 2001. (The Palace of the Grand Master in Valletta).



The Grand Master's grand and impressive corner balcony earned its name as *gallarija*, setting the pace for a fashionable prototype of successive closed balconies, albeit on a much smaller scale. In 1792, Meerman considered the Palace unworthy of praise, however noticed, "...on the outside there are long wooden galleries on the two sides of the building, just as all the houses have roofed balconies of the same material hanging outside them" (Strickland, 2005, p. 129). Angas (1841) describes the characteristic features of the Maltese houses as having; "one or two balconies jutting out into the street several feet from the wall. These are sometimes furnished with glass windows and sometimes screened with blinds made of India matting" (p. 16) (Figure 17).

Figure 17

Piazza San Giorgio, 18th century, oil on canvas. In Vella, T. Charles Fredrick de Brocktorff.



Another plausible inspiration to the *gallarija*'s design, is the long upper stern section of the Order's ships architecture, known in Sicilian as, '*galleria*' (Magro Conti, 2005; Mallia, 2013) (Figure 18). Magro Conti (2005) insists that Maltese stone carvers imitated maritime-influenced features styled as giants, '*puleni*', mermaids and mermen from ship galleries in their design of the *gallarija* corbels (Figure 19). The coat of arms on the corbels at the Palace represents a sense of identity in the development and sequence of the covered wooden balconies by different Grand Masters (Ganado, 2001, p. 27)

Figure 18

The stern gallery of a galleon. John Wilson Carmicheal, The Grand Harbour. Oil on canvas. In De Piro 2002, The International Dictionary of Artists.



Figure 19

An example of maritime influenced carved corbels, a pulena.



Supernatural Powers

The carved stone corbels exhibiting heraldic emblems, coats of arms, mythical creatures, rampant lions, Moors and Tritons, are emblems of the Baroque expression in Malta, enriching the facades of edifices, and portraying power and prestige of the houses' masters (Magro Conti, 2005). In 1875, Gaultier called the *gallariji*; “these glazed cages.... the projectings (*sic*) from the houses are supported by consoles and brackets carved and convoluted, decorated by battlements, by entwining foliage carved in stone and by innumerable ornamental chimeras achieved in fantasies the most various” (p. 21) (Figure 20).

Figure 20

An example of elaborate stone carved corbels supporting a gallarija.



Similar decorative corbels appeared in Sicily in 1693 giving rise to what Gullo and Battaglia (2015) call ‘Sicilian Baroque’ (p. 54). These ornamental artifacts shaped like face masks, become ‘*apotropaic*’ with anthropological and magical significance (Cassar, 1995; Gullo and Battaglia, 2015). Gullo and Battaglia (2015) explain that ancient cultures believed destructive evil entered residences through portals and windows, hence face masks carved in stone corbels vigilantly guard the house from the evil eye. Sculptured masks corbels, ‘*antefixa*’, depicting abnormal anatomical configuration of a male human visage in grotesque guises have sinister overtones, sarcastic and hostile features, weird expressions or threatening grins, and large protruding tongues (Cassar, 1995) (Figures 21 & 22). The intent was to repulse and counteract the harmful influences cast by evil-intentioned people. Of note, these overt non-Christian, pagan manifestations appeared in a cultural setting riddled with superstitions. Fear of supernatural powers was equally ingrained among common folks, slaves, knights and clergy, considering

Malta was ruled by three theocratic entities, The Order, The Bishop and The Inquisition, who professed the Roman Catholic Faith and punished those who believed in the Evil Eye (Cassar, 1995).

Figure 21

An example of sculptured masks corbels, antefixa.



Figure 22

An example of apotropaic masks carved in corbels.



If the decorative corbels mirrored the exuberance and passion of the Baroque artistic and architectural attitudes, the *gallarija* in its inceptive stage did not sit well in the Baroque scenery. In 1819, Colt Hoare wrote, “the architecture and symmetry of the several houses are destroyed by heavy wooden balconies projecting like excrescences” (p. 495). Praising the carved stone open balconies, Braun (1944) assigned the same epithet of ugliness to the *gallarija*; “the now ubiquitous wooden excrescences have not been able to conceal the beauty of the (*carved stone*) balconies ...” (p. 24). Mahoney (1996), while conceding that *gallariji* provide splashes of colour and cast deep shadows on the monotonous uniformity of the facade built of the Maltese limestone, condemns them as; “unrelated appendages” (p. 233).

Provenance

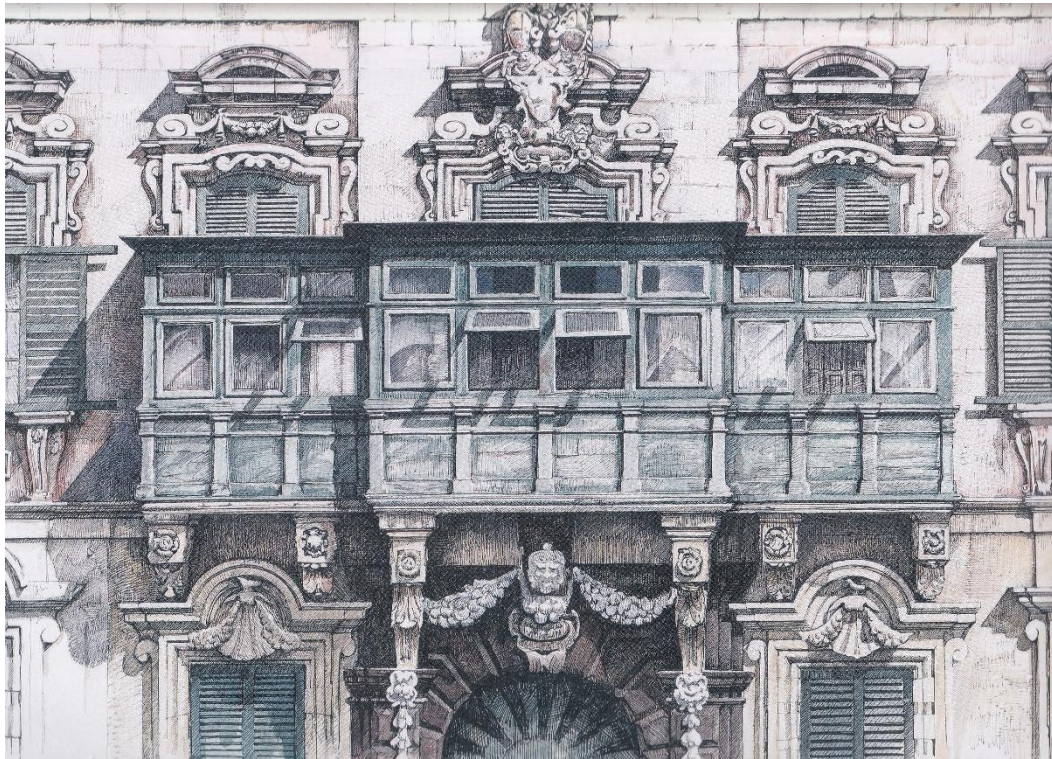
The *gallarija* made its appearance at a time when Malta was experiencing a social, cultural and political transformation influenced by the ‘*Baroque Idiom*’, which De Lucca (2018) expresses as; “an integral component of an aristocratic culture incorporating art and architecture, religious and philosophical attitudes, political, military and social structures, geographical and scientific discoveries, literary achievements and ceremonial and theatrical displays” (p. 8).

The Baroque era constitutes one of the most significant historical periods that characterised the history of Malta, representing artistic and cultural values of the prevailing style in Central and Southern Catholic Europe, maintaining the identity and integrity of the region through aesthetics and fine things (De Lucca, 2018). Consequently, Malta, particularly Valletta, went through a process of change, from a ‘European fortress to European city’, becoming “an epitome of Europe” (Mallia Milanese, 2019, Chapter 2).

The original plan for Valletta after the Siege of Malta in 1565 served two concepts; a fortress of military strength and fortitude, and convent for the ‘*Religione*’, the former with formidable fortifications; the latter with sombre austerity and simplicity of a cloister-citadel, manifested by the bleak and unadorned architecture on the buildings’ facades (Mallia-Milanes, 2019). When the threat of an Ottoman attack subsided, the Order’s lifestyle became lavish, extravagant, affluent and privileged, inclined towards more elaborate, resplendent and spectacular architecture with rhetorical imagery and embellishments (Freller, 2009). The artistic *gallarija* on the facades of palaces and noble residences showcased the evocative idea of beauty [*l’idea del bello*] (De Lucca, 2018, p.343) (Figure 23).

Figure 23

The huge gallarija on the elaborate Baroque style facade of Hotel De Verdeline, Valletta. Andrew Micallef, 1998. Pen and Wash. Bank of Valletta Collection.

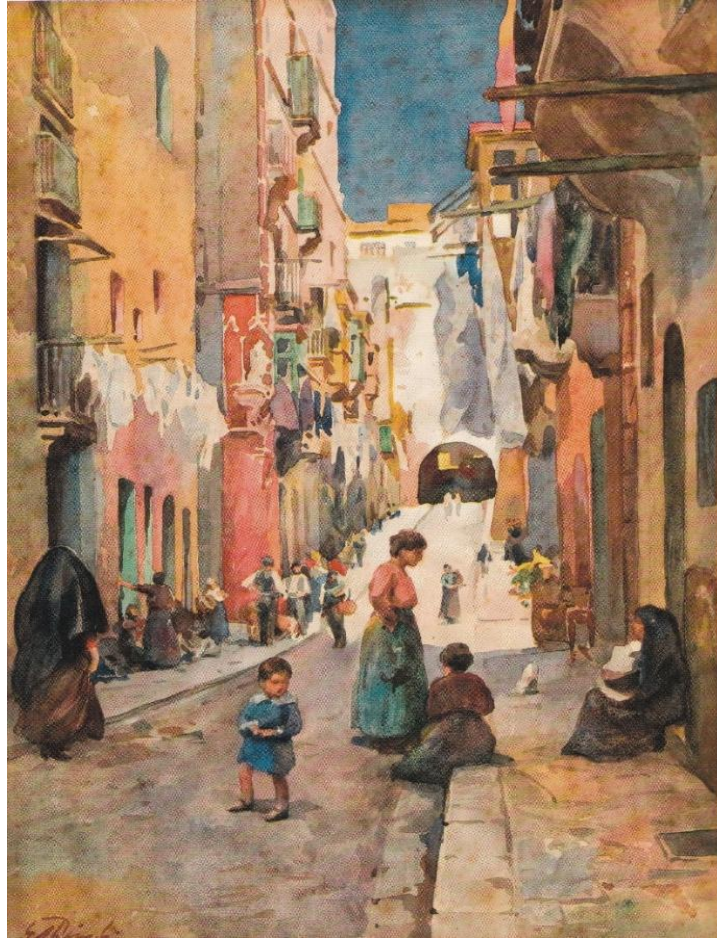


The Baroque period communicated power, wealth and authority by virtue of architectural decorations, where size mattered; the bigger the *gallarija* the greater social status, exhibiting lavish adornments that displayed owners' prestige, defining class distinction. For the wealthy, ambitious and the more socially mobile, the new Baroque architecture featured highly with the latest fashion of the time. Least, the high bourgeoisie were seen as falling out of step with the times they incorporated *gallariji* into facades of their residences (Bonello, 2017). Lacroix (1848) explained how, "the houses of the bourgeoisie and the nobility of Malta were, for the most part, adorned with closed balconies" [*Les demeurs des bourgeois et des nobles de Matte sont, pour la pfupart, ornees de balcons couverts*] (p. 28). However, in less pretentious urban homes of the poor and humbler working class the *gallarija* was not a social luxury but a necessity, emphasizing function over flaunt (Figure 24).

Figure 24

Strada San Patrizio, Valletta. Edward Caruana Dingli. Watercolour. From Edward Caruana Dingli (1876-1950), Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

Note. Gallariji in the background in a humbler street in Valletta.



The early 18th century Valletta's urban fabric experienced a transformation; houses were reconstructed to accommodate social and economic demands brought about by the increasing population and a prosperous commercial activity. (Camilleri & Spiteri, 2021). Large, older houses necessitated the modifications of internal living spaces and facades, with the insertion of balconies, windows and doors, to provide access and source of light to tenements, [*kerrejji*]. More balconies in the restricted space on the existing facade created disputes regarding the

security and privacy as close proximity permitted easy access from one property to another (Spiteri, 2021).

The demographic situation of Valletta divided residential quarters that classified the city into ‘high’, and ‘low’ areas, a distinction detailed by Mitchell (1998) in; “both topographical terms and in terms of reputation” (p 84). Both areas incorporated *gallariji* that reflected the degree of affluence of their respective residents. Mitchell (1998) describes a particular ‘low’ area dating to the late 17th century, *L-Arcipierku*, as having the *gallariji* overhanging very narrow streets and alleyways, so close to each other that one could reach over from one balcony to another. So robust was its popularity that the *gallarija* encroached on every facade in Valletta, in such a spread to warrant the unhealthy accolade of “a cancerous growth” from Mahoney (1996, p. 233) (Figure 25).

Bonello (2006) states that the Maltese *gallarija* revolution coincided with and was a direct consequence of a new process of glass manufacturing in France that produced larger glass plates. Early artistic depictions show the *gallarija* with windows made of small glass panes (Figure 26).

Figure 25

Print by Richard England 1970 in Joseph Paul Cassar, Pioneers of modern Art in Malta, Vol. 2.

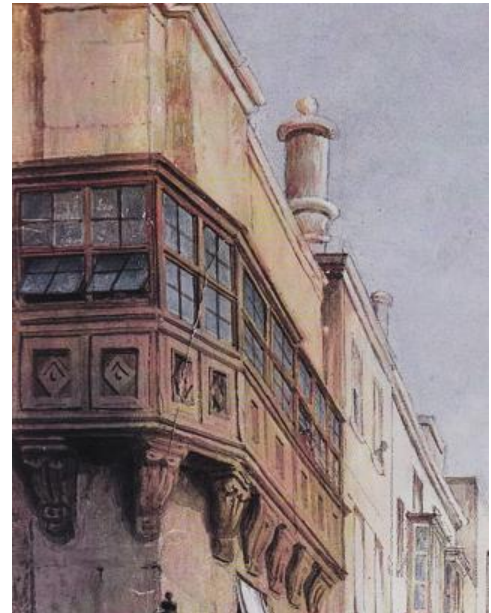
Note. Gallarji covering the facade of Victorian Apartments in Valletta.



Figure 26

Strada San Giovanni, early 19th century by G.R. Sarjent. Watercolour.

Note. Detail of left-hand corner showing a gallarija with small glass panes.



Window on Life's Parade

The self-imposing Gallarija Ta' Malta, like the ornate opera-house boxes, holds a privileged position overlooking the theatre of public life, enacted and choreographed at street level below, witnessing numerous social dramas, triumphs, comedies and tragedies. The *gallarija* became fashionable and gained popularity especially in grand edifices in the main streets and squares of Valletta. Fuelled by the Baroque perception, the streets of Valletta exemplified a theatre stage for public performances, with the house facades acting both as backdrops and grandstands (Spiteri, 2021). The occupants of the *gallarija* become the spectators

and audiences interacting with the street actors by applauding, celebrating and jeering in the religious calendar, political events and cultural festivals. Equally, the *gallarija* has been staged and decked like background scenography for the Maltese streetscapes to show one's political loyalties, during religious rituals and parochial feasts, in military pageantry, and in pagan events like football and carnival (Figures 27, 28, 29, 30 & 31).

Figure 27

Feast of San Pawl, St Paul Street, Valletta, 10th February 1858. Giovanni Schranz. Watercolour. The Gennadius Collection

Note. The image records the pageantry and devotion of a religious event. Detail shows the decorated gallariji with flags and banners.



Figure 28

Strada San Paolo, Valletta, religious procession, by Michele Bellanti. 1844. Hand-coloured Lithograph



Figure 29

The Irxoxt on Easter Sunday, on Lower Strada Rjali. Girolomo Gianni, 1873. Oil on board.



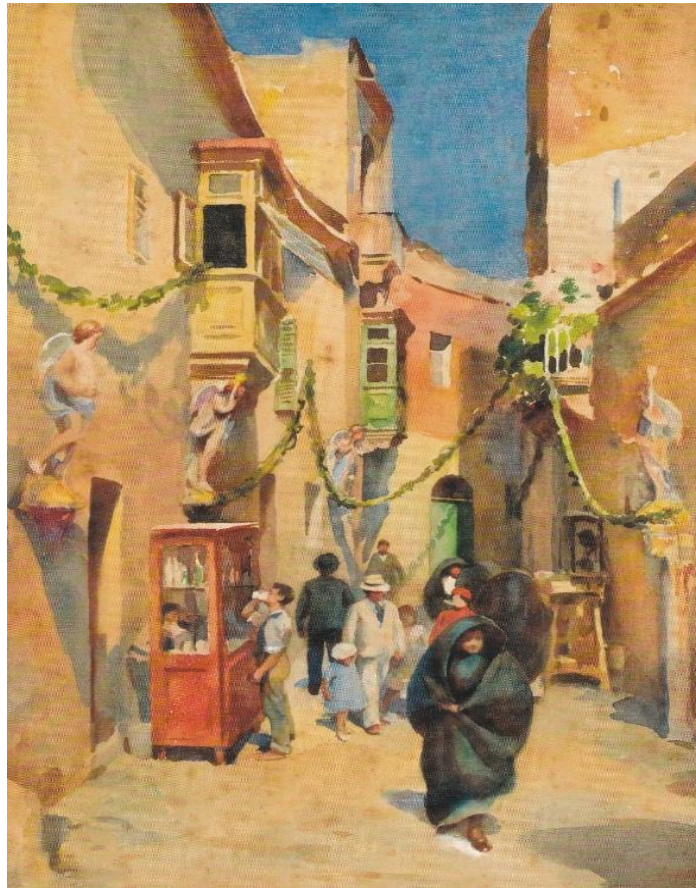
Figure 30

Good Friday Procession, Merchant Street, Valletta. Girolomo Gianni, 1873. Oil on board. 1994



Figure 31

Morning of the Festa. Edward Caruana Dingli. Watercolour.



The *gallarija* became a window on urban life, overlooking everyday social rhythms and cultural events unfolding, like the “*calendimaggio*” and “*compleannos del magistero*” which were aimed to glorify the Grand Masters and demonstrate magnanimity towards all their subjects, whilst increasing their popularity (Zammit, 2006, p. 72). Popular festivals were entertainment for the common people [*basso popolo*], while “...military parades, and religious rituals were conceived as social control as they occupied subjects, instilled obedience, and diffused prospective social unrest” (Spiteri, 2021, p. 31). The Grand Master invited the Bishop and the Inquisitor to enjoy the spectacle from the Palace balcony, while the privileged classes looked down from equally crowded balconies surrounding the square, where public games such

as the ‘giostra’ and ‘coccagna’ were held (Zammit, 2006, p. 70). By the early 19th century “parading became a characteristic Maltese pastime” (Vella, 2008, p. 133); being seen and appearing in public was of great social significance. In 1831, Biglow witnessing the “confused spectacle” of carnival wrote, “The balconies were filled with spectators of both sexes, or rather with actors, for they too scattered showers of sugarplums on the crowd below, and the salute would be often returned with full interest” (p. 233) (Figures 32, 33, 34 & 35).

Figure 32

*The Giostra in Piazza San Giorgio at the time of Grand master Zondadari (1720-1722)
In Ganado, 2001. The Palace of the Grand master in Valletta.*



Figure 33

Giostra in St George's Square, C.F. de Brocktorff, watercolour.

**Figure 34**

Military parade in St George's Square. C.F. Brocktorff watercolour.



Figure 35

Carnival celebration at St George's Square, Valletta. Edward Caruana Dingli. Oil on canvas.



The journey to a destination became more important than the actual destination itself, and the *gallarija* provided the ideal spot to gaze at passersby, while the occupants were admired for their social status and taste in latest trends. In 1841, Angas noticed that; “... (*Piazza St Georgio*) is the usual evening promenade of the fashionables of Malta and every evening the military band performs here for their gratification. On the opposite side is situated the Casino or Exchange where the merchants generally meet either for business or conversation” (p.23). Roland de la Platiere (1780) finds the closed balcony very useful and pleasant; “...from where one can watch passers-by and take in some fresh air” (p.19). Mrs Darby Griffiths (1845) enthralls her readers with praise for the *gallarija* in her lodgings (Figure 36).

...an enclosed wooden verandah furnished with windows, ... the views commanded the whole length of the Strada Reale, up and down, ...we found ample amusement sitting in the verandah, watching the passing groups composed of people from almost every nation in the world, and observing the Maltese in their dress and manners. ... where the band plays three times a week, we betook ourselves to our verandah, where our ears were charmed and our eyes amused while we were resting and cooling ourselves by eating ice. (p. 103).

Figure 36

The Palace, Valletta Michele Bellanti. 1844, Lithograph.

Note. Image showing people promenading in St Georges Square.



Visual Representation

Bonello (2018) states; “Non-Maltese eyes and brushes gave shape to a Malta stereotype” (para. 1), while Sant Cassia (1993) believes that a nation's identity can be forged across time in the way foreigners discover and create its society. Paintings and images are instrumental in creating discourses of place, becoming a rich cultural reservoir of popular perceptions of people and places (Pritchard & Morgan, 2003). In the 18th century visiting artists concentrated on archaeological ruins, folklore and mythology, excluding the urban streetscapes of Valletta in their depictions (Freller, 2013). For Jean Houel, inferring from his writings and artistic output, Malta’s ancient past and customs of the ordinary folk were more appealing than the *gloire* of the Order (Freller, 2013, p. 41).

Bailey (2018) reports that 19th century artwork was designed to catch the eye of the curious Victorian visitors to Malta and their fascination with the historical and institutional story of the Knights of St John. For Sant Cassia (1993), images were constructed “by a determined artist for a determined public” (p. 357) implying that foreign artists were commissioned to produce Maltese secular artworks that contributed to the manufacture of traditions, cementing the island’s identity that suited and appealed to the public imagination. When in the 19th century interest in antiquities declined and the colonialists preferred the North European perceptions, depictions of local landscapes, streetscapes, costumes and local customs created and shaped the essence of Malteseness (Sant Cassia, 1993). Lear in 1848 expressed, “The street scenery, so white, so bright, so clean, so balconied, is really beautiful- but there the charm ends”, focusing more on topographic scenes around Malta (Varriano, 2014, p. 4).

Throughout the 19th century a sequence of foreign artists who settled in Malta, called ‘*ritrattisti*’, indulged in ‘tourism-inspired art’, executing Malta’s views of landscapes, seascapes, narrating memorable and unusual happenings and events (Pavia, 2018, p.2). Such artists were members of the Schranz family (Abdilla Cunningham, Scicluna & Vella, 2018), Brocktorff family (Scicluna, 2007; Vella, 2008), D’Esposito family, Bellanti family (Zammit, 2010), and Girolomo Gianni (Bonello, 1994). Maltese artists like Edward Caruana Dingli (Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2010) and Gianni Vella (Attard, 2013) painted scenes of local customs and culture. Paintings illustrate the charms of the Islands, a quasi-photographic chronicle of contemporary local culture while narrating daily life scenes evoking poetic, realistic and ideal visions of the past with a sense of nostalgia (Micallef, 1994). Although not necessarily the protagonist, the ubiquitous Maltese *gallarija* became an established background feature of urban landscape paintings, at a period when cultural identity took a new dimension in the quest for nationhood (Sant Cassia, 1993) (Figure 37).

Figure 37

Collecting water. Edward Caruana Dingli, 1914. Watercolour.

Note. Painting of Nostalgic scenes.



Perceptions and Interpretations

From St Paul's sojourn on the island to the 19th century, Malta attracted thousands of visitors; historians, adventurers, authors, artists and missionaries, and as a British colony, Malta became a frequent travel destination for British citizens, military men and diplomats for whom the bustling port city of Valletta was a stepping stone to the East. Their verses, visions and illustrations, constitute a huge and varied amount of literary material, artistic depictions of the historical and cultural value of the Maltese Islands (Freller, 2008). Malta was the focus for those undertaking the '*Chevalier Tour*' and later the '*Grand Tour*'; cultural expeditions designed to

take in Europe's landmarks and cities, as the island echoed the development of European culture particularly during the reign of the Order of St John (Freller, 2009 p. 9). In Feller's tome, 'Malta and the Grand Tour', the enclosed wooden balcony is mentioned sparingly, alluded briefly by French traveller Sieur de Bachelier's observation of the Grand Master's "glass-covered balcony" (2009, p. 352).

Foreigners interpreted the appearance and function of the *gallarija* in their travel journals and narrated their perceptions on its cultural journey. The depictions of the *gallarija* in the streets of Valletta by foreign and local artists contributed to its perception as an object of outstanding visual interest that combines elegance and practicality, privacy and exposure, as well as entertainment and social life. Boyer (1994) explains how travellers grasp the immediacy of a city through its imagery, "thrilled by the imposing vision and power of the sovereign spectacle, ... mesmerized by the visual facticity of everyday sights" (p. 204).

The visitors' stay in Malta mostly followed the same itinerary of sightseeing; the Grand Master's Palace, St John Cathedral, Mdina, San Anton Palace and gardens, and the sites of the Pauline cult; the Grotto and catacombs. Despite its visibility, as a protrusion on the façade of the building in the narrow street of Valletta, sometimes the *gallarija* blended in the streetscape and was deemed unworthy of comments. Other sights took precedence; the destitution at the *Nix Mangiare* steps at the Marina, the outdoor market, the multitude of clergy, Maltese mode of transport; [*caleches*], and the women's attire; [*faldetta*]. As opposed to frequent remarks on the cubic style of the pale-yellow stone houses and flat roofs, the city's cleanliness (or otherwise), and the cacophony of sound in the city, several descriptions of Valletta architecture completely omitted the *gallarija*. Hypothetically one could infer that the cursed stepped streets and sensory stimulation of Valletta, experienced by Lord Byron as, "a city of bells, smells and yells" (Ryan,

1910, p.173), diverted the visitors from looking upwards to notice the *gallarija* (Figures 38, 39, 40 & 41).

Figure 38

Valletta Street scene. Girolomo Gianni. Oil on board.

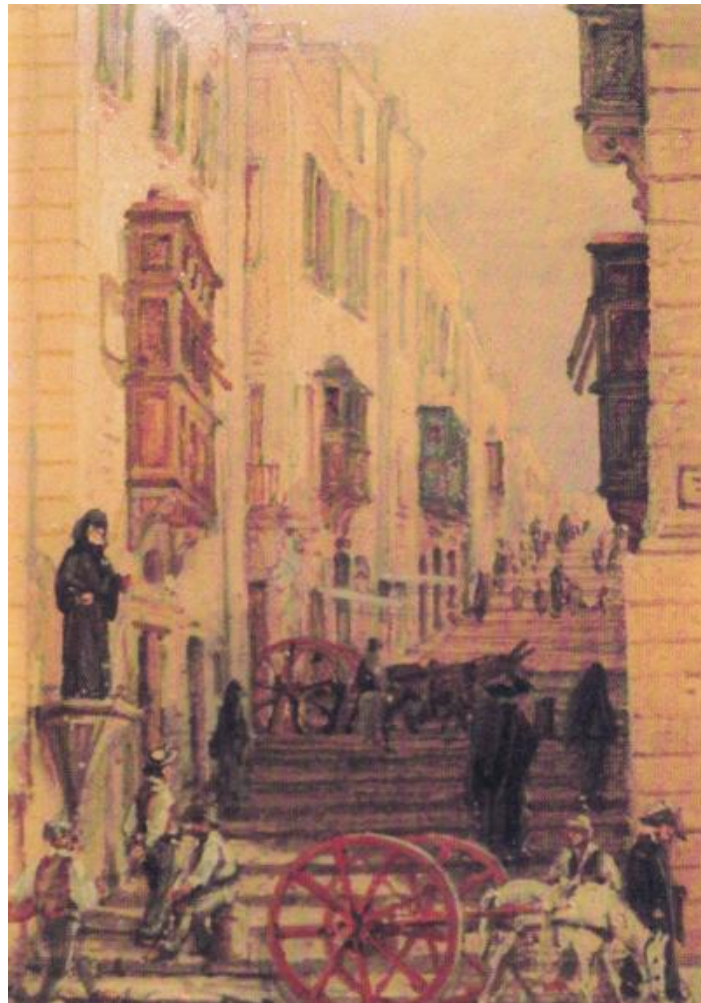


Figure 39

Street Scene, Girolamo Gianni. Gouche. In De Piro 2002, The International Dictionary of Artists.

Note. A depiction of the stepped streets of Valletta in 19th century narrating everyday events of common people.



Figure 40

*Valletta Porte Reale Fountain. Michele Bellanti, 1848.
Hand-colourful lithograph.*

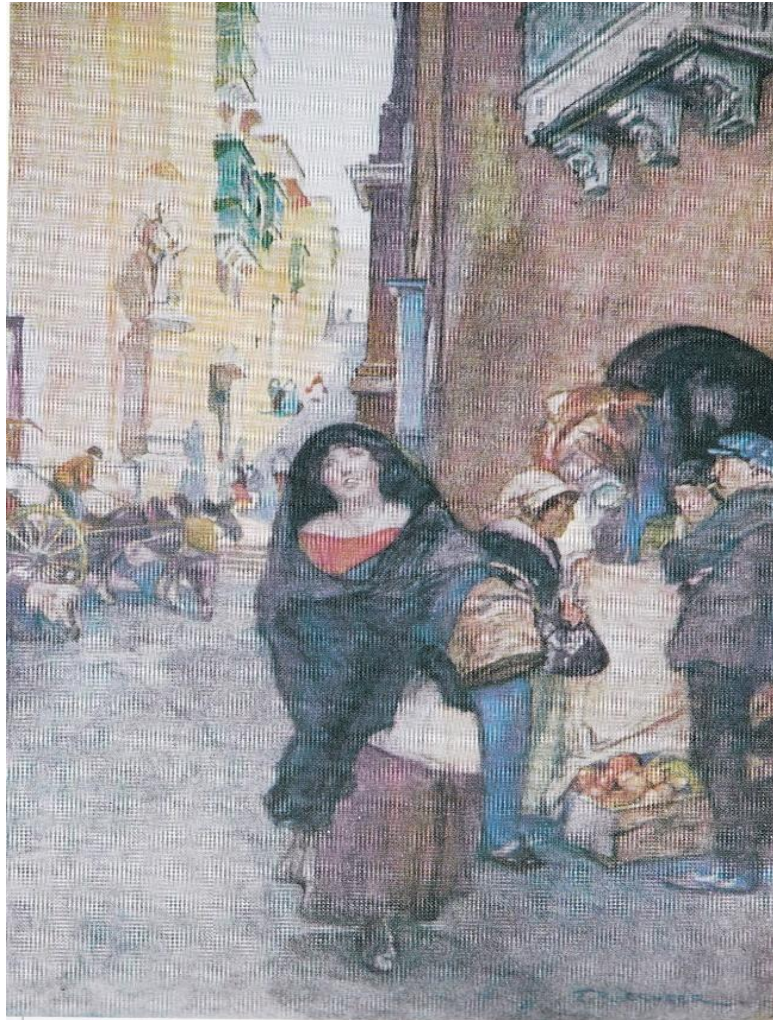
Note. The Maltese caleche.



Figure 41

Sunshine and Shadows, A Stirring Past and a Vivid Present. 19th century P.R. Gruger. Watercolour. In De Piro 2002, The International Dictionary of Artists.

Note. The Faldetta a memory of the past with the gallarija in the background still present today



Travellers assimilated the *gallarija* to urban architectural characteristics in similar geocultural contexts in the Mediterranean Littoral, taking the liberty to profess a Hispano-Moresque origin. Gautier in 1875 described, “...the projecting balcony hung upon each front like the ‘*moucharabys*’ of the East or the ‘*miradores*’ of Spain” (p.21). In Ryan (1910), Ingress Bell attributes Maltese architecture to Renaissance art influence; “extend(ing) even to the balconies,

which are held to be the Spanish ‘*miradores*’, themselves but modifications of the Oriental ‘*moncharbis*’” (p.143). These misconceptions have since been proven to be false but have caught the public imagination to the point that they are still quoted today.

Mixed and controversial impressions from visitors abound, though none described the *gallarija*’s design with any notion of awe or fascination. Micallef (2013) states that 17th and 18th century travellers were animated with the concept of beauty or lack of it when subjected to emotions that left them feeling different, explaining that, “beauty is associated with the perceptual experience of pleasure and emotional well-being and its appreciation takes place in the aesthetic attitude adopted towards the discovery of the ‘Other’, of his customs, and of his heritage”(p.158). In 1820, Monsoon records; “The houses are of white stone seldom more than three stories and all ornamented with enclosed balconies lighted by windows” (p.124). Visitors did little to hide their distaste and lack of objectivity in aesthetics, often portraying the *gallarija* in a disparaging manner or simply regarding it as ornamental. Millard (1860) comments, “... these balconies detract from the beauty of the buildings” (p.19). Woods (1828) wrote, “They might perhaps be admissible occasionally as a source of variety but are very injurious in a building which makes any pretence to magnificence” (p. 310). Badger (1848) describes the *gallarija* as; “awkward protuberances” that “... serve to destroy the beauty of the external appearances of the buildings” (p.127). Although part of Badger’s description is somewhat unflattering to its appearance, he appreciates the usefulness of the *gallarija* as a surveillance post and for the protection it affords from the climatic elements.

Identity Symbol

The early 20th century political agenda of the British Empire determined what social and ethnographic representations possessed identity values. In 1924, the illustrations for the promotion of the Maltese pavilion in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley were the fortifications, the national costume [*l-ghonnella*], and the statue of Neptune juxtaposed above a Grand Harbour view (Bonello, 2000). According to Debono (2012) these represented, “a synthesis of culture-politics in British colonial Malta at the time” (p. 69). At that time the Gallarija ta’ Malta was not regarded as possessing identity values. In contrast with non-European colonies, the exhibits represented ‘the age of chivalry.’ of the Knights of St John and asserted the European legacy and historic relevance of the Maltese islands, thus projecting the civilising quests of the British Empire (Debono, 2012).

Despite being branded as the ideal candidate for cultural heritage tourism, the *gallarija* endured periods of anonymity in the context of Maltese identity representation. Its uneven journey in terms of getting endorsed and promoted as an icon of Maltese identity contrasts with current concerted focus. Political, social and economic changes, modern stylistic architecture, and technological advances of the 20th century are credited to the *gallarija*’s demise, and its glorious days of the Baroque era forgotten.

The Gallarija Ta' Malta regained visibility when the extensive urban heritage of the fortified city of Valletta was granted a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). In 1996, the *gallarija*’s potential as a historical marketing asset was appreciated by governments to rehabilitate traditional streetscapes, providing financial schemes

for the conservation and restoration of timber balconies in Vittoriosa as part of the Cottonera Urban Conservation Area (MEPA, 1996) (Figure 42).

Figure 42

A Valletta streetscape.



In the 21st century the global tourism industry experienced a trajectory towards “heritage tourism,” which Ebejer and Tunbribge (2020) describe as; “primarily anchored in the built environment of urban centres” (p. 2). Urban heritage enables visitors to see tangible evidence of narratives of the past, associated with the Maltese identity and linked to past foreign occupiers (Ebejer & Tunbribge, 2020) The distinctive coloured closed timber balconies in Valletta contribute to a sense of place and communicates a socio-cultural narrative of the city, besides reflecting periods in Maltese history that left marks on national identity (Ebejer, 2019).

In the promotion of Malta as a cultural heritage destination, tourism literature regards the *gallarija* part of the national vista, what Foxell and de Trafford (2010) call “familiar historical

representations” (p.156). Together with the impressive fortifications, the *gallarija*, communicates a distinct Maltese identity and cultural heritage experiences to tourists (Ebejer, 2019).

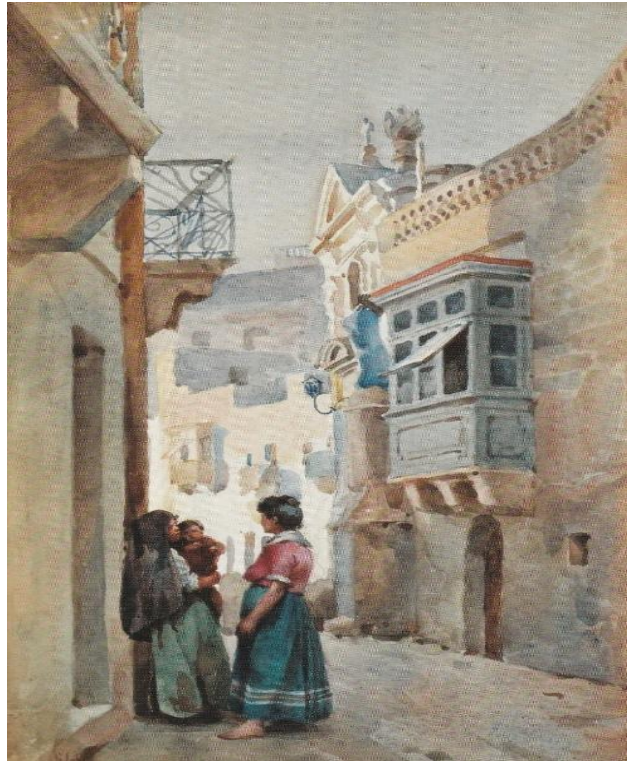
Surveillance and Gossip

In a balcony ordinary vices are laid bare just as ordinary virtues. Unsettling eventualities and real-life circumstances like losses in temper, love affairs, family disputes force neighbours to come to terms with the others’ realities. Bachelier, a French traveller, records in *Tour de Malte* (Freller, 2009), how the Grand Master used to walk through his Palace’s *gallarija* observing what was happening in the squares below, keeping a watchful eye on his Knights’ going-on surreptitiously (p. 352). Unwittingly, Bachelier described one of the social and cultural functions of the *gallarija*; affording the occupants the luxury of discreet surveillance or gossiping; [*tnemmis*] a fascination with everyone else’s affairs, a trait that the Maltese embraced from that day forth! (Figure 43).

Figure 43

Daily Gossip. Edward Caruana Dingli, 1909. Watercolour.

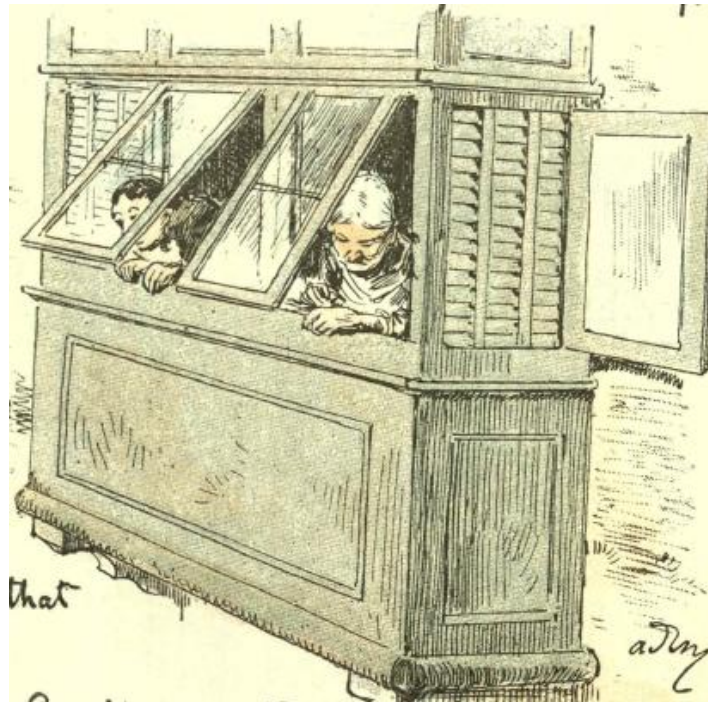
Note. Gossip is part of the Maltese social life.



O'Reilly Mizzi (1994) reinforces that gossiping is “the most widespread and effective means of social control” (p.368), and partly attributes this to the Maltese architectural styles, in particular the *gallarija* which affords; “an ideal observation post for the street below and the activities of passers-by, without oneself being observed” (p. 375). Ganado (1977) considers the *gallarija* as the street television [*televizjoni tat-triq*], from where the gossipers and the curious watched street films and heard news bulletins (p. 253). Additional privacy in the *gallarija* was best attained by louvers which still made it easy to open and look out to outside life (Ganado, 1977). Louvers allowed hidden observation while protecting the sacred space of the family. However, it is more likely that louvers were incorporated in the *gallarija* to keep the sun out more than to shield oneself from the passersby (Figure 44).

Figure 44

Curiosity in the Balcony. William Crawford McFall. In Melitensia, University of Malta.



The Balcony Concept

The historic genesis of the ‘Balcony’ transpired from different cultures over many centuries, initially regional to Mediterranean civilisations (Emekci, 2021), spread by the ‘connectivity’ and ‘microecology’ of the Mediterranean Sea, (Horden & Purcell, 2000, p.11) taken across continents by colonisation (Frendo, 2012) and transferred by diasporas (Frendo, 2020).

The phenomenon of the balcony has a broad storyline but is similarly defined worldwide as; “the interface between indoors and outdoors” (Emekci, 2021, p. 616). Typologies evolved and mirrored the environmental, religious and political influences of the place and location. The cantilevered space has retained its form for centuries, but at various times, in different societies, it has been significant for a variety of reasons and functions.

Balconies featured prominently during political and religious representations, activism, and identity maintenance in historical events (Emekci, 2021). Popes, dictators, presidents and sovereigns used the structure of a balcony to; declare wars or announce truces, address their citizens, bless their faithfuls, triumph at victories, celebrate liberations and freedoms, read decrees and orate their ideas. Using the balcony as a privileged platform, leaders demonstrated hope and openness in equal measures as supremacy and dominance over public gatherings. Masses made their voices heard from balconies and protested when public gatherings were banned. Balconies became stages for sending messages; flags, signs, banners and symbols of identity and ideology, like contemporary Pride flags showing support for gender equality movements.

During elections, political candidates pay constituents to hang their flyers from the balcony. In Soviet Union's mass social housing programmes of tiny apartments, the balcony was a way of improving the nation's health (Burlaka, 2019). In post-soviet Ukraine, the addition of a balcony became an anarchic right, rendering this phenomenon, an intrusion into the city space, unlawful and often parasitic (Kowalska, 2021).

In the political upheaval of *Sette Giugno* 1919, besides standing witness to the riots happening in the streets of Valletta, the *gallarija* deterred looters from ransacking properties. Bonello (2004) documents a little-known fact when holes were drilled in the floor of the *gallarija* through which a firearm could be used if anyone dared break in. Similarly, the military purpose of *hoards* (Emekci, 2021, p.612), or *machicolations* of the medieval castles; overhanging structures like balconies, supported on corbels, had floor openings through which missiles and combustibles could be dropped onto the enemy below (Hughes & Thake, 2003, p.55) (Figure 45).

Figure 45

*An image of Torre del Capitano (1550) in Naxxar showing machicolations.
In Hughes & Thake 2003, Malta The Baroque Island.*



Functional Virtues

In urban living balconies are known for their adaptability and responsiveness to context, possessing functional and recreational virtues that facilitate leisure activities like gardening, painting, studying, reading, and dining; used as environmental conditioners by increasing air circulation in hot climates, enhancing natural light to a building's interior, capturing warmth from the sun on cold days, and serve as storage spaces, utility spaces for laundry, clothes drying and even used as a lavatory (Duart et al., 2023). Many *gallariji* in Valletta also underwent alterations to serve basic human needs, in the absence of adequate space inside for lavatories. Following the epidemic of cholera in 1865, sanitation arrangements required the *gallarija* to be improvised with sanitary facilities, some of which are still seen to this day (Azzopardi, 2008). Thereby, earning the title of “the hanging water closet of Valletta” (Cassar, 1994, p. XXVI).

In the 19th century with the emergence of the middle class and industrial workers balconies became accessible to the masses, when Industrialisation necessitated high-rise collective housing and apartment blocks in high density cities and industrial towns (Melanie, 2020). During the Order's period the *gallarija* was used on the facade of one-user house in Valletta, since the only “atypical experiment in communal living” was the tenement block at the huge Cotoner building (Bonello, 2015, p. 8). The *gallarija* may have been the only outside space for some tenements, in the absence of courtyards and access to the roof.

It was during the British dominance when speculators built multi-storey dwellings crammed with as many flats as possible, that facades packed with multiple enclosed balconies began to appear in Valletta (Bonello, 2017). These *gallariji* provided harbours views and streetscapes as seen in Charles F. de Brocktorff's watercolour of the interior of a spacious sitting room (Vella, 2024). Hogg (1835) noticed, “A distinguishing feature of the domestic buildings is a projecting enclosed balcony usually erected before the front windows of each room and often extending even beyond their breadth thus forming a cool and separate species of gallery at the end of the apartment” (p. 62) (Figures 46 & 47).

Figure 46

The Interior of a Sitting Room. Charles F. De Brocktorff, c. 1830. Watercolour. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Note. The views which can be seen beyond the gallarija in the detailed image.



Figure 47

In a Maltese balcony. William Crawford McFall. Watercolour. In Melitensia, University of Malta.

Note. The open louvered windows providing shaded and allowing a breeze to enter inside for the woman to do her sewing.



In the late 19th century amenities like the horse-drawn omnibus, railway ferry-service in Marsamxett Harbour and the setting-up of electrical power station led to the development of suburban buildings, housing families of working men, extending to Marsa, Ħamrun Paola, Birkirkara, and Msida. The *gallarija* became a pervasive and continuous feature in the streets of these suburbs, exposing the difference between the rich and poor houses in size, design and proximity to neighbours (Mahoney, 1996), thus performing as the society's barometer of the district's wealth, affluence and population density.

Connectivity

Balconies have captivated, inspired and fascinated societies due to their position as “gateways” (Traverso, 2020, para. 6), as ‘unique transitional zone’ (Thi Ngoc et al., 2024, p. 1), and as ‘a threshold and in-between realm’ (Zacka, 2020, para. 1). Aronis (2007) states that; “Balconies act as liminal places connecting the private sphere and the public arena” (p. 157). For Zacka (2020) the balcony is “private, yet public; exposed, yet secluded”, exemplifying, “the balcony is domain of the nightgown and the undershirt: items too revealing for the street, yet modest enough to be worn at a distance” (para. 7). A space within the interior of the home that facilitates access to the exterior life just as easily as it enables withdrawal, supporting a distinctive type of reserved sociability. Aronis (2020) calls the balcony, a symbol and a condition of an ethical relationship with the other’ (p. 22). The degree of its publicity and seclusion varies from culture to culture (Charitonidou, 2020) (Figure 48).

Figure 48

A watercolour of a door leading to the balcony of the Palace. 19th century. In Ganado, 2001. The Palace of the Grand Master in Valletta.

Note. The transitional zone of the gallarija between the private and the public.



While Zacka (2020) regards, “the genius of the balcony is to assemble people who live within proximity, but who are otherwise strangers, around a common world of events, experiences and issues” (para. 6). Aronis (2020) posits that technologies such as phones, television and air conditioners pushed people indoors and some of the connectivity with the events happening in the street is lost.

The balcony as a space for social connectivity was particularly exhibited during the COVID-19 pandemic, inspiring completely new ways of togetherness while being apart during a

lockdown world (Melanie, 2021). Balconies became essentially platforms for social solidarity and social interaction, their silent ordinariness helped in psychological adjustment during isolation, staging external communication and emotional expression. Among the many unpleasant experiences, this health crisis provided an opportunity for society to rethink the relationship between the balcony and people. The curators of an impromptu exhibition that transformed balconies in Berlin into miniature art galleries displaying artwork, thereby changing isolation into connectivity and proximity to the passersby, commented, “Balconies serve as the public apertures of the private,” and “They seem to be where the house ends, and yet not” (Machemer, 2020, para. 3).

Therapeutic Space

At the turn of the 20th century before the discovery of a pharmaceutical cure - antibiotics, the balcony concept earned its place in medicine, as a palliative and curative element in sanatoriums. Thomas Mann sets his novel, ‘The Magic Mountain’ around the balcony where his consumptive wife was treated from tuberculosis by the restorative views of the sky, the fresh air and sun-exposure in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps in 1912 (Symington, 2011). Hospital balconies became historic cultural landscapes, used as therapeutic spaces in the fight against tuberculosis (Adam et al., 2008). Although sanatoriums were made redundant, the curative environment of the balcony left a lasting influence on the design of hospitals (Campell, 2005). An article titled ‘The Balcony Question in Hospitals’ suggested that balconies will benefit patients if incorporated in hospital designs (Annon, 1908). Fast forward one hundred years, González-Caro, et al. (2023) propose a holistic care that facilitates the recovery of Intensive Care Unit patients’ physical and psychological conditions in the form of “Balcony of Hope”; an

outside space where patients could spend periods in contact with their family, feeling the sunlight and the air breeze as restorative therapy.

Therapeutic practices of the past featuring paintings and galleries, are described as; “promenades to exhibit art” (Britannica). Alain de Botton (2013) recognises the therapeutic potential of art galleries as, “apothecaries for our deeper selves” (para. 4) . The intriguing approach to the curative value of viewing art is by no means a modern concept as the overlap of art, philosophy and popular medicine echoes the opinion of practicing physicians in the late 16th and early 17th centuries Europe (Gage, 2008). Drawing on the treatises of Robert Burton (1577–1640) a clergyman in England, and Giulio Mancini (1559–1630) a physician in Rome, Gage (2008) establishes the relationship between the therapeutic function of art galleries, spaces for combined physical and mental exercise and recreation, and the treatment of the humoral imbalance of melancholy and anger. In Burton’s opinion visiting art collections benefited the mind and provided physical exercise, since the spatial characteristics of art galleries resembled enclosed ‘*loggias*’ and private covered promenades, affording a space to walk and entertainment (Gage, 2008). It was perceived that specific subjects and genres of art such as landscape paintings depicting figures engaging in physical exercises and recreational activities, were a mechanism to stimulate the beholder to pursue their example and relax the observer’s eye. According to Mancini, art collecting enabled people to demonstrate intellectual learning and discernment to rank them as nobles, and assisted them to condition their bodies, soul and mind (Gage, 2008).

Artistic Inspiration

The balcony has been a source of inspiration to philosophers, poets and artists representing their perspectives in literature, mythological tales, folk songs, and poetry, with popular romantic balcony scenes incorporated in the storylines of classic and modern literary masterpieces. A Maltese saying goes; ‘*qagħad gallarija*,’ “he did not get involved in what was going on or what was being said, he watched but took no part” (Serracino Inglott, 1976, p. 73). The *gallarija* too debuted in Maltese folklore, as Badger (1838) recounted and translated a poem about Maltese courtship, [*namur*] (p.88).

Tridu tâfu shbeiba sh taghmel
Min fil ghodu sa fil ghashia
Taghmel il bokli f rasha
U tokghodlok fil gallaria

Would you know what a maiden does
From morning until evening
She adorns her head with curls
And seats herself in the balcony

Tokghodlok fil gallaria
Tibda taghmel in namoor
Meta târa l ommha geyya
Tibda tkoffu il maktoor

She seats herself in the balcony
And sets about making love
When she sees her mother coming
She begins hemming her handkerchief

Artistic representations depicting the balcony as space for merging the public and domestic environment, where house residents inhabit and participate in the same space (Aronis, 2020). Goya painted ‘*Majas on a Balcony*’, a scene of two women inhabiting a balcony (The Metropolitan Museum). Manet’s, (1868) ‘*The Balcony*’, portrays females observing the surroundings from a balcony (Valtorta, 2020). In ‘*The Street Enters the House*,’ Boccioni (1911) captures the colourful, busy market square entering the private space of a home, through the balcony (Mather, 2023 p.137). A deeper observation of these paintings reveals a gender/space

relationship pointing to a notion of spatial order also related to the Gallarija Ta' Malta (Figures 49 & 50).

Figure 49

*The Street Enters the House, Umberto Boccioni 1911. Oil on canvas.
Sprengel Museum in Hanover, Germany*

*Note. The interior and exterior merge with the woman leaning into the
centre of the painting.*



Figure 50

Majas on a Balcony, Francisco de Goya, ca. 1800-1810. Oil on canvas.



Gendered Space

The man-woman dichotomy determines public places and defines the balcony as a feminine territory (Ragavan, 2021). References to the female's place in the *gallarija*, may not be so coincidental, as traditional gender roles and attitudes influenced by religion, cultures and ideologies, persisted in Maltese society. Despite pictorial evidence showing the *gallarija* as anything but a space of stealth and seclusion for women, Vakili-Zad (2014) theorizes that the enclosed balcony was adopted by the Knights to be used as an instrument for gender segregation, making their Maltese women invisible. Vakili-Zad (2014) claims that the *gallarija* served to hide

the Knights' association with women, especially prostitutes in Valletta, and for Knights to isolate themselves from the rest of the Maltese people. At the same time, Vakili-Zad (2014) speculates that the *gallarija* protected Maltese women from the wandering eyes of the Knights, designed to limit the females' presence in the streets but still allows participation in social life.

Ganado (1977) explains the popularity of the *gallarija* among women for the fact that in the past mothers had large families and they stayed home to bring up the children. It was unacceptable for females to socialise in the streets, except to go to church, do shopping errands and chat with relatives, therefore the *gallarija* afforded the women to be in public at all hours and in all weather conditions, sun, rain, wind, storm and cold. (Ganado, 1977, p.253) (Figures 51 & 52).

Figure 51

Maltese Street Scene numero duo, painting in oil by Gero Urso. In De Piro 2002, The International Dictionary of Artists.

Note. Simple street scene in which the gallarija is an important feature of everyday Maltese life. Social communication between the gallariji and surveillance of the neighbourhood.



Figure 52

Another painting in oil, Maltese Street Scene numero uno, Gero Urso.

Note. Nostalgic scene depicting the woman lowering a basket to interact with the man below in the street without having to come down.



Even travellers observed the spatial/gender concept of the *gallarija*. Slade (1837), writes, “...every street is picturesque on account of the numerous glazed balconies supported on carved stonework where the fair ones of the isle love to while away the day” (p. 169). Lacroix (1848) refers to the *gallarija* as the place where “... in the evening, the women stay to enjoy the breezes of the sea” (p. 28). An unnamed visitor recounts; “The latticed windows of the old-fashioned houses of unequal height overhanging the streets and the dark tenements with their tiny windows and terraced roofs speaking of protection for the fair against prying eyes” (1861, p. 49). Gautier (1875) commented,

It is in these balconies that the ladies of the independent classes of Malta pass their lives watching for the faintest whisper of the sea breeze or listlessly yielding to the enervating influence of the sirocco. One catches from the street a glimpse of a snowy arm resting upon the sill of the lattice or a glance from the corner of a superb black eye forming an agreeable interruption to all these architectural contemplations. (p. 22)

Introduced in Malta

In conversation with Von Brockdorff (2021), De Lucca opines that the timber enclosed balcony was introduced to Malta by Turkish slaves, during the Order's rule. De Lucca (2000) asserts that the *gallarija* was the result of, "the engagement of some skillful Turkish artisan in the humble carpentry shops that at the time were flourishing all over Malta". This assertion, which involves several cultural and ideological dichotomies; master/slaves, Christian/Islamic, European/Oriental, can be cross referenced with the research done by Godfrey Wettinger on Slavery in Malta. Apart from galley slaves and those owned by the Order, slaves were privately owned by merchants and nobility. Wettinger (2002) lists the menial trades and crafts of slaves in private ownership as barbers, tailors, shoemakers, water sellers, commercial activities of foodstuffs and "woodcarvers of small wooden objects" (p. 417).

Dispersed by Diaspora

In many countries, local cultures merge distinct regional architectural styles through cultural diffusion across migrating diasporas. Studying Maltese diasporas, Henry Frendo (2020) attempted to trace tangible evidence of Maltese presence in Smyrna (now Izmir in Turkey). Testimonies reveal that, "there had been a few of the typically wooden balconies, similar to the Maltese ones, which had Maltese crosses- inscribed on them" (Frendo, 2020, p. 172), indicating

that the concept of the *gallarija* migrated eastward with the migrants. However, Frendo, (2020, p.177) researched that the occupation trends of the Maltese settlers did not always have a “Maltese pedigree” or engagement with the trade and craftsmanship of building balconies. At La Punta, although not a Maltese quarter as the Maltese migrants spread in other European areas, several surviving wooden balconies like the *gallarija*, were spared the fires during the 1922 Turkish revolution (Frendo, 2020) (Figure 53).

Figure 53

An image of the type of closed timber balconies in Izmir, Turkey.



Colour Perceptions

Paint served both aesthetic and protective purposes, safeguarding the timber balconies from environmental stressors (Mallia, 2013). Together with the strength and vigour of the *gallarija*'s design, the colour of paint was not left to chance; colour implies cultural significance

and a social sense of identity. *Gallaliji* exemplify the idea of a theatrical appearance within the streetscape with the splashes of colour that breaks the monotony of the Maltese limestone (Mahoney, 1996, p. 233).

The myriads of hues of the *gallariji* offer a visual experience of Maltese streetscapes, a reflection of the Mediterranean characteristics of the Maltese people who delight in vibrancy of colours (Bezzina, 2016). Maltese's love for colours is demonstrated in, the formerly brightly coloured mode of public transport, [*tal- Linja*,] and the colourful manifestations of the Maltese *festa* that identify the community's affiliations and distinguish between social clubs [*kazini*] within the same town (Figure 54).

Figure 54

Tal- Linja. Sue Gregory. Watercolour. Sue Gregory-Art

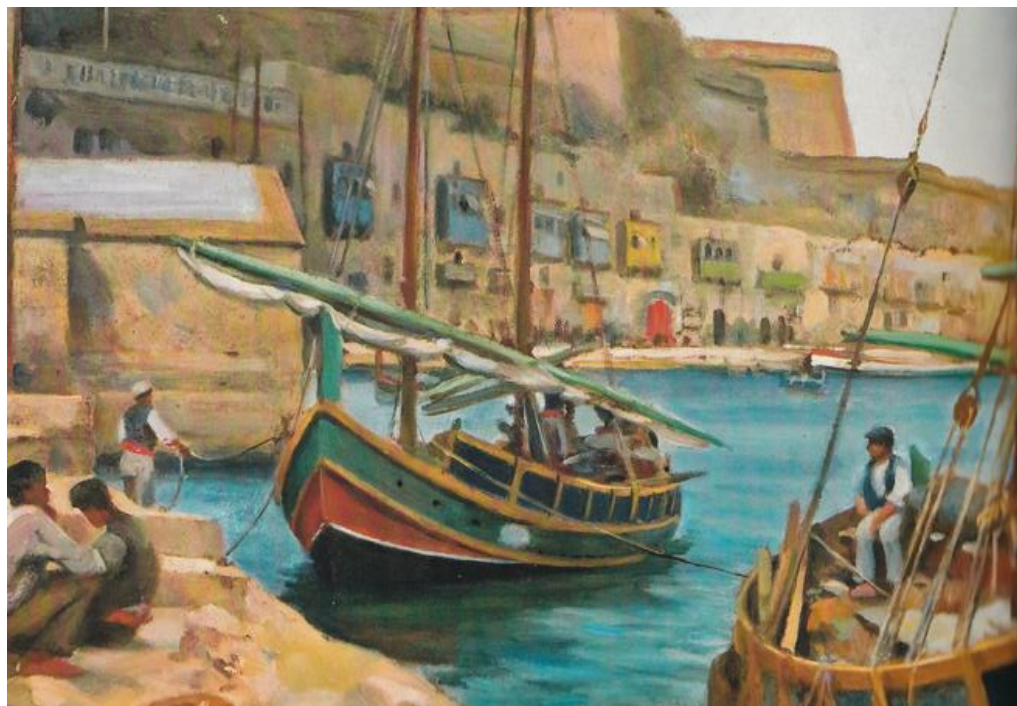


The colour used on *gallariji* creates a sense of individualism to similar houses, while same coloured *gallariji* may create a sense of pride and belonging to one community by creating a visual sense of uniformity. Parisi, et. al (2020) analysed the variety of colours of *gallariji* in areas around Malta, finding that colour respected the customs and religious cults of the town's inhabitants, for example *gallariji* in Mosta and Naxxar were mostly painted blue, since both towns have the Virgin Mary as their patron saint, while red dominates the streets of Qormi, in respect to the martyrdom of the two patron saints, St George and St Sebastian. The *gallariji* in the fishing villages of Marsacala and Marsaxlokk respected the varied colours of the traditional boat [*luzzu*], while *gallariji* in Valletta and Vittoria (Gozo) are predominantly green (Paris et al., 2020) (Figure 55).

Figure 55

Maltese Fishing Boats (Luzzijiet) off Pinto Wharf, Valletta. Edward Caruana Dingli. Oil on canvas.

Note. The colours of the Luzzu matches the colour paint of the gallariji in the background.



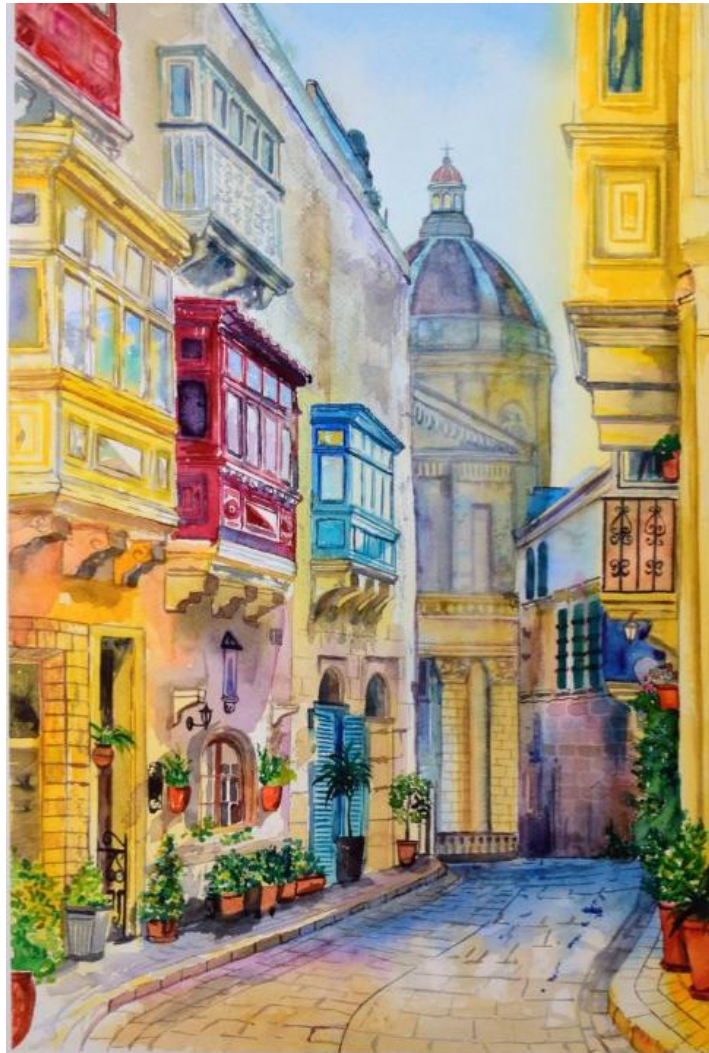
Colours such as maroon, blue and yellow were more popular in the villages, while the colour green dominated the Cottonera area, since green paint was obtained from the dockyard stores (Bondin, 1987). Pilfering from the military stores was rife and illicit traffic between ships and shore was part of the vulnerable social and economic situation in Malta in the early decades of the 20th century (Ellul, 1998). Ellul (1998, p. 104) cites Buttigieg (1980), whose father was a Maltese service man with the Navy and supplemented his wages with commodities from the Naval Stores recounts; '*Kultant il-kuxjenza kienet tippermettilu jgib xi bott żebgħa biex niżbghu l-bieb ta' barra u l-gallarija.*' (Every now and then, he availed himself of a can of paint so that the front door and the *gallarija* would have a lick of paint).

Several 19th century visitors expressed contrasting opinions regarding the painted *gallariji*. Colt Hoare opined that they were, "...painted of a dingy hue which ill accords with the colour of the stone" (1819, p.495). Woods commented; "These boxes upon the balconies are very frequent in Malta. They are painted of a grey or dull green colour and do not rise so high as the windows behind them" (1828, p.310). Hogg in 1835, noted; "The windows of this balcony are shaded on the outside by well-constructed wooden blinds painted green which gives a pleasing variety to the houses as seen from the streets" (p. 62). Hans Christian Anderson (1841) noted that the painted *gallarija* makes the house look grander and more palatial, whereas Crawford McFall (1885) wrote that, "... these balconies painted with all the brightest colours imaginable have a charming effect in a street with the bright, hot sun shining down upon them and lighting them up" (Figure 56).

Figure 56

Valletta Balconies. Malta. Ariana Tero, Watercolour. Saatchi Collection.

Note. The colours of the gallariji portray a positive atmosphere.



Vernacular or Cultural Artifact

In the 18th century, the urban environment of Valletta dictated the cultural trends that spread elsewhere in rural Malta (Spiteri, 2021). De Lucca (2000) credits, “the channelling of the city Baroque idiom into the vernacular environments of rural Malta”, to ‘*capomastro*’ Francesco

Zerafa, in the 18th century, who implemented “a timber balcony supported on beautifully carved projecting consoles, ...in the village houses” (p. 4) (Figures 57 & 58).

Figure 57

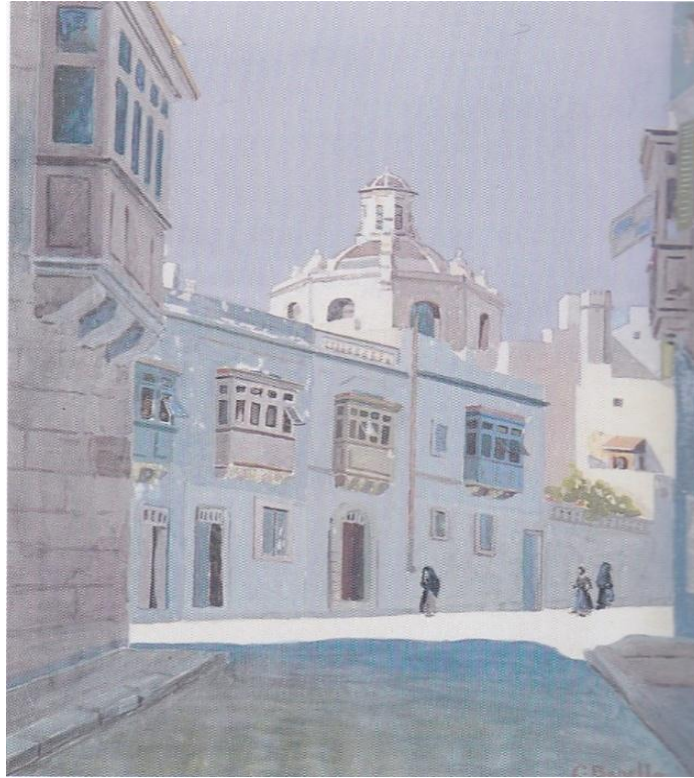
Feast at Zejtun (San Girgor) 1919, Gianni Vella. Oil on canvas. The gallarija becoming a vernacular feature in the pjazza in rural town and villages.



Figure 58

In the Village. Carmelo Bonello. Watercolour.

Note. The gallarija is a cultural feature equal to the church dome in Maltese landscape scene.



Although the term ‘*ta’ Malta*’ denotes ownership and exclusivity, the *gallarija* poses a dilemma whether it is vernacular or a cultural product. Oliver (2006) defines vernacular architecture as, “built to meet needs,” by the natives of the land, relating to the environment, using available resources and traditional technologies; thereby combining history, geography and anthropology of the place (p. 3). Kanes Weisman (2000) sustains that, “The built environment is a cultural artifact. It is shaped by human intention and intervention, a living archaeology through which we can extract the priorities and beliefs of the decision-makers in our society” (p.1). King (1971, p 54) cites Rapaport’s dictum that “Form follows Culture” to describe Maltese architectural development. The *gallarija* seems to fit to the latter description as from its

inception, it was influenced by the religious, political, social and cultural events, but equally qualifies as vernacular as it evolved into a necessity to meet urban needs in a style that form followed function (Figure 59).

Figure 59

St Lucy Street Naxxar. Cedric Galea Pirotta.

Note. Gallariji adorning dwellings in main streets in villages.



Conclusion

This chapter reviews literature on how the *gallarija* reflects Malta's socio-cultural history. As Borg cited in Zammit (2022) expresses, "Something becomes cultural heritage because someone, that is society, attributes it to the value of cultural heritage" (p. 54).

This claim ties to the Methodology chapter which considers the philosophical foundations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, rooted in people's life experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach of qualitative inquiry appropriate for architectural interpretation (el-Moussaoui, 2020). Places become “experiential” through their interaction with the people who experience them in an affective meaningful way (Selway, 2014, p.5). Phenomenology is “a way of seeing people and places,” since it interprets experiences as they happen during human life (Seamon, 2002, para.1).

Research Setting

Society, through common life experiences, attributes the value of cultural heritage to a place. The study’s objective to research the socio-cultural aspects of the Gallarija ta’ Malta directs this research towards a qualitative methodology, which radically values the human being as a “knowledge source” (Cohen et al., 2010, p.19). Quantitative perspectives frequently employed in architectural studies, gives an idiosyncratic description with rigorous empirical and scientific proof, independent of human life (Selway, 2014). Positivist research methods lack imagination, as data is materially identifiable and mathematically recordable (Seamon, 2002). Constructivist qualitative methods “generate flexibility of thought and feeling, and evoke unanticipated insight” (Andrews, 2020, p.20).

Research Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a methodological framework mainly used in psychology and social sciences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), becoming increasingly significant for phenomenological articulation of dwellings (el-Moussaoui, 2020). IPA suites

topics that are “dynamic, contextual and subjective, relatively under-studied and where issues of sense-making are important” (Smith, 2004, p.42), suitable for researching the dialectic dynamism of the *gallarija* and the Maltese socio-cultural identity.

The fundamental principles of IPA, drawn mainly from concepts created and developed by Husserl and Heidegger, are informed by the philosophical approaches of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is the study of perspectives, unique experiences and meanings, while hermeneutics is the activity of interpretation to make meaning comprehensible by translating it (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The analytical process in IPA entails “a double hermeneutic” because firstly, the participants make meaning of their world and secondly, the researcher tries to decode that meaning - making sense of the participants’ meaning making (Smith et al., 2009 p.3). Idiography refers to an in-depth exploration of single cases and examining individual perspectives of study participants, in their unique contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was provided by the Faculty of Research Ethics Committee (FREC) of the University of Malta prior to the start of the study. Ethical conduct was prioritised in the stages of; recruitment, written consent, confidentiality, anonymity, potential vulnerability, and sensitivity. The participants were primarily briefed about the objectives of this study. Separate information letters are provided for residents and experts to make sure that they are fully informed about the nature of the study and ethical use of data (Appendix 1). Separate consent forms ensured that each participant understood the merits of his/her contribution and remain

anonymous if they wished (Appendix 2). All the experts have given consent to be cited in this study.

Sample Recruitment

Since IPA requires an interpretive analysis of detailed personal narratives, Smith et al. (2009) recommend a small sample size. The sample was selected purposively for the contribution of two categories of voluntary participants; residents and experts, as both can offer insights on the social and cultural aspects of the Gallarija ta' Malta. Using a snowballing method, a sample of three relatively homogenous residents are given the opportunity to share their experiences living in houses with a *gallarija*.

The six participants titled 'experts' are policymakers, professionals and academics, who were contacted via referral by gatekeepers for their experience and academic knowledge on cultural heritage, to enhance the investigation with their expertise and views. Although not a criterion for recruiting the experts, many of them live/or lived in houses with *gallarija*, therefore were able to contribute in both their professional capacity and from firsthand personal experience. However, on the notion held in the book 'Who Needs Experts', John Schofield (2014, p.2) states that; "... heritage is everywhere, it is for everyone, and we all are heritage experts.", therefore the residents are also regarded as the real and experiential experts on the Gallarija ta' Malta. Brief biographic descriptions of the research participants in Table 3:1 for the Residents, and Table 3:2 for the Experts, provides contextualization.

Table 3.1: *Biographies of Residents with pseudonyms*

Connie (P1)	Married, octogenarian, lives in the Cottoner Area
Pauline (P2)	Married, in her late seventies retired teacher/ counsellor grew up in Rabat
Tereza (P3)	Married, in her early seventies, retired Assistant Head of a school, grew up in Pieta

Table 3.2: *Biographies of Experts in alphabetical order*

Lino Bianco (LB)	Architect and architectural historian. Published papers on traditional Maltese architecture. Lives in a house with a Gallarija ta' Malta.
Giovanni Bonello (GB)	Lawyer and Art historian. Published scholarly articles on Gallarija ta' Malta in Melitensia journals and books.
Richard England (RE)	Architect, artist, a stalwart heritage steward and author of books featuring paintings of the Gallarija ta' Malta.
Reuben Grima (RG)	Archaeologist and academic. Lives in a house with 3 Gallarija ta' Malta in Valletta.
Ugo Mifsud Bonnici (UMB)	Lawyer and Politician involved in Maltese Culture and Heritage. Lives in a house with a Gallarija ta' Malta.
Joe Zahra (JZ)	Executive Officer at the Heritage Planning Unit within the Planning Authority. Researched and compiled a presentation on the craftsmanship and physical aspects of the Gallarija ta' Malta.

Data Collection

Unstructured face to face interviews give participants the space to converse and elaborate in their own words. One-to-one interviewing helps to build a rapport between the researcher and the participant to facilitate a flowing and natural dialogue. Key data taken from textual sources guided the researcher to formulate a short schedule of questions which were applicable to all participants despite their varying backgrounds. Open-ended questions and prompts on features of the *gallarija* help the participants maintain a balance between being guided and being led during the conversations. (Appendix 3) The researcher adopted the position of an “active listener” (Smith et al., 2006, p.64) to allow each interview to progress down paths the participant preferred rather than those dictated by the schedule, since the aim is to capture the richness and complexity of the participant’s meaning making.

The interviews’ settings were chosen by the participants, and all preferred to converse in English. The audio recorded interviews took between thirty and sixty minutes and were manually transcribed verbatim soon after to minimise losing valuable data. Names of residents were anonymised and identifiable information removed. The verbatim transcripts in Appendix 4, serve as raw data analysed for recurrent themes (Smith et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) propose that IPA is a ‘stance’ from which to conduct qualitative data analysis, rather than a distinct ‘method’ of research (p.104). The analytic process of IPA affords ‘considerable flexibility and variations,’ however flexibility does not mean ‘lack of rigour’ and ‘the subtlety and complexity of phenomenology’ must not be overlooked (Larkin et al., 2006, p.104).

The analytic procedure is carried out manually following the guidelines by Smith et al. (2009). The inductive and iterative approach of IPA to data analysis, building patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up, aims at filtering out theoretical and conceptual assumptions to allow the lived experiences of research participants to speak on their own terms (Creswell, 2017). A process of repetitive engagement with the data allows unanticipated themes to emerge for interpretation without attempting to verify any specific hypothesis (p.79).

The researcher's role in IPA is not simply descriptive but involves two parts. Firstly, the 'phenomenological' stance requires, 'hearing the participants' stories and prioritising their contextualised account' (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p.22). Later, the researcher makes sense of the participants' experiences and concerns, clarifies them in an interpretative commentary, and uses verbatim extracts from the data (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

Analysing IPA data entails the reading and returning to the transcript several times in a 'cyclical process' for the identification and grouping of emergent themes involving; "moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). During the task of reading the transcripts, the researcher practices "bracketing"; suspending presuppositions to focus on what is presented in the transcripts, refraining from making critical judgments because of assumptions and previous experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p.82).

Initial annotations, coding and descriptive comments in the margins of the transcripts identifies recurring and significant topics which are transformed into preliminary themes. Attention is given to developing themes only based on the emerging information collected from participants, rather than fitting data to predetermined topics. Notations of recurring themes

which stand out in this study are the ‘inside/outside space’ and ‘the private/ public’ concept of the Gallarija ta’ Malta.

The preliminary themes are organised by identifying patterns of discourse and relationships, charted to fit together into clusters or concepts of related topics and assigned thematic keywords. By abstracting like with like from the clusters, emergent themes develop in ‘Superordinate’ themes, for example, ‘Liminal space’, incorporating several subthemes that correspond and support them, like ‘Private outdoor space’. The analytic task establishes four superordinate themes encapsulating the participants’ perspectives and experiences of the *gallarija*. The analytic process entails refining the superordinate themes, identifying the essence and producing subthemes that relate and interact with each other, often with the inevitable overlapping. Table 3.3 below provides a systematic outline of the list of the themes.

Although there is no rule for the appropriate number of superordinate themes, fewer themes “represent a more thorough and synthesised analysis”, whereas numerous superordinate themes tend to present superficial and descriptive rather than interpretive data, consequently failing to provide depth to the analysis (Heffron and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p.757).

Table 3.3 *List of Superordinate themes with Sub-themes. Adapted from guidelines by Smith et al. (2007).*

Superordinate Themes	Subthemes
Identity and Collective Memory	Origin and etymology Self-referential and insularity Heritage value Culture and traditions Craftsmanship and conservation
Practice Relevance	Adaptability Urban necessity Climatic control Modification of enclosure and exposure Modern day challenges
Liminal Space	Private space in public Refuge and Prospect Separation and connectivity
Social Space	Spectator and surveillance Communication and gossip Gendered space Colourful streetscapes and loyalties Showcase and status symbol

Quality Criteria

Trustworthiness is the central concept to evaluate ‘soundness’ in a qualitative study where the researcher’s subjectivity can easily misinterpret the raw data (Creswell, 2018). Researchers need to persuade readers that the findings and conclusions are worth paying attention to and worthy of consideration. Reliability is the scientific measurement of the process’s replicability and stability of results, while validity is the appropriateness of tools, processes, and precision in which findings accurately reflect the data in quantitative research. Trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry is achieved using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, where the data generated is grounded in human experiences (Creswell, 2018).

Credibility, equivalent to validity in quantitative research, is the accurate and truthful depiction of the participants lived experiences (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). This criterion is achieved in this study by conducting searches of textual material and visual representations from different sources to know, describe, and understand the phenomenon and engage with it thoroughly. The recruitment of the expert sample serves as knowledgeable and scholarly consultants on the Gallarija ta’ Malta to ensure credibility in the inquiry. An option to review the interview transcripts before presentation of the study was given in the consent form to enable participants’ feedback on interpretations of the interview data. Member check was carried out by Prof. Reuben Grima.

Transferability considers applicability of qualitative findings in other contexts and settings with different participants (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). Transferability is achieved in this work by utilising purposive sampling methods and by outlining a comprehensive description

of IPA. Dependability includes the aspect of consistency and stability of findings (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). Dependability is achieved by carefully following the research steps and transparently describing and reflecting on the research methods used, while checking that the analysis process is in line with the standards for IPA as outlined by Smith et al. (2009).

Confirmability is concerned with the aspect of neutrality. Interpretations of the findings should not be the creations of the inquirer's imagination and preferences. (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). A reflexive journal is kept recording personal experiences, reflections, how interviews were conducted, literature read in preparation for the study, and the steps taken for the duration of this project to secure the intersubjectivity of data.

Reflexivity, considered a quality criteria, is a transparency strategy that acknowledges the researcher's role in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting the data, and identifies preconceived assumptions, motivations, perceptions and opinions that can either inspire the research process or taint the findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2018).

Limitations

Despite the relevance of the qualitative methodology in answering the research questions and exploring the participants' perceptions and experiences, this study presents certain limitations. The choice of IPA is justified as it focuses on the possible transferability of findings, rather than generalisation, not the ultimate goal of this research (Heffron and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). The sample of the residents is small for generalisation of findings, however this study hints to future studies at a larger scale.

The researcher is aware that the participants' experiences and perceptions are much more nuanced and complex than the findings reveal, but time and word constraints limit the scope and sample data of the dissertation in some way.

A degree of subjectivity of memories and a sense of nostalgia is acknowledged in the interview process given that participants were asked to recall past experiences. However, the researcher believes that personal narratives and insights from participants enrich the study more than diminish it.

Conclusion

This chapter explains why IPA was deemed an appropriate choice for the qualitative research question, the strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, and the method of data analysis. The following chapter presents the findings supported by explanatory comments and extracts from the interviews.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews of three residents and six expert participants. IPA focuses on the researcher's role in interpreting the experiential data presented in themes. The verbatim extracts evaluate the researcher's interpretation and serve as evidence that the participants' rich sense-making narratives are preserved with integrity as far as possible.

Findings

To preserve the connection between the participants' own words and the researcher's interpretations, the standards of 'prevalence', 'representation' and 'variability' were observed. Prevalence indicates the occurrence of the super-ordinate themes that best illustrate the research question in all transcripts, whereas representativeness involves representing all participants by proportionally citing their narratives to support each sub-theme. Variability demonstrates the patterns of similarity and contrasts of the participants' experiences (Smith, et al., 2009).

Extracts from the transcripts are labelled with the residents' number (P1, P2, P3), whereas the experts' initials (LB, GB, RE, RG, UMB, JZ) denote their extracts. The findings fall broadly under the themes, Identity and Collective Memory, Practice Relevance, Liminal Place and Social Space.

Identity and Collective Memory

The participants perceived the Gallarija ta' Malta as a symbol of Maltese identity embedded in the collective memory. Individuals' conceptions, meanings and feelings regarding

the *gallarija* are related to the interwoven themes of traditions, culture and heritage. In accordance with Nora's statement, (1989) collective memory entails environments of memory, spontaneous remembering which is embedded in daily life customs and rituals.

Origin and etymology.

The residents seemed unaware of the *gallarija*'s origin and its connection to the 'muxrabija', even attributing it to European influences. The experts were convinced that the Gallarija ta' Malta is disconnected from the Arab influence in its size, concept and function. The etymology of the word *gallarija*, an Italianised-Maltese term for a long, covered corridor deciphers the purpose and function of the early enclosed balconies in Malta.

I always took it for granted that the *gallarija* was purely Maltese. I do not recall seeing similar balconies like our *gallarija* in my travels, but I would perhaps associate it with Italy. (P.2)

I believe the word *gallarija* comes from Sicilian, meaning 'a showcase' a space to show things. It is like the cloisters in monasteries in Italy. A corridor with arches to look out from. What also comes to mind is the gallery on ships; like in the film Pirates of the Caribbean. (P.3)

It has a pedigree that goes back to the 17th century. The Palace's closed balcony functioned as a *gallerija* with its Italian meaning of a closed [*loggia*] or corridor. It is rather curious that very few examples of the closed balconies are found in Sicily and Italy. (RG)

It seems that the Grand Master wanted to have a corridor and since there was no space inside the Palace, commissioned one on the façade. The origin of the word “gallarija” is certainly for me an indicator that the first enclosed balcony is the one at the Palace. (GB)

The *gallarija*, regarded as originating in regional and environmental circumstances of the Mediterranean Littoral, is rarely found in Northern Europe. The *gallarija*’s functionality has social and cultural significance in the Maltese context different from other cultures.

It reflects the Mediterranean social lifestyle and climate. Northern countries do not appreciate balconies in the sense that it is not in their culture to be social and spend time outside. It reflects our Maltese identity because we take interest in what is happening outside our family/home. (P.3)

The experts disputed the linkage between the *gallarija* and the *muxrabija*, remnant of the Arab occupation but still in the Maltese collective memory.

I doubt the fact that the enclosed balcony originated from one specific area in the Mediterranean region. I believe there were many needs and elements and when combined resulted in the enclosed balcony as a solution. The *gallarija* seems to refer to our collective memory of the Arab influences and occupation in Malta. (JZ)

I don’t believe its origin is from the Arabs. The “*muxrabija*” may have some characteristics of the *gallarija* but its function and structure are totally different. I do not think that the Grandmaster looked towards the “*muxrabija*” to build his corridor at the Palace. (GB)

The *gallarija* appeared in the late 17th century and there is a gap of 500 years since the Arab occupation of Malta. (RE)

Although having different function and structure to the enclosed balconies of the Arab world, the *gallarija*'s craftsmanship is still being transported back to an Arab lineage.

One aspect that is tied to the explanation of its origin is an interesting fact that I discovered in the testimonies of several present-day carpenters who still construct the *gallarija*. These craftsmen recounted how they learned the craft [*sengħa*] of building the *gallarija* from their forefathers who in turn learned it from someone from Morocco or from an Arabic land. There were several who presented with this lineage of generations ago. However, the circumstances of how these original foreign craftsmen (Moroccan or Arab) ended up in Malta is unknown. (JZ)

Heritage Value.

The *gallarija* is considered by all the participants an important heritage that portrays Maltese history, culture and identity, perceived it as a defining element that contributes to making Valletta a World Heritage site, and its visibility is as significant as its tangibility

The *gallarija* is an important and beautiful element that makes Valletta a World Heritage site and cannot imagine the city without it. The *gallarija* is not only an integral part of Valletta's heritage, but it is a national heritage. (LB)

Il-*gallarija* has become typically Maltese. Even in iconography one can tell the location if there is a *gallarija* in the picture. One would immediately identify Malta through its presence. Whereas in Europe the enclosed balcony is rare. (GB)

Citizens need to appreciate everything and anything pertaining to our cultural heritage, like the *gallarija*, has value because it pertains to the culture of humankind. It translates into the fact that everything of the past was the work of man. (UMB)

Self-referential and insularity.

Although the name ‘Gallarija Ta’ Malta’ denotes uniqueness, most of the participants refer to notions of imitation and adaptation from architectural elements of other cultures. The expert participants observed that Malta acquired a mentality of insularity, and this influenced every aspect of the Maltese way of living.

Personally, I have an issue with the name Gallarija ta’ Malta. My preference is the Traditional Timber Balcony. Balconies evolved through the ages in other countries. Locally we have adopted and adapted the closed balcony. The Maltese added some elements and made it functional to Malta. (JZ)

The *gallarija* gives the impression of a nation who wants to be reserved but is still able to observe the wider world. (RE)

Most probably someone came up with the idea of an enclosed balcony and since it was a very useful feature in the house others copied it. I think the *gallarija* shows a uniqueness which I have never come across in my numerous travels abroad. (P.2)

This sub theme reveals some conflicting opinions on how characteristics of the *gallarija* make it unique or just an adaptation. The *gallarija* took the identity of Malta because its design is only found in Malta.

I do not think it is unique; it happens with numerous small nations and states; they borrow or copy something and make it exclusively theirs. The *gallarija* is not Maltese. If you look toward Smyrna in Turkey, the balconies there are very similar to the Maltese ones. (LB)

It was called ‘Maltija’ simply because you only find it in Malta. There are some characteristics that you only find in the Gallarija ta’ Malta and nowhere else. When an object is identified with a geographical place it takes on the identity of the place. The enclosed balcony became extensively popular only in Malta. (GB)

The collective memory of the *gallarija* may have been politically manipulated to erase episodes of the nation’s history. It is possible that the *gallarija* was labelled Maltese as a political statement in a form of selective amnesia in favour of prevalent ideologies of the administrators of the time.

We want to be unique and different. These views tie in with the notion of ‘cultural exceptionalism’. The name “Ta’ Malta” stuck when politically the Maltese and British mentality did not want any connections with North Africa and the Arabs. In the British period Malta wanted to be seen as more European. (RG)

Being an island nation with a mentality of insularity has influenced how the Maltese refer to artifacts, events and places, naming them as their own and protecting them from outsiders.

We are ‘self-referential,’ we call the siege of 1565 – the ‘Great Siege’, we call the fault that crosses Malta the ‘Great Fault’. We love adopting. And the enclosed wooden balcony becomes Il-Gallarija ta’ Malta partly due to our insular referential nature. This

type of romanticization would have happened during the British Colonial period. This is when the idea of the Maltese Cross and the 'Malta' icons were created. (RG)

The *gallarija* is part of our identity as it developed into a civilization that had buildings in stone and a strong culture of fortifications. We forever had a mentality of “insularity” of being an island not part of the continent. This mentality influenced how we think of ourselves and our culture. Always on the defense because we do not have protection from neighbours. (UMB)

Culture and traditions.

This sub theme reveals a picture of how much the Gallarija ta' Malta was part of the cultural and traditional aspects of everyday life in Malta. Memories and experiences connected with the *gallarija* permit some participants to reflect on how life was in the past.

Besides its utilitarian function, it is an element embedded in our collective memory because of our strong religion and beliefs. The many occupiers from foreign cultures left a strong influence in the creation of Malteseness. (UMB)

A strong sense of nostalgia comes across quite vividly in the narratives, especially those of the residents about social and cultural events.

In the feast of St Peter and St Paul [*L-Imnarja*], horses for the Buskett races used to parade through our street, so from the *gallarija* we used to participate in this event. (P2)

The traditional buildings in towns and villages would not be as attractive if someone did not come up with the idea of the *gallarija*. It profiles Valletta and old towns in Malta.

(GB)

On the day when the cart or truck selling gasoline, [*pitrolju*] came in the street the housewife would lower the tin and money. I remember listening to religious talks [*Is-Sajda*] given by members of the Society of Museum once a year from the *gallarija*.

Religio-cultural events that are redundant today (P.1)

We used to lower a basket [*qoffa*] to get our bread. A whole different culture in those days. (P.2)

My daughter learned her numbers at a very young age while sitting in the *gallarija*, when the women in the square in front of our house used to play bingo, [*it- tombola*] in the evening. I got my daughter a bingo chart and she used to look out for the numbers called and mark them on her chart. (P.1)

There is an awareness that the *gallarija*'s usage diminished as standard of living improved, technology replaced traditions and progress enveloped culture. The collective memory tied to the *gallarija*, linking traditional, cultural and community bonds, needs to be safeguarded and preserved before they are forgotten.

I am reminded of the time when the herdsman used to come into our street with his goats to sell fresh milk. We used to be on the lookout from the *gallarija* and call my mother upon his arrival. There was a beggar called 'Luzar' who used to pass in our street, and we would call out "Ġej Lizar", [*a bedsheet is coming*] for my father to go out and give him

some money. We encountered someone who was different from our social standing.

Malta was totally different in the 1950s after the war, with lack of provisions and lack of social services. (P.2)

It is advisable to study the older generation of people living in houses with *gallarija* as the modern usage of the balcony has changed. (LB)

Craftsmanship and conservation.

Most of the participants show appreciation for the conservation and preservation of the Gallarija ta' Malta for its heritage and cultural value. The expert involved in urban planning gives informative insights and highlights the legal processes of protecting historical and cultural architectural elements.

The inherited British law for planning consisted of 2 elements; 'listing' and 'scheduling', [*skedar*], which does not completely apply to Malta. In Malta we do not have "listings" as such, but have an inventory, the National Protective List. Firstly, a building is assessed and catalogued before put on the inventory list, however this exercise does not offer protection, but merely puts the building under the spotlight for further investigation and is recognised for its heritage and cultural values. In [*skedar*] the building is legally protected, and its architectural and historical factors have significant value to society. (JZ)

The *gallarija* is regarded as artisanal work and there is an expression of dismay for the loss of craftsmanship and an intense period of urbanisation that favoured other materials and styles when timber was replaced with aluminum.

I believe it is a work of art. ... the different colours, its craftsmanship, its Maltese identity! It is a marvellous and aesthetically pleasing piece of cultural heritage. (P.3)

Traditional balcony denotes a lot of meanings. Regarding age, it has a history. There are five most important factors that constitute the construction of a Maltese traditional timber balcony; the materials, not modern man-made materials, together with the craftsmanship [*sengħa*] that is manifested in the proportion, design and finish. (JZ)

There are conservation financial aids to protect this national heritage. Although there was a horrible period when the wood was replaced by aluminium. Absolute disaster! to get away from the high maintenance work required. (RE)

The amount of maintenance required, and its expense was highlighted as a downside. The sun fades the colour and the rainwater rots the timber.

The *gallarija* was expensive to maintain. There was always something needed to do as it was made of wood and paint. Rain and sun took a toll on the *gallarija* and parts had to be changed every so often. (P.3)

Another interesting element in the craftsmanship of the *gallarija* is the metal fittings that nowadays are hard to find. When we had to change one of the balconies, I made a point of keeping the original hinges and hooks, [*firrolu u gancetti*] as their design is different, not a hook but a small ball that fits in a slot and locks, [*mhux b'ganc imma b'boċċi li tidhol go slot u tillokja*]. (RG)

Practice Relevance

The participants reflect on the Gallarija ta' Malta's capabilities to address residents' needs and its adaptability to fit multiple functions in a limited area. Besides extending the indoor floor area, it becomes a potential amenity space and a substitute for a garden or courtyard, particularly in the urban context. A variety of activities outlined by the participants reveal how the *gallarija* enables flexibility and personalisation of the extra space. This theme produced rich anecdotes that brought as many smiles as poignant memories of loved ones who depended on the *gallarija* daily.

Adaptability.

Most of the participants appreciate having a Gallarija ta' Malta in their dwelling as they observe its capability to improve quality of life and positively impacts residents' wellbeing with natural light and the private outdoor space, sometimes even with restorative merits of open views of the sky and sea. The *gallarija* is adapted to every member of the household as they made use of it according to their age and stage in life.

The *gallarija* was part of our home life of the same importance as the kitchen and bedroom. Once a neighbour told my husband to check the reason for the incessant crying of our infant coming out of our *gallarija* as she thought the child was abandoned. All the while I was in the balcony trying to pacify the baby and get him to go to sleep. (P.1)

For the children living on main busy streets the *gallarija* became their playhouse and place outside, in the absence of a courtyard or garden.

Because our street was a busy main road we were not allowed to play or stay out in the street and spent many hours in the *gallarija*. We were 3 girls, and played with dolls, tea sets and role play [*tal-mummy*] in there. It was a safe inside space but also had a lot of natural light and views of the outside. (P.2)

This testimony expresses the relevance of the *gallarija* in one of the most difficult life transitions in the elderly, leaving the familiar environment of home. The psychological cost brought about by reduced mobility and isolation especially in elderly living alone in urban dwellings is alleviated by the shielded semi-outdoor space of the balcony.

The *gallarija* was a means for my mother's mental wellbeing especially when she was not able to go out. In the last 5 years of her life, she needed residential care. There was a Gallarija ta' Malta in her room at Casa Arkati which helped my mother get used to life in residential care. She spent most of her last days in the *gallarija*, looking out onto the gardens there. I believe it was a sort of therapy for my mother as it was a continuation of her life at her house. There wasn't a great disruption to her everyday routine. (P3)

The *gallarija* was adapted for the needs of every member of the family as it may have been the only outside space in many dwellings.

Some of the older examples in Valletta had a small opening in the lower part of the timber frame that had a sliding door purposely included for the benefit of small children; not tall enough to look out from the upper glazed part of the *gallarija*. This is a sort of peep hole and was very practical for preventing children from climbing dangerously on the balcony ledge. (RG)

Urban necessity.

The enclosed balcony is considered as having evolved from a need in the urban context, its form may have followed function. Some residents express how this private outdoor space has been personalised to support housing adaptability within a dwelling.

The Gallarija ta' Malta is not a vernacular heritage. In Malta, vernacular architecture is considered as the traditional farmhouse, [*razzett*] which is very introverted looking with few small windows high on the front façade. (LB)

In the Valletta tenements the *gallarija* was the only opening onto the street in the absence of a roof and courtyard. (LB)

The participants highlighted how the *gallarija* is an outside extension of the house relieving the confinement of the inside.

It extends your space out onto the streets, like an extension of your room out over the street space. You are “stealing” a few square meters. It creates spaces in many of these houses where light is limited. (RG)

The *gallarija* was an extension of the house, of the room. There was the feeling of being unrestricted by walls of the inside (P.3)

At my mother's house in Paola, we did not have a garden, therefore the *gallarija* overlooking a busy main road, for us children, served as a platform and a lookout. (P.1)

These narratives are examples of how the *gallarija* is personalised and appreciated for the space it provides.

My daughter often did her homework there as she used to want to work in an “open” space with views down the street and upwards to the sky. It acted as a semi-private outside study. (P.1)

One of our neighbours split the house in two and to extend their kitchen space they installed the kitchen cabinets in the *gallarija*. (P.1)

My son converted his open balcony to a closed wooden one. And he makes very good use of the space and the abundant light. He has his computer desk there and works from there. If only now, I had a closed balcony in my house, where I could relax and do my sewing in privacy yet enjoy outdoor views. (P.2)

Thermal control.

The capacity of the Gallarija ta' Malta to improve the indoor thermal environment was highlighted by the participants as being most beneficial and suitable to Malta. The urban context incorporates varied sensory experiences and the design of the *gallarija* allows smells, sounds and ventilation to be naturally regulated.

So many sensations were experienced through the *gallarija*, the cries of the vendors of gasoline; [*tal-pitrolju*], fishmonger; [*tal-hut*], greengrocer; [*tal-haxix*]. The warmth from the sun and the abundance of light. The smells of freshly baked bread. (P.2).

My mother used to sit at the *gallarija* with abundant light and a breeze especially in summer as she used to open the glazed windows. In winter she was protected from bad weather but still enjoyed being outside. (P.3).

The glazed windows, [*purtelli*] are like sails which are adjusted accordingly to capture the breeze to move the boat forward. The *gallarija* performs like louvers – blocks out sunlight during the days in summer and encourages air currents during the night to get in. (RG)

The *gallarija* is considered to have developed according to the environmental conditions and has a functional element of climate regulation in the Mediterranean context.

Architecture and way of life reflect each other. In Malta we have high temperatures, we stay indoors in summer to avoid the sun, not because it is cold outside. Our climate has conditioned our way of life since the sun is vital, but we need to keep our home cool. Therefore, the *gallarija* serves the functions of keeping the direct sun rays out, light in and provides a cooling effect to the house. (UMB)

Modification of enclosure and exposure.

The different design elements of the Gallarija ta' Malta have a lot of merits in terms of enclosure and exposure to the residents' functional and leisure needs on a daily and seasonal basis.

Considering the climate, the *gallarija* protects you from the sun, heat and rain, and besides letting in light, it allows a breeze to cool the room inside. The use of louvers, [*persjani*], serves this purpose of allowing a breeze inside. (UMB)

It was glazed, but we had blinds [*tendini*] that were drawn up and down to protect us from the direct sunlight. There was a fanlight [*logġ*] that afforded more light to come in. (P.2).

It was discreet, as there were the blinds that hid you and no one would see you if you did not want them to. (P.3)

Evidence of the functional virtues of the *gallarija* as it can be utilised at different times during the day.

In winter months, when there are less sun hours, my wife and I start the day by having breakfast together at a small table in a small *gallarija* and try to finish a crossword before work. Only a brief time of 10-15 minutes every morning at our own special space. Then during the day, it is a space ideal for reading. (RG)

In the evening, my mother never used to go out, she stayed in the *gallarija*, knitting or sewing and looking at the Msida church, Msida Creek and the Yacht Marina right in front of her house. (P.3)

When the *gallarija* is well positioned it is a good place to dry clothes, [*Nixxiefa*], in the absence of the roof or courtyard. It is also protected from dust and dirt at street level. (UMB)

Modern day challenges.

It is noted in dismay that the Gallarija ta' Malta is losing its capability to control temperature and ventilation. From the direct firsthand experience of an expert participant who is also a resident, it is evident that the *gallarija* is being challenged by governing policies, tourism and climate change. This sub theme merits the succinct account of the challenges the *gallarija* is struggling with.

In Valletta you have quite poor control of noise/sound due to increased tourist activity and the legal notice a couple of years ago which allowed music to be played until 2AM. Any traditional aperture, like the *gallarija*, has a low sound proofing capacity. There is also a directive across the EU which encourages the improvement of passive climate control measures, with strong encouragement for installation of more double glazing. (RG)

The danger of this is that traditional timber apertures like the *gallarija*, will come under pressure to be replaced. Therefore, the *gallarija* is under pressure to improve insulation properties to comply with the directives and improve sound proofing because there is much more noise pollution, especially at night. It's becoming a nuisance. There are these big tensions. Traditionally, the windows had quite thin glass, the woodwork is not a perfect seal, it is not soundproof, so the outside noise is heard as if it was inside. The *gallarija* is very physically permeable. (RG)

In the past three years with climate change I have been finding direct firsthand experience. Even at night, the air in summer, in July and August does not cool enough to have a cooling effect when you open at night, partly because of the increasing temperature but also because air conditioners are pumping hot air out into the street from the outside compressor. (RG)

Although there are preservation schemes, the *gallarija* is increasingly under pressure to change its function from one of permeability to isolation. It is risking becoming impracticable in environmental control.

So, the air in the street is becoming hotter and staying hotter during the night to the point that you don't cool the house. I was convinced that using the passive measures is enough, but I am reaching a point where we must install an A.C. because it is cruel if one cannot sleep well during summer. I am seriously giving up and considering introducing A.C. in the house. (RG)

Liminal Place

The interpretation rendered from this theme enforces the perception that it is an in-between zone that allows freedom of passage between the private and the public sphere, unencumbered by clear rules or social norms. Perceived as a place that implies connectivity without an obligation to connect. Predominantly the *gallarija*, described as a bastion for the protection of the family, its spatial physicality is related to the notions of refuge and prospect. The *gallarija* affords protection whereas at the same time it is a place where one can view the surrounding environment as a lookout for approaching enemies and danger at the street level.

Private space in public.

The Gallarija ta' Malta is portrayed by all participants as a phenomenon that embodies two contrasting spatial domains, enabling the crossing from the private space into the public sphere.

The *gallarija* is a "threshold" space between the outside/inside, like the space between the front door and the inner glass door [*antiporta*]. A transitional space. Like the porch [*parapett*] an extension of the house (LB)

The main and useful function of the *gallarija* is that of being outside and inside at the same time. In the privacy of the home with a public view. (GB)

It is interesting how the *gallarija* assumes a “visual threshold” in a way as opposed to a physical threshold like the portico (RE)

It is a permeable space where you are in the comfort of your home, wearing indoor attire but still can converse with someone outside. The *gallarija* breaks down the boundary between the public and private. (RG)

There is a notable emphasis on the function of the *gallarija* to safeguard one’s privacy. The liminal features of the Gallarija ta’ Malta are perceived as creating potential separation by its boundaries, and at the same time through the opening in the walls of the home allows connectivity with the outside. It is regarded as a respectful means of maintaining interaction with those outside, yet distant enough for choosing whom to allow in the private sphere.

The *gallarija* is the best invention that helps you safeguard your private life in your home while at the same time observing what is going on in public outside. In the *gallarija*, we are looking on to the streets but also are protecting the privacy of our home. (UMB)

Refuge and prospect.

A basic value of the Gallarija ta’ Malta appreciated by most participants is that of security and protection. The *gallarija* becomes a place where one enjoys the outside while being protected from danger at the street level. One is safe in the refuge of a closed balcony; inside one’s home and at the same time in a location where one can observe what is going on around in

the street. The *gallarija* is perceived as providing security measures for the home and family, enabling the residents to control interaction with the outside.

When we were allowed to sit on the front doorstep to wait for our father to return from work, my mother used to sit in the *gallarija* to mind us, least we crossed the road or came to any harm while outside, as the street was very busy. (P.2)

Every time the doorbell rang my mother used to look out of the *gallarija* to see who was at the door before opening. It was used as security. She was able to decide who she'll let in and whom to leave out. (P.2).

The *gallarija* is not a window as it projects out and there is a feeling of being closeted and safely suspended above the street. It performed the function of CCTV. (P.3)

The *gallarija* had the function that while one is safe in his/her castle, there is communication with what was going on outside. (GB)

The safety of the family within the home is juxtaposed with the Maltese geography and the historical events since the Maltese Islands always defended and protected themselves against outsiders.

The *gallarija* evolved from a civilization that had buildings in stone and a strong culture of fortifications. We were constantly defending ourselves from the “Others”. Malta, being a small defenseless island in the middle of the Mediterranean. The *gallarija* has historical values as it reminds us of the time when the Maltese were under siege. We were always protecting ourselves, our land, our property. There is an element of being closed in,

protected from what is going on outside. In the past the idea was to protect the front door by means of the *gallarija*. (UMB)

The *gallarija* affords the notions of refuge and prospect. These notions are not something new because the troglodytes employed these two notions when choosing their cave dwellings. (JZ)

Separation and connectivity.

The *gallarija* is structured as an opening in the walls of the home that allows sights, wind, light sound and movement to connect two realms, from the inside to the outside and vice versa. There is a continuity between the street and the home, however the enclosed nature of the *gallarija* creates borders that separate what is private and public. Its liminal nature allows freedom of choice for relationships and interaction with those outside.

We say, “Keep relatives and friends at the door” [*qraba u ħbieb sal-bieb*] The *gallarija* in a respectable way permits one to interact and connect with the outside but still maintains privacy. (RG)

In the past, the practice was that the family stays within the safe walls of the home and avoids exposure to the outside. In this way the family was isolated inside the house, while under the protection of the *gallarija* they were still connected to what was going on outside. (UMB)

In bigger blocks of flats/apartments the *gallarija* is the only outside space that one can call their own for interactions with the street as most do not have a roof or terrace. The only permeability with the outside. (LB)

Social space

The theme of social space emerged strongly from the narratives of both the residents and experts. The Gallarija ta' Malta is generally perceived as a symbol of ethical relationship with the other and as the elemental condition for communication, interaction and sharing in general. The *gallarija* is a space where social bonds are forged and social relationships are experienced creating a sense of belonging in a community. It is the social capital of a person from which one can voice an opinion, entertain an audience and showcase loyalties. The *gallarija* is considered as mostly used by women more than men, and many historical social and cultural attitudes inform this notion.

Spectator and Surveillance.

The position above the street level affords the occupants of the Gallarija ta' Malta a vantage view on the drama and everyday street life, thereby maintaining a relationship with the outside as a spectator. It is a space where one can sit, watch and observe people and their business without physical contact or intimacy.

The *gallarija* afforded us the experience of being spectators to the processions of the Feast of Rising Christ [*L-Irxox*] and the parish patron saint [*Kuncizzjoni*]. (P.1)

I distinctly remember feeling elevated from the street while in the *gallarija* watching the people passing by and hearing the chatter from my privileged position. One could eavesdrop [*tissemma*] on people who used to stop under our balcony. (P.2)

In Valletta people are known to use this space as a theatre stage [*palk*]. If a woman has a quarrel with the husband, she does it in the *gallarija* to make sure everyone knows about

it. It is like stealing an important space and using the opportunity of an assured audience to vent her emotions. (RG)

The notion of surveillance expressed in Maltese as [*tissindika*] or [*tnemmes*] is an activity that the participants claim to be a common activity synonymous with the *gallarija*.

Basically, we used the *gallarija* for surveillance [*nissindikaw in-nies*]. It being above the street afforded us the privilege to view what was going on below. From the *gallarija* we noticed common practices of people in their everyday routines. (P.3)

It is not necessarily a place of surveillance [*tissindika*] but more like an extension of the inside from where to look out and have a relationship with the outside. (LB)

The *gallarija* is a perfect place to sit out and watch what is going on in the street. It also makes part of the social structure of how people lived. A way from which to conduct surveillance [*stajt tnemmes*] without the public seeing you. (RE)

Communication and gossip.

The Gallarija ta' Malta provided another level of social utility in transmitting and imparting information and ideas from the comfort of the home. Considered by some participants as a Maltese trait, taking interest in what is happening outside their family/home, gossip is also seen as an enabler of connectivity and continuity within the social community and rituals.

If an ambulance approaches the square everyone comes out of their *gallarija* to see who has been taken ill or injured. This would initiate a conversation on what was going on

down in the street. It was a matter of the public knowing what was happening without invading anyone's privacy. (P.1).

I consider the *gallarija* as a place where one can communicate with the outside without having to dress elegantly but stay in indoor clothes [*pulit u 'tibqa b'ta ġewwa*]. (P.2)

Because of the *gallarija* my mother used to know what was happening (gossip) in the neighbourhood. The next-door neighbours used to greet and converse with each other through their *gallarija*. (P.3)

The saying goes, “you are inside but still know everything that is going on” [*Qegħda ġewwa u taf kollox*]. Also, we used to say, “If you want to know something, ask someone who stays in the balcony” [*Trid tkun taf xi ħaga saqsi lit-talġhija għax dik dejjem fil-gallarija*]. (P.1)

It is very interesting how the *gallarija* reflects the Maltese character! How curious we are about other people. We like to gossip about everything that moves. (RE)

The *gallarija* was my mum's social place, ...enjoyed staying there because it was a means of communication with the outside. My mother was a very social person before my father died, then her independence suffered as she depended on him. (P.3)

Although the *gallarija* may seem like a space of isolation, it enables vibrant communicative life that draws and connects people with a sense of belonging and community.

The *gallarija* is a space for communication, especially in Valletta where the balconies almost touch each other in narrow streets. No need to go into the street or outside the home but still can conduct a neighbourly chat/conversation with the next door. (LB)

On a personal note, when we moved to Valletta as a family, I am reminded of the bells at St. Dominic Church sounding a tone that somebody died [*mota*] and then someone coming down in the street talking to someone in the *gallarija* asking her if she knows who died, spreading the news in the community. Therefore, the news is spread from one *gallarija* to another as if cascading down the street. (RG)

As soon as you go into the enclosed *gallarija* you are stepping into the social arena. (UMB)

Gendered space.

The Gallarija ta' Malta is characterised as being a woman's domain by most of the participants. The wife/female of the household stayed at home, while the males were the breadwinners. Historically the *gallarija* functioned as a place of social control over women by a male-dominated society and religious institutions.

I remember my aunt (a spinster) who used to spend most of her day in the *gallarija*, reciting the rosary, surveying the surrounding area from there and talking to people in the street. (GB)

Alternatively, the Gallarija ta' Malta was seen as a safe place for the women of the household from the advances of the Knights of the Order of St John.

The connection of the *gallarija* and the female gender, reflects a worldwide control on the female gender. When the *gallarija* appeared during the Order's rule one must consider that institutions were ruled by males. Publicly there was control but privately there was no telling what went on. More so the balconies show power and authority. Malta had 3 authorities – the Order, the Bishop and the Inquisitor. The Inquisitor's Palace was not in Valletta because the Knights did not want the Inquisitor to interfere with their lifestyle. The Knights who were supposed to be celibate had a lady friend (mistress). Maltese folk songs researched by Guze Cassar Pullicino like “Ongi Ongi ongella” related to the relationships between the Knights and women. On the other hand, the Knights gave protection to their mistress. (LB)

During the period of the Knights the *gallarija* became very popular. The knights were a group of men who were not married, but nothing stopped them from looking at Maltese women. Therefore, *gallarija* served an important function of protecting the Maltese ladies from the knights while they still had a social life away from the streets below. (UMB)

This sub theme expanded beyond the concept of the Gallarija ta' Malta in connection with the participants' perspectives on the female's power, position and role in past societies.

My father's goal was that we girls went to university since he did not manage to attend himself. The whole concept of the woman's place at home contrasts with my father's ambition in the 1950s was to push his daughters for education. The social way of life was that the female's place was solely at home. Even when I became a teacher and got

married, I had to resign from my post. At the time nobody believed that women can be a wife, a mother and have a career. (P.2)

The issue of gender was very acute in the past, up to the 1970s-80s, women, like nurses and teachers, were required to stop working once they got married. The issue of gender may have been used in a stereotypical manner; working women were regarded as breaking up the family. Therefore, the *gallarija* was mostly used by women more than men, who spent most of their days at work. The wife/female stayed at home most of the day. We say the husband is the head of the household [*kap*] but the woman was the backbone that controlled what went on in the home. (LB)

Colourful streetscapes and loyalties.

The different hues of the *gallarija* give character and beautify the streets. Many times, the colour of the Gallarija ta' Malta is not the owner's preference but governed by parochial loyalties. The colour makes it possible for the residents to feel in control, and to determine for themselves how their own personal space within the public sphere defines their identity and their loyalties.

What I find especially mind blowing beautiful is the cacophony of *gallariji* you get in Valletta, because the streets are so straight, when the balconies catch the light because they are painted in different colours. (RG)

Colour identifies residents' loyalties. From my experience when I painted my renovated *gallarija* blue, I was told to change it since blue is the colour of the opposing band club [*kazin*] on the other side of the same village. (LB)

It was a means to identify oneself in all levels of society by hosting the flag, banners, [pavaljuni] and light decoration whether during football, feast and politics. (GB)

I am convinced that the *gallarija* was always a dominant architectural element on the streetscape because of the colours. It is an element in the street that you cannot ignore or overlook. (JZ)

Showcase and status symbol.

Historically, owning a Gallarija ta' Malta was regarded as a status symbol but later it became a common architectural element in all types of dwellings, whatever the inhabitants' economic status. The Gallarija ta' Malta is a place for exposure and display and a means of showing off one's style and aesthetic preferences.

There is a small metal loop fixed to the centre of the panel to attach a small glass light fixture [braż tal-ħgieġ] filled with oil or paraffin to be lighted during feasts. The *gallarija* has become a space where you put yourself purposely on display as in a festa. (RG)

The balcony played an important role in the courtship of the past as folklore recounts how the family showed off their young girls who were ready for marriage. (LB)

When I was elected a Member of Parliament for the first time, a small crowd of constituents gathered to cheer and congratulate me in front of my house. I came out in the *gallarija* to thank them as I could not accommodate everyone inside the house. (UMB)

Whereas the element of a showcase is fundamental to the Gallarija ta' Malta there is a lack of consensus regarding its presence signifying a status symbol.

Well in Cottonera, everybody had a *gallarija* whatever their status. The streets are so narrow it is said that people can almost shake hands through the balconies. (P.1)

We never considered it as a status symbol as in our street most of the houses had a *gallarija*. I suppose having a house with Gallarija did show one's family to be "benestante" (well off) with a sizable wealth. (P.2)

Our big house with a *gallarija* was a privilege to have but maybe not a status symbol. (P.3)

The Maltese lifestyle was different in the rural and urban environments. The rural people were frugal and not so show off. The city people were status orientated, merchants, professionals. The city dwellers were always trying to imitate whoever was ruling, the Order, the British. Status symbol in the sense that everybody who was somebody wanted to acquire the latest fashion and styles of the Grandmaster. (GB)

It was also about status symbols. There grew a competitive streak of whose *gallarija* was the best and the biggest. (RE)

Conclusion

This chapter gives an interpretative account of the findings from the participants' narratives, supported by extracts that illustrate and add depth to the study. The following chapter

discusses the findings in a wider context with references to extant literature. It concludes with a summary of the whole study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter concludes the study that explores the strong link between the *Gallarija ta' Malta* and lived experiences, reflections and opinions. It rediscovers cultural practices and influences, adding new insights to the social aspects of this national heritage and icon of Maltese identity

Discussion

The participants' rich narratives affirm the *gallarija*'s role in the Maltese cultural and social history of events, people and ideals, evoking an infusion of collective and personal memories. The *gallarija* evolved for a particular need, confirmed by its etymology, and consequently adopted characteristics of regional typologies. Although a persistent Arab provenance lingers, no other typology like the Maltese balcony exists elsewhere, making the *gallarija* uniquely *Ta' Malta*. The way the *gallarija* was adapted to the residents' needs and to broader social and political needs is an example of 'cultural exceptionalism', that portrays Maltese tendency to nationalise foreign features. Lahoud (2008) maintains that architectural heritage impacts a community's identity through its cultural identity and ancestral philosophy. As a social representation of the Maltese cultural identity the *gallarija* carries historical experiences and past traditions ensuring a degree of continuity for society, especially in a fast-changing present where basic traits and values are lost to the rapid changes of globalisation.

An unexpected insight relates the exclusiveness of the *gallarija* with the geographical insularity of the Maltese Islands, that renders a perpetual mentality of defence and protection for

the people and property. The *gallarija* is associated with the notions of refuge and prospect, providing an observation and a shielded place for the protection and safety of home and family from the “dangers” of the street.

The *gallarija* merits preservation for providing a sense of anchoring and belonging, and establishing the legitimacy of urban identity, besides being an ideal architectural element within urban conservation areas. Conservation efforts will help to preserve the *gallarija* in the Maltese streetscape, although its functional virtues, craftsmanship, versatility and environmental performance may diminish due to political, economic and technological changes. The vulnerability of the *gallarija* to modernisation is highlighted mainly due to the gentrification of Valletta, which pushes elderly residents out, thereby annihilating the multi-generational links. A modern role combining the aesthetics and testimony of a historical past, reimagines the *gallarija* in advertising the Maltese cultural heritage to attract visitors and ensures continuity in the future.

A spatial connotation of surveying the street from above, affords the *gallarija*'s occupants a panoptic gaze essential to participating in public life, and grasping what Lefebvre (1992) calls the ‘fleeting rhythms of urban life’ (p.28), while functioning as ‘windows on the world.’ (Charitonidou, 2020). The concept of surveillance also exposes the Maltese cultural pastimes and social traits of gossiping and of minding everyone else's business.

The static *gallarija* renders itself experientially as a mobile space by the liminal notions of inside and outside, connectivity and isolation, exposure and seclusion, and proximity and distance. This physical place where private and public areas touch one another, but do not belong clearly to one side or the other, enables access and passage for people, sight, artefacts, light and wind between the two realms. The *gallarija* affords company without infringing intimacy, being

close enough to the street to greet a passerby below, but at a distance to engage in a lengthy conversation; near enough to witness a dispute, yet far enough to stay personally uninvolved. The *gallarija* exposes the house's residents to the rest of the community while the house has a space that is more open to the exterior and less isolated.

The Gallarija ta' Malta portrays a social story about verbal, visual and ideological communications and connectivity. Residents use their *gallarija* to get a sense of community, to be part of a larger scene, to observe social life and to reflect on their own. It facilitates acts of engagement with strangers from a distance, and despite its enclosed features, it also invites solidarity and openness from the observer's gaze. Like balconies in other Mediterranean cultures the *gallarija* provides interactions, community building, while sustaining individual identity, regarded by Aronis (2020) as 'a prevalent communicative site in everyday life' (p. 3).

The *gallarija* evolved a functional role, domesticated as an amenity owing to the lack of space inside the home, adapted for social and personal usage according to needs and preferences. The abundance of light attracts every member of the family to use this space for activities according to their lifestyle and life-stage needs. It positively impacts occupants as a place to ease loneliness and emotional distress especially during lengthy home confinement, thus becoming a vital link with restorative views of the outside and a leisure place for resting and relaxing.

Contrasting with the Islamic conceptual use of the *moushrabiya*, hiding women from society, the *gallarija* is regarded as the domain of female residents. The gender/ *gallarija* connection expands into unanticipated territory concerning the emancipation of females in higher education and employment, and the stereotypical beliefs of the female's role in society persistent

into the 20th century. The spatial-gender organisation of the *gallarija* reveals a patriarchal social order and unequal power relations between males and females prevalent in the past.

The striking characteristic of the *gallariji*, by far, is the effect of their colours that defines life in the Maltese streetscapes. The aesthetics of the *gallarija* identify Malta in iconographies and in the tourism aspect. Sometimes unwittingly the colour of the *gallarija* denotes acceptance or rejection within parochial, sports, political and social entities.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of the Gallarija ta' Malta acquired an identity of its own as it evolved through the centuries in relation with the development of a nation to become a marker and a mirror of the unique Maltese identity. Whether the *gallarija* is vernacular, culturally grown or a transplanted branch from foreign cultures, its inherent value is its unique character, design and presence, that the people own with pride, making it a protagonist in Maltese culture.

Previously studied for its uniqueness in architectural style and design, this study explores the *gallarija* from a relational and reflective perspectives to interpret its significance and engagement with people, unearthing nostalgic memories and poignant emotions of a different past. The study delved into the historical, ethnographic and philosophical aspects of the balcony concept, to highlight the universality and uniqueness of the Gallarija ta' Malta.

By employing a qualitative and phenomenological approach, this study gives a 'voice' to the *gallarija* and serves as groundwork for further exploration. This study recommends that to reinforce its cultural value and validate the urgency of its preservation, broader views providing

informed context and meaning of historical process will expand knowledge on social representations, society and identity.

The study includes visual representations of the *gallarija*. Apart from their artistic appeal, such images document the changing appearance of cityscapes and act as descriptions of a slice of time embodying remnants of a past which are now distanced from the present. Like the participants' nostalgic recollections of earlier societies, expressed by one as: "it was a totally different culture back then," imagery draws the spectators' eyes to the historicity of the *gallarija*.

Lastly, there is a human story behind every *gallarija*: conserving and archiving these stories is as valuable as preserving the structure, before it becomes devoid of humans and remains merely an ornamental artifact.

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Appendix 1 – Consent Forms

Residents' Consent Form

Title: Il-Gallarija Ta' Malta: The Maltese balcony as a socio-cultural marker of identity.

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Julia Bianco. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. If I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in Face-to-face interview in which the researcher will open semi- structured questions to explore the views, perspectives and opinions regarding il-Gallarija Ta' Malta. I am aware that the interview will take approximately half an hour and will be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by raising awareness of the socio-cultural features of the Maltese balcony.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be erased on completion of the study and following publication of results.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded.
- ☐ I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded.

10. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym [a made-up name or code – e.g. respondent A].

11. I am aware that, by marking the first tick-box below, I am asking to review extracts from my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs, before these are published. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider these to be necessary.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I would like to review extracts of my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs before these are published.
- ☐ I would not like to review my interview transcript extracts that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs before these are published.

12. I am aware that, by marking the first tick-box below, I am giving my consent for *my identity* to be revealed in publications, reports or presentations arising from this research, and responses I provide may be quoted directly or indirectly.

If I do not agree that my identity may be disclosed in research outputs, my data will be pseudonymised; i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data, in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely destroyed on publishing of the results of the research.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree that my identity may be disclosed in research outputs.
- ☐ I do not agree that my identity may be disclosed in research outputs.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

 Researcher: Julia Bianco
 julia.bianco.09@um.edu.mt

Experts' Consent Form

Title: Il-Gallarija Ta' Malta: The Maltese balcony as a socio-cultural marker of identity.

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Julia Bianco. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. If I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in Face-to-face interview in which the researcher will open unstructured questions to explore the views, perspectives and opinions regarding il-Gallarija Ta' Malta. I am aware that the interview will take approximately half an hour and will be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by raising awareness of the socio-cultural features of the Maltese balcony.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be erased on completion of the study and following publication of results.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded.
 - ☐ I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded.
10. I am aware that, by marking the first tick-box below, I am asking to review extracts from my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs, before these are published. I am also aware that I may ask for changes to be made, if I consider these to be necessary.

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I would like to review extracts of my interview transcript that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs before these are published.
- ☐ I would not like to review my interview transcript extracts that the researcher would like to reproduce in research outputs before these are published.

11. I am aware that I am giving my consent for my identity to be revealed in publications, reports or presentations arising from this research, and responses I provide may be quoted directly or indirectly.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher: Julia Bianco
julia.bianco.09@um.edu.mt

Appendix 2 – Information Letters

Information letter to Residents of houses that adorn a *Gallarija ta' Malta*

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Julia Bianco, and I am a student at the University of Malta, at present reading for a master's in Maltese studies. I am currently conducting research for my thesis titled 'Il-Gallarija ta' Malta: The Maltese balcony as a socio-cultural marker of identity', supervised by Dr Theresa Vella. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail.

The aim of my study is to demonstrate that *il-Gallarija ta' Malta* is more than an aesthetic visual architectural space, by exploring its cultural and historical context within the Maltese identity. Your participation in this study would contribute to a better understanding of the socio-cultural significance of *il-Gallarija ta' Malta*. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to recall lived experiences in regards of having a *Gallarija ta' Malta* in your present or past residence.

Data will be collected by means of a voice-recorded, face-to face interview which will be transcribed verbatim. The text will be anonymised and coded by me, the researcher. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer in encrypted format. This data will be accessible only to myself as the researcher and to Dr Vella, as the thesis supervisor.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data which concerns you to be erased. All data collected will be erased following publication of results. A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep, for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail julia.bianco.09@um.edu.mt; you can also contact my supervisor via email: theresa.vella@um.edu.mt.

Sincerely,

Julia Bianco
julia.bianco.09@um.edu.mt

Information letter to Arts and History Experts

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Julia Bianco, and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Masters in Maltese Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my thesis titled ; Il-Gallarja Ta' Malta: The Maltese balcony as a socio-cultural marker of identity.

This is being supervised by Dr Theresa Vella. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study, based on your contribution to studies on the subject. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to demonstrate that il-Gallarija ta Malta is not merely an aesthetic visual architectural space by exploring its cultural and historical context within the Maltese identity. Your participation in this study would help for a better understanding in how the uniqueness of Il-Gallerija ta' Malta defines the character of Maltese urban landscapes and how it contributes to the Maltese identity. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked for your views, perspective and opinion on the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the Gallarija ta'Malta. . You will also be asked to explore the cultural qualities of the Maltese balcony, how these have evolved and whether the Gallarija ta' Malta still plays a social role or otherwise.

Data collected will be retained securely with access to the researcher and supervisor, and kept until confirmation of results from the exam board for dissertation will be published.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview it will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is published).

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be erased following publication of results.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Appendix 3 – Schedule of Interview Questions

Qualitative unstructured Interviews shall take place with residents and experts who have knowledge in relation to the research question.

The interviews questions for experts who had researched and published on the Maltese balcony are aimed to derive responses to the following:

- Why did the closed timber balcony depicted by local and foreign artists in numerous paintings, views and photographs throughout the centuries, become synonymous with Malteseness?
- When did this national architectural heritage appeared to reflect the Maltese cultural identity and a way of life in the city and towns?
- How did this balcony influenced by various cultures from around the Mediterranean Sea transformed to be uniquely Maltese in name, appearance and physical structure.

The interviews questions for residents are aimed to derive responses on their experiences of living in residences adorning Gallarija ta' Malta.

- What are/were the personal experiences, in relation to the Gallarija ta' Malta, lived by the residents in homes adorning such a balcony.
- What are/were the social and cultural engagements afforded by the Gallarija ta' Malta to the occupants of residences with this type of balcony.

Appendix 4 – Transcripts

Interview with Participant 1- Connie

Date: 11 – 11- 24

P.1-Participant 1

JB-Julia Bianco

JB: How long have you been living in a house with a Gallarija ta' Malta?

P.1: I can safely say all my life; at my mother's house at Lija and Rahal Gdid, and now in Bormla. Our use of the closed balcony was very utilitarian and social. For example, on the day when the cart or truck selling gasoline/*pitrolju* came in the street the housewife would lower the tin and money. I used to observe neighbours although we never used to do it. If you need something from the street, there is no need to come into the street. There were instances when the crowd of children playing and shouting in the street square would be told off by the mother of the newborn because the noise would disturb the baby.

JB: Can you describe how you utilized the Gallarija?

P.1: The Gallarija had numerous uses over the years. At my grandmother's, although there was a closed balcony in the house, we used to spend a lot of time out in the big garden. At my mother's since her house did not have a garden and the Gallarija was overlooking a busy main road (very near to a bus stop), for us children it served as a platform and a lookout. My sister used to catch a bus to work, and as soon as the bus approached the bus stop, we used to call her to go out. My daughter learned her numbers at a very young age while sitting in the gallarija, because the women of the neighbourhood used to play *tombola* in the square in front of our house. I got my

daughter a bingo chart and while at street level, the square community shouted out the numbers, my daughter used to look out for the numbers to mark them on her bingo chart. That was the social way of life in this community. Life is still the same. Nowadays whenever I am looking out of our enclosed balcony the neighbours enquire if anything is wrong or if I require something which reflects the traditional community way of life. For example, if an ambulance is heard approaching the square everyone comes out of the gallarija in concern to see who has been taken ill or injured. This would initiate a conversation among the occupants of the balconies about what was going on down in the street. It was a matter of the public knowing what was happening in the neighbourhood without invading anyone's privacy.

JB: You live in a square surrounded by buildings that have a Gallarija. What events did you witness from the balcony?

P.1: Most vividly I remember the talks given by members of the Society of Museum during a whole week once a year called "*Is-Sajda*". At other times we were able to witness cultural events organised by the local council in the comfort of our home. Other occasions where the Gallarija afforded us the experience of being spectators were the Feast of Rising Christ "*L-Irxoxt*" and "*Kuncizzjoni*". It gave us a vantage point to view.

JB: Did you used to decorate or embellish the balcony on such occasions?

P.1: Yes, we had *pavaljuni* and lights to hang on the balcony. The balcony serves as a showcase and a stage. Mostly it was my neighbours who were more enthusiastic on decoration.

JB: What about your neighbours? How do they utilise their enclosed balcony?

P.1: Interestingly one of our neighbours split the house in two and in order to extend their kitchen space they installed the kitchen cabinets in the Gallarija. Our balconies here are rather big and wide so it was wise to utilise that space. One can easily put a desk and chair in the Gallarija. In fact, my daughter often did her homework there as she used to want to work in an “open” space with a view down the street and upwards to the sky. It acted as a semi-private outside study. I observed that a neighbour uses the space as a sewing room to do her embroidery, having abundant light and not bothered by anyone.

JB: Your anecdote of the community’s reaction to the arrival of an ambulance gives the idea of the Gallarija as a means of communication.

P.1: True, the saying goes “*Qegħda ġewwa u taf kolloxx*”. Also, we used to say “*Trid tkun taf xi haga saqsi lit-talġhija ġħax dik dejjem fil-gallarija*”. When you need to enquire about someone or something ask the person who is all the time in the enclosed balcony. And this reinforces the notion of being an observer on the street.

JB: Regarding colour – Was yours always the same colour? Do you think there is any particular reason why certain colours are chosen?

P.1: Ours has always been dark green, and in the neighbourhood, they were always green, but now the houses in our square have been bought by foreigners and they changed the colour to light blue.

JB: I found an article indicating that the colour of the Gallarija was chosen according to the colours of the patron Saint of the village/town. For example, in Naxxar/Mosta the colour was

mostly blue for the 2 feasts of Our Lady – Il-Vitorja and the Assumption, whereas in Qormi red was more dominant reflecting the martyrdom of Saint George and Saint Sebastian.

P.1: In the Bormla Gallarija, the colour green was domineering. I am reminded of a saying of the past advising careful discretion of which colour to paint the Gallarija because the sun fades it away. Especially the colour red. Obviously the paint of the past was not the same as that of these days.

JB: What about the maintenance of the Gallarija?

P.1: Maintenance is huge and expensive. It has 3 sides to it and requires repair and paint every so often. Another anecdote that I remember is that my infant son used to cry a lot and for a long time, someone told my husband to go upstairs to see what the reason for the incessant crying as she thought I, the mother had abandoned the child all the while I was in the balcony trying to pacify the baby. The balcony was part of our home life of the same importance as the kitchen and bedroom.

JB: Did the Gallarija reflect the financial or social status of its occupant?

P.1: Well in Cottonera, everybody had a Gallarija whatever their status. The streets are so narrow it is said that people can almost shake hands through the balconies.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Participant 2 - Pauline

Date: 4 -12- 24

P.2- Participant 2

JB- Julia Bianco

JB: You lived in a house that had a Gallarija ta' Malta.

P.2: Yes, I grew up and lived in Rabat in a house with a Gallarija that overlooked the main road.

It used to be Buskett Road, now Borg Olivier Road.

JB: Was the Gallarija a special feature in your childhood?

P.2: In those days every house in our street had a Gallarija so it was a common architectural feature. However, for us children it was a special place as we spent a long time in it. Because our street was a main busy road we were not allowed to play or stay out in the street. Therefore, we used to stay in the balcony as if we were outside overlooking what was happening at street level. I have many fond memories of the time we spent there.

JB: What special memories do you recall?

P.2: For example, in the feast of St Peter and St Paul "L-Imnarja" the racehorses for the Imnarja race in Buskett used to pass through our street, so from the Gallarija we used to participate in this event. Residents used to communicate and converse from the Gallarija to people passing below in the street. My mother used this facility a lot. Interaction with the outside while inside having no

need to come out. I believe there was more community spirit in those days. Those in the house were able to still be part of the community by interacting with the outside through the Gallarija.

I am reminded of the time when the herdsman used to come into our street with his goats to sell fresh milk. We used to be on the lookout from the Gallarija for the milkman and used to call my mother upon his arrival. Another memory is of a beggar called 'Luzar' who used to pass in our street. My father always used to give him some money and as soon as we saw this person we used to call out "*Ġej Lizar*". This fact made us children in contact with someone who was different from our social life. In those days things were different, a totally different culture in the 1950s after the war, with a lack of provisions and absence of social services.

JB: How did your mother use the Gallarija?

P.2: When we were allowed to sit on the front doorstep to wait for our father to return from work (Dockyard), my mother used to sit in the Gallarija to mind us, least we cross the road or come to any harm while outside, as the street was very busy.

My mother did not use the Gallarija to do much, but my father had constructed 2 seats to the side of the Gallarija. When still very young we used to stand on these seats to look out on the street but when we grew taller, we used to sit on them to look out.

JB: Were there other children of your age in your street?

P.2: Yes, many. There were our cousins who lived only 3 doors away and who also had Gallarija on their house façade.

JB: How else did you use the space of the Gallarija maybe in winter?

P.2: You are reminding me of how we utilised the Gallarija because there was so much light in that space. We were 3 girls, and we used to play with dolls and tea sets and role play being “mummies” in the balcony. It was a safe inside space but had a lot of natural light and views of the outside.

JB: The Gallarija was glazed or with louvers?

P.2: Yes, glazed but had what we called “*tendini*” that were drawn up and down to protect us from the direct sunlight. There was a ‘*loġġ*’ that afforded more light to come in.

JB: As you are recounting, I am visualising many sensory experiences.

P.2: Yes, so many senses were felt in the Gallarija, ‘*tal pitrolju*’, ‘*tal-hobz*’, ‘*tal-laħam*’ shop not far from us. The warmth from the sun. and the abundance of light. The cries of the vendors of freshly baked daily bread. We used to lower the basket to get our bread. A whole different culture in those days.

JB: Do you consider having the Gallarija in your house as a privilege?

P.2: In my childhood everyone in our street, our friends and relatives had a Gallarija. When I grew older, I became more appreciative of the privilege of having a Gallarija. I used to take the Gallarija for granted but now I wish I could still live in that house because of the Gallarija. Now I have an open balcony.

JB: Do you appreciate the Gallarija now because you would use it for several activities?

P.2: Yes, I would read in it and do my sewing. I wish I had a Gallarija now.

JB: Did your father use it?

P.2: Well, my father did not use the Gallarija as much as us children and my mother. He was more involved with maintenance, upkeep and painting.

JB: What colour was it?

P.2: It was off-white in colour (café-latte) brown.

JB: Do you think the choice of colour was intentional?

P.2: I imagine the choice of colour was according to taste. However, most of the colours were not bright in our street. I'm sure they were all off-white and café-latte and there weren't any blue/green ones.

JB: Is the house still standing with the Gallarija?

P.2: The house still stands, and I had the opportunity to live there when I got married and am sorry I didn't, but the house needed a lot of renovation which discouraged us from staying there. The house was family owned and had a large garden. The house is listed and the Gallarija cannot be removed but conserved.

JB: Do you have any kind of concept from where the Gallarija originated?

P.2: No, I always took it for granted that the Gallarija was purely Maltese.

JB: You have travelled to many countries. Have you seen balconies like our Gallarija?

P.2: No, not exactly like ours. I cannot recall seeing similar ones but I would connect it to Italy. Did not notice any in Spain or Istanbul but honestly was not really looking out for them. Most

probably someone came up with the idea and since it was a very useful feature in the house others copied it.

JB: Some historians attribute this architectural element to the Arab occupancy in Malta while others do not. Have you heard of the word “Muxrabija”?

P.2: I have heard of the word but do not know what it means. I think it is an Arab word.

JB: The whole concept of “muxrabija” is a small window with holes in it that serves as a peeping space for women in Arab culture. So, do you find that the concept and function of the Gallarija is like the veiling and seclusive function of the muxrabija? Or do you think the Gallarija had an opposing concept and function.

P.2: Not at all it was a means of visual communication and a space for exposure rather than to shield the house’s occupants. It does not shield the person from society. I consider the gallarija as a place where one is able to communicate with the outside without having to dress elegantly “*pulit*” u “*tibqa b’ta ġewwa*”.

JB: Did you use to decorate the Gallarija for special occasions?

P.2: Since it was a busy main road the processions of the village patron Saints and Good Friday did not pass from our street. But I remember my father decorating it with light bulbs most probably for Christmas.

JB: Did you consider having a Gallarija in the house as a status symbol?

P.2: We never considered it as a status symbol as in our street there were many houses with a Gallarija. However, I was aware that other houses did not have a Gallarija. Our house came from

my father's side of the family. They had many houses in Rabat with big gardens and Gallarija.

So, I suppose having a house with Gallarija did show one's family to be "*benestante*" with a sizable wealth. My father's family regarded education as a very important aspect in our lives. His two brothers were a doctor and an architect.

JB: Did you used to do your homework in the Gallarija?

P.2: No not really as my mother seated the 3 girls at the dinner table to do our homework under her supervision. My father's ambition for me as the eldest daughter was for me to go to university even though I am a female and having to pay for university. My father's goal was that we girls go to university since he did not manage to attend himself. His brothers were a doctor and an architect, but he was a dockyard draughtsman. His occupation required hard exams and needed to continue his studies.

JB: Interestingly, that the whole concept and your father's ambition in the 1950s was to push his daughters for education and into society. A totally different concept and purpose of the "muxrabija" that veiled and secluded the women from society.

P.2: True, my father's sister became a teacher by a teacher by attending the Teacher's college of the 1950s. The social way of life was that the female's place was solely at home. Even when I became a teacher and got married, I had to resign from my post. At the time nobody believed that women can be a wife, a mother and have a career. Socially my mother was more adapted and knowledgeable than my father about what was going on in the village. She did not work while raising us but was a very good seamstress and craftsperson.

JB: Do you consider the Gallarija a national heritage and a symbol of our identity similar to the Maltese cross?

P.2: I think the Gallarija shows its uniqueness to Malta. I have never come across it in other countries in my numerous travels. In fact, my son converted his open balcony to a closed wooden one. And he makes very good use of the space and the abundant light. He has his computer desk there and works there. If only now, I had a closed balcony too where I could relax and do my sewing in privacy yet enjoying outdoor views.

JB: The Gallarija has been described as on stage (theatre) commanding an audience below. And alternatively, it has been described as participating as an audience to the street theatre. What are your views?

P.2: I distinctly remember feeling elevated from the street while in the Gallarija watching the people passing by and hearing the chatter from my privileged position. One could eavesdrop on people who used to stop under our balcony. I recall witnessing from the Gallarija neighbouring siblings conducting a quarrel.

JB: The fact that Gallarija overhangs over the front door and over the street. It could be said that the balcony acts as a CCTV for the security of the front door.

P.2: Precisely you are reminding me of what my mother used to do every time the doorbell rang. She used to look out of the Gallarija to see who was at the door before opening. It was used as security. She was able to decide who she'll let in and whom to leave out.

JB: How do you see the connection between the Gallarija and your upbringing?

P.2: I have very fond memories of my childhood in Rabat and the Gallarija contributed to my upbringing. We used to visit our aunt down the street and the cousins used to congregate upstairs in the Gallarija in this sort of private/public space.

JB: Did you have any views of the country?

P.2: Not so much as views but on the other side of the street there were big villas with large gardens. In one of these villas lived a family with children of our age who used to visit every now and again. They used to invite us over to play with them in their garden. Therefore, as soon as we saw them, we used to go there, and it was like a treat to run around in the huge and safe space of the garden.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Participant 3 - Tereza

Date: 5-2-25

P.3 Participant 3

JB Julia Bianco

JB: What comes to your mind when you hear about the Gallarija Ta' Malta?

P.3: What comes to mind is my mother's house at Marina Street, Pieta'. Her house was very old. I remember my mother saying that the house was demolished during World War 2 by bombings, but it was rebuilt after the War. My mother got married in 1948. Pieta was targeted because it's a town near Marsamxett area where the Navy had Depots. The house had an enclosed wooden balcony.

JB: So, you've spent your childhood in this house.

P.3: Yes of course. My mother lived in the same house until she was 80 years old then she went to a residential home. We all loved the gallarija but my mother spent a lot of time there. In her later days my mother enjoyed staying in the gallarija because it was a means of communication with the outside. In the evening, she never used to go out, so she stayed in the gallarija, knitting or sewing and looking on to Marina Street, which has always been a thoroughfare going and coming to and from Valletta to the North. It was as if she was right on the street outside with the cars and *xarabanks*, the Msida church right in front of her. For my mother, sitting in the gallarija was the same as if she went out.

I also believe the gallarija was a means of security for her. For example, when the doorbell rang, she used to look out from the gallarija to see who was at the door. She used to communicate with the person. Sometimes when my siblings or I used to call on her she used to drop the door keys from the gallarija. My mother used to sit at the gallarija, she had a sort of shelf to put her things on and had abundant light too and a breeze especially in summer as she used to open the glazed windows. In winter she used to be comforted that she was protected from bad weather but still enjoyed being outside.

The gallarija is not like a window as it projects out and there is a feeling of being closed and safely suspended above the street level. Interestingly when she went into residential care at Casa Arkati in the last 5 years of her life, she had a gallarija in her room too and that made her feel at home. The gallarija at Casa Arkati helped my mother get used to life in residential care. She used to spend most of her days in the gallarija, looking out onto the gardens. I believe it was a sort of therapy for my mother as there was a continuation of her life at her house. There wasn't a great difference to her everyday life. The gallarija was an extension of the house, of the room. There isn't the feeling of being restricted by walls but the gallarija goes a bit beyond the walls of a room.

JB: How did you make use of the gallarija?

P.3: I lived in that house for 25 years until I got married. Basically, we used the gallarija to “*nissindikaw in-nies*” “surveillance’ being above the street afforded us the privilege to see what was going on below. From the gallarija we noticed common trends or lack of them in people/neighbours. In a way, we kept contact with people we knew by watching them without physical contact or intimacy, at an arm stretch. The gallarija was my mum’s social space.

JB: Did the gallarija give you a sense of community?

P.3: Yes, very true. My mother used to hold conversations and greet people from the gallarija. Because of the gallarija my mother used to know what was happening in the neighbourhood – even when there were national events like Carnival and feasts. Marina Street has always been very busy. She used to get the news from the gallarija. My mother in her old age fulfilled her social life from the gallarija.

There was a sense of security in the gallarija because you didn't need to face anyone at street level. But also, it was discreet as there were the blinds that hid you and no one would see you if you did not want them to.

JB: Did your family decorate the gallarija?

P.3: Well not much but she used to participate in the feast of St. Joseph Msida from afar and had the vantage view of the “*gigġifoggu*” without leaving the house. She used to enjoy the feast whilst comfortable at home. The view from our house was spectacular with the Marina, the sea and yachts/boats coming and going.

In the next-door house, there was another gallarija and my mother and the neighbours used to greet and converse with each other. The enclosed feature of the gallarija protected the residents from climatic elements. These days open balconies defeat the scope of protection from the rain and cold.

JB: What colour was it painted?

P.3: Green. Most of them were green. These days they are painting them in light blue.

JB: Do you think there is a significance to the colour?

P.3: Not sure but could be that since there was the torpedo depot right in front at Msida the paint came from there. However, I believe that it was more a matter of which popular colour was in fashion at a particular time. Take the aluminium bronze, gold and silver in the past that were not allowed anymore, now black, white and brown. The trend has changed. So, I believe the paint was used according to the availability and trend.

JB: When do you think the Gallarija originated?

P.3: Not sure! 17th century – during the Order’s rule.

JB: From where did we get the term “gallarija” and what does it mean?

P.3: Well, the word gallarija comes from the Sicilian I believe and means “a showcase” a space to show things. It is like the cloisters in monasteries in Italy. A corridor with arches to look out from. A look out like an art gallery. There is an element of viewing something. Overlooking from a vantage point. What comes to mind too is the balconies in the galleons and ships. The captain overlooks from the stern of the ship like Pirates of the Caribbean.

JB: Did you or your mother use the gallarija as a means for recuperating from illness?

P.3: Besides being a social space for my mother, the gallarija was a means for her mental wellbeing especially when she was not able to go out. In a good sense, having a gallarija at Casa Arkati was beneficial for her to adapt to her new surroundings in her old age. She seemed to have stayed in the same environment. I remember my mother’s gallarija had a door between the room and the gallarija or total privacy of the inside. At the entrance to gallarija there was a door.

JB: How did your mother make use of the gallarija?

P.3: Well, it performed the function of CCTV. But most importantly the social life and mental wellbeing depended on it because my mother, being a widow for a long time, spent many years on her own. One third of her life she was on her own as a widow. When my father was alive my mother was very social but once he died her independence suffered as she depended a lot on him. She never went abroad alone. Therefore, her social life depended on the gallarija once she was widowed. Besides, she did not have many friends. The gallarija was her social life.

JB: Have you seen similar balconies abroad?

P.3: I have travelled a lot and lived in Germany for some time but never seen any balconies like the gallarija.

JB: Do you associate the gallarija with other counters you have visited?

P.3: Perhaps Greece or Spain.

JB: Do you think the gallarija developed because of the regional climate of the Mediterranean?

P.3: Yes, you have a point. You do not find it in the northern countries. It was a novelty for Matla, and everyone saw the usefulness of it. It is a blessing now that there are schemes for preservation and conservation of the gallarija.

JB: What happened to your mother's gallarija?

P.3: The house has been demolished but the façade and the gallarija. These were preserved. The gallarija was expensive to maintain. There was always something that needed to be done to it being made of wood and paint. Rain and sun took a toll on the gallarija and parts had to be

changed every so often. I think that trends colours and materials are adopted according to the technology of the time. Owning a gallarija was very expensive. The wear and tear were huge given my mother's house was right in front of the sea.

JB: Do you think it denoted status symbols?

P.3: Well, the house together with two other houses were owned by my uncles and I suppose having such a big house with a gallarija was a privilege to have but maybe not a status symbol.

JB: Following this interview do you regard the structure of the gallarija differently?

P.3: Yes, since we learned so many aspects from you that we never thought and never knew if it wasn't for this interview. I believe it is an artistic element as much as craftsmanship.

JB: Interesting! Explain why it is artistic please.

P.3: Well in the different colours, in its origin in the craftsmanship, its Maltese identity typical to Maltese. It is a marvellous and aesthetic architectural element that pleases one to look at. I believe it is a work of art.

JB: Do you think it reflects our identity? In what way?

P.3: Of course it does. Firstly, it reflects the Mediterranean social lifestyle and our climate. Northern countries do not appreciate the gallarija in the sense that it is not their culture to be social and spend time outside. Like most Mediterranean people we like to know what is happening and take interest in what is happening outside our family/home. It is our heritage and must continue to be protected. The element of showcase is fundamental to the gallarija. My

mother used to put up the statue of Baby Jesus during Christmas time. The gallarija was to show off and not to hide.

JB: Do you imagine Valletta a world heritage site without the Gallarija ta' Malta?

P.3: No, absolutely not! The gallarija defines Valletta. It would not be the same. The same as I would not imagine Valletta without the bastions. The gallarija is part of the aesthetics of the straight streets of Valletta. The many Gallariji give the streets a pleasing and colourful aspect.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Prof. Lino Bianco

Date: 27 – 11 - 24

LB- Lino Bianco

JB -Julia Bianco

JB: Why did the Maltese call this architectural feature “Ta’ Malta” as if it is uniquely Maltese?

LB: I do not think it is unique, as happens with numerous small nations and states, they borrow or copy something and make it exclusively theirs. Il-Gallarija Maltija is not Maltese. If you look toward Smyrna in Turkey, the balconies there are very similar to the Maltese ones.

JB: Is the Gallarija ta’ Malta regarded as vernacular heritage?

LB: The Gallarija ta’ Malta is not a Maltese vernacular heritage. In Malta, the vernacular architecture one can consider the traditional farmhouse which is very introverted looking with few small windows high on the front façade. Practically life was carried out in the inside courtyard.

Some people try to trace the origin of the Gallarija to the “*muxrabija*”, which is space where one can “*tissindika*” and one can find some literature theorizing that the connection of the Gallarija and the female gender, reflecting a worldwide control on the female gender. Publicly there was control but privately there was no telling what went on. During the Knights’ Rule, Malta had 3 authorities – the Order, the Bishop and the Inquisitor. For example, the reason why the Inquisitor's Palace was not in Valletta was because the Knights did not want the Inquisitor to interfere with the Knights’ lifestyle.

For example, thirty or so years ago one would not venture beyond Strada Vescovo in lower Valletta. Even the Knights who were supposed to be celibate had a lady friend (mistress). Even in the Maltese folk songs researched by Guze Cassar Pullicino like “*Ongi Ongi ongella*” these were folk songs related to the relationships between the Knights and women. On the other hand, the Knights gave protection to their mistress.

When the *gallarija* appeared during the Order’s rule one must consider that these balconies appeared in institutions ruled by males. One only must look at the Grandmasters Palace balcony to see that it was a male gender space. More so the balconies show power and authority. There are open and closed balconies. The open ones restrict one from the outside due to environmental elements (cold and rain). Whereas the closed ones allow one to be outside even when it rains.

Another function that I associate with the closed balcony is timber, not forgetting that wood was a rare commodity in those days. Wood would have been used for more important projects, like the military, building of ships etc. In fact, in houses, they constructed walls 3 feet wide and sacrificed the inside space to minimize the need for long joists and rafters.

It is plausible that the wood used for constructing the *gallarija* could have been recycled wood from galleons. I have seen properties that have recycled wood such as the mast of the ship used as ‘*travi*’. During the Order’s time it was a luxury to use wood whereas during the British, wood became more available. It could be because ships were no longer built of wood but of metal.

JB: What is the link with Turkey?

LB: Although the order and the Ottomon Empire were enemies the Knights took a lot of influence from the Arab culture, namely the language which has its roots in Semantic. The

Ottoman Empire was very powerful. Also, Tripoli was given under the Order's rule together with Malta I 1530. There were relations between the two.

Il-Gallarija historically has always been a social space where you can go out to see what is going on, be outside viewing the surroundings. It is not necessarily a place where to "*tissindika*" but more like an extension of the inside from where to look out and have a relationship with the outside. There is the element of light. It is one thing to open the window and let in the sunlight and another thing where you have a space where you can sit in a chair and view and converse.

Some restaurants in Valletta make use of the balcony space as an extension of the inside, so that the customers can have their meal and watch the passerby in the street. Making full use of a space to have visual contact with the outside.

The Gallarija was a space for communication, especially in Valletta where the balconies almost touch each other in narrow streets. No need to go into the street or outside the home but still can conduct a neighborly chat/conversation with the next door. Another level of social utility.

JB: I found some contradictions on the use of Gallarija ta' Malta in some literature. A particular article describes Gallarija's purpose and function as solely of stealth and secrecy whereas the aesthetics and design with glass windows indicate more of a revealing nature.

LB: True. Written by a Social Urban anthropologist? The issue of gender was very acute in the past, up to the 1970s-80s, women were, like nurses and teachers, required to stop working once they got married. Even in America in the 1980s this applied to the female ambassadors too. Working women were regarded as breaking up the family although even the husband can do that. The issue of gender may have been used in a stereotypical manner. One can say that the Gallarija

is a gender space considering that in the past the wife/females stayed at home. Therefore, the Gallarija was mostly used by women more than men, who spent most of their days at work. The women were at home most of the day.

One must mention that women in the past knew how to use their sexuality to control society, although the power and authority were dominated by men. Women were implicitly powerful and influenced the making of Popes like Borgia and Barbarini. At times it was the female's physique that controlled power. Although sexual activity between the Knights and women was censored it was more compact than these days.

JB: It might be that the gallaija is more associated with women and the female gender.

LB: In a study done by one of my students, Valletta as a fortress at the high end near St. Paul's Parish was associated with the male gender most probably where the palaces, cathedral and auberges are to be found. Whereas at the lower end of the city, Valletta's St Dominic Parish was associated with the female gender. Usually a 'city' as a fortress is associated with the female gender.

The issue of gender infiltrates our lives. We say the husband is the head of the household "*kap*" partly due to the limitations of our language as there is no distinction between the man and the male or the female and the woman. We say "*għandek il-mara*" to indicate both the wife and female animal (could be a female dog!) as objects. It is a matter that is mostly seen in people living in the south. We don't even distinguish between a house and a home, but the head of the home is the woman. The woman was the backbone that controlled what went on in the home. Although the man may be the financial breadwinner.

The issue of gender is only one aspect of looking at the Gallarija. The aspect of communication in the concept of balconies is most important. Like the porch “*parapett*”, an extension of the house.

JB: Do you regard the Gallarija ta’ Malta as important as the Bastions in placing Valletta as a World Heritage?

LB: Valletta became a World Heritage site from the era of Mintoff and yes, the Gallarija is an important element that makes Valletta a World Heritage. No, I do not imagine Valletta without the Gallarija but most importantly I cannot imagine Valletta without the colourful streetscape that the numerous Gallariji create.

The colour also gave a sense of identity. Colour identifies residents’ loyalties. I can vouch for this from my experience of when I painted my renovated Gallarija. It is situated in Misraħ San Mikiel in Zabbar, and my choice was blue before being told to change it as blue is the colour of the opposing band club (*Kazın*) in the same village. The colour of the Gallarija shows one’s loyalty, whether it is football, politics and parish rivalry.

The Gallarija is not only an integral part of Valletta’s heritage, but it is a national heritage. It is the most beautiful element of the city of Valletta.

JB: As an architect by profession, do you find people who nowadays have a Gallarija on their newly built house façade?

LB: Firstly, the financial cost of constructing a new gallarija is enormous. Nowadays the balcony space is being incorporated within the room no longer as it used to be. To make good use of the indoor space the role of the balcony has changed. Nowadays there is no longer a barrier or a

threshold space in the balcony between the inside and outside. The gallarija is a threshold space between the outside/inside, like the antiporta, a space between the front door and the inner glass door. A transitional space. A study was conducted in Ħamrun and the traditional use of 'antiporta'. A very important space of transition

JB. What is the connection between the gallarija which is rather plain and the Baroque style in stone, for example the Palace of De Veredin. Which is very obvious. A marriage or a contrast?

LB. The gallarija happened during the Baroque period but the balcony concept of cantilever architectural element was there long before Baroque. The hanging gardens of Mesopotamia. The concept of the balcony is a statement of power, as an element in certain Palaces to emphasise power. The gallarija is found above the main/front door. Men of power – Pope, Mussolini, Ceaușescu Mandela

The gallarija protects one from the elements. The enclosed balconies are mostly made of timber. The stone balconies pose a problem of heaviness and weight on a cantilever jutting out from the façade. Nowadays stone balconies need to have concrete platforms. When stone balconies are carved, they become lighter because pieces of stone are carved out, rendering the stone balcony lighter. Like the carved "lavur" of the Gozo stone balconies.

JB: Why do you think that in Gozo the Gallarija ta' Malta was not as popular as in Malta?

LB: It is an interesting question. Don't forget that in Gozo things arrived later than in Malta (behind Malta). They had a good stock of stone and good carvers so probably since the introduction of timber until recently they preferred to build in stone.

JB: Can we conclude that the Gallarija evolved in a way as “form followed function” a type of urban vernacular?

LB: No, not really. The *pjazza* is urban vernacular. Vernacular architecture is built out of a need or necessity of the local people. Up to the 20th century there were the “capimastri” stone masons. Capimastri were not architects, but they were equally able and ‘master’s in construction. They knew their trade well and were considered capable as modern-day architects. Take the Mosta and Mgarr churches, these were effectively built by capimastri. Built by the locals for the locals. Vernacular building included the orientation of the house to optimize light for the inside and the shade. Everything was done thoughtfully. In the past if you wanted to have a warm room you had to design the building accordingly. For light, shade etc, particularly the loggia to provide shade used to be situated south facing so it will be shaded in the summer sun but allows the winter light and warmth to infiltrate inside. They had to think about where to dry and preserve their food. Everything changed. In the past the smell of freshly baked bread directed you towards the Bakery. These days that smell sensation is lost as bread is locked in plastic to keep fresh. Even the well or cistern had the function of keeping food from going bad.

JB: In a sense one can say that the gallarija especially in Valletta, evolved as a necessity for the residents of apartments.

LB: True in the Valletta apartments the gallarija was the only opening onto the street in the absence of a roof and courtyard. The street became the theatre – processions, carnival and parades.

JB: The gallarija has been utilized for many purposes – toilets, extension, washrooms too.

LB: Yes, it is advisable to study the older generation of people living in houses with gallarija as the modern usage of the balcony has changed.

LB: Using phenomenology is very interesting and appropriate for this study, although relatively new to the University and to Malta. We are not used to it yet.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Dr Giovanni Bonello

Date: 26 -11- 24

GB: Dr Giovanni Bonello

JB: Julia Bianco

JB: Why did the type of enclosed wooden balcony in Malta acquire its name Ta' Malta?

GB: Primarily the name Gallarija is interesting because it is an Italian word that means something different from balcony. Il- Gallarija in Italian means a long corridor with windows to let in a lot of light. So, in Malta the enclosed balconies became known as “gallarija” because the first one documented in Malta was that of the Grand Palace which serves as an outside corridor for the inside rooms, which in those days one had to go from one room to another. Therefore, the original purpose of the balcony at the Palace was as a corridor albeit outside the building so it was not called a “*balcone*” but “*galleria*”. It evolved as a necessity because there was not an inside corridor. It seems that the Grand Master wanted to have a corridor and since there was no space inside the Palace, commissioned one on the façade. The origin of the word “gallarija” is certainly for me an indicator that the first balcony of the Maltese type is the one at the palace.

JB: Do we have any documents referring to the palace's balcony?

GB: No there are no documents, but before the gallarija at the Palace appeared there was no other structure of the type.

JB: Are there any documents in the Notarial Archives documenting the contract and construction of this balcony?

GB: I doubt there are any documents. It seems like it appeared out of nowhere but with a purpose and function attached to it. The most plausible explanation is that an architect was asked to produce a corridor, and the outside enclosed wooden balcony fitted the purpose. That is why it was not called “*balcone*” but *gallarija* in a case of form followed function. Along with the enclosed corridor came the corbels “*saljaturi*” that were needed to support the *gallarija*. The name *gallarija* indicates what influenced the typology. Obviously as always in Malta if the Grandmaster has one everyone wants to have and imitate him. Although no other *Gallarija ta’ Malta* is as big as the ones around the two corners of the Palace. Others were built in a smaller scale in proportion to the façade of the building. Because socially everyone tries to imitate someone of better social standing. Therefore, after the *gallarija* at the Palace those who had an open balcony made of wood or stone made sure they enclosed it in a similar fashion as the Grandmaster’s one.

In order to accommodate an enclosed balcony, the *saljaturi* (corbels) had to be shortened in length as they could not support the weight of an enclosed wooden structure. There are many examples of corbels that have been shortened. Interestingly, one can tell which enclosed balconies were constructed before the balcony at the Palace from their corbels, and those built after because the corbels were planned to support a *gallarija*, an enclosed one. There was the weight of the wooden structure plus the glazing. Because of the leverage façade. There is a fine example of a house in Street San Kristoforo corner with Street Federico, that has two balconies next to each other, one is open, and one is enclosed. The open one has long corbels while the enclosed one has its corbels shortened. One can clearly see that the weighted enclosed balcony could not be supported on the existing corbels.

JB: In an article by a sociologist Vakili Zad, the Gallarija ta' Malta was described as a structure of stealth and to hide the knights' illicit sexual behaviours, do you agree?

GB: Well, I do not agree with that point of view. Maybe there was an element of vanity but the main and useful function of the gallarija is that of being outside and inside at the same time. In the privacy of the home with a public view.

JB: The gallarija is very often associated with the *muxrabija*. In fact, some writers attribute the Gallarija ta Malta to the *muxrabija*.

GB: I do not think that the Grandmaster looked towards the *muxrabija* to build his corridor at the Palace. The concept, size and function of these structures are so different.

JB: Do you think that the Gallarija ta' Malta was a status symbol? An expression of vanity?

GB: Yes, status symbol in the sense that everybody who was somebody wanted to acquire the latest fashion and styles of the Grandmaster. The idea of imitating those in power/authority is innate in humans.

JB: Therefore, do you see a sequence in how the Gallarija ta Malta evolved in urban buildings?

GB: The first was at the Palace and later it became fashionable to have an enclosed balcony. Open balconies can be found everywhere; Spain, Italy but enclosed balconies with glass panels were rare.

JB: In travellers' forwards and guides the Gallarija ta Malta is seen as an ornament to the façade. In one instance describes as venetian.

GB: I see no connection to Venice as they are rare in Northern Italy. I know of one in Rome. The house where Bonaparte's mother used to live has an enclosed balcony very similar to the Gallarija ta' Malta. It is an exception to the rule.

JB: Again, why was this balcony given our identity Maltija.

GB: It was called Maltija simply because you only find it in Malta. Like "ghonella" you only find it in Malta; id-dghajsa Maltija and dghajsa Ghawdxija. There are some characteristics that you only find in the Gallarija ta' Malta and nowhere else. When an object is identified with a persona geografika it takes on the identity of the place. The enclosed balcony became extensively popular only in Malta. Although our proximity to Sicily, the enclosed balcony did not take root there. One finds many open balconies but hardly any ones similar to the Gallarija ta' Malta.

JB: I have encountered a lack of information and documents recording the Gallarija ta' Malta.

GB: Well, one should find contracts on buildings that mention a balcony, but these do not specify if it is an open or enclosed one.

JB: The image of the Gallarija ta' Malta has become synonymous with Malta – mostly used in tourism as a souvenir.

GB: Yes, one identifies the Gallarija with Malta. Now the enclosed balcony has become "Ta' Malta". Undoubtedly, the Gallarija identifies with the Maltese. Il-Gallarija ta Malta has become typically Maltese. Even in iconography one can tell the location if there is a Gallarija ta' Malta in the picture. One would immediately identify Malta through the presence of the Gallarija. Il-Gallarija are not like the ones in Spain or Portugal.

JB: There are similar types in Lima, Peru taken there by the Spanish. But those examples have lattice work, not glass.

GB: The use of glass windows is a recent introduction. The balconies used to be covered in tarp (*inċirata*) because glass was expensive and not easily available. Also, glass used to be manufactured in small square panes “4 x 4”. In the early days of the Gallarija ta’ Malta there were no glass panes, but they were covered with *inċirata*.

JB: In what era was glass introduced to Malta?

GB: In the Order’s era but in the small square pieces. A window aperture was made of small squares of glass panes.

JB: In Iconography, engravings and watercolours of the 19th century the Gallarija ta’ Malta dominated the streetscape scenes.

GB: True, by the time of the British in the 19th century the Gallarija was firmly stabilised in Valletta’s streetscapes. I concentrated most on the Order’s era. However, from then to today the Gallarija has not changed. First, it was covered in “*inċirata*”, then in small glass panes and later with bigger glass windows.

JB: It evolved according to the technology of the time.

GB: Yes.

JB: What were the special and cultural functions of the Gallarija? Ganado says that the Gallarija was used for entertainment like modern TV.

GB: Yes! I remember my aunt (a spinster) who used to spend most of her day in the Gallarija, reciting the rosary, “*tnemmes*” from the Gallarija, and talking to people in the street from the Gallarija because she was in and out at the same time. The Gallarija had the function that while one is in his/her castle, there is communication with what was going on outside. The Gallarija was a means of communication with the neighbours when life was quieter and calmer. It was a social place.

JB: What about the decorations?

GB: It was a means to identify oneself in all levels of society by hosting the flag “*pavaljuni*” and light decoration whether during football, feast and politics.

JB: How is the Gallarija represented in the Maltese Collection memory? Most of the writing I came across points to its origin to the Arabs. Why is it so?

GB: I don’t believe its origin is from Arabs. The *muxrabija* may have some characteristics of the Gallarija but its function and structure are totally different. When viewing the grandiose and glorified Gallarija at the Palace one can find no comparison at all with *muxrabija*. One would never think of the *muxrabija* as the prototype of the Gallarija at the Palace which is monumental.

JB: Then do you see any European influence in the Gallarija?

GB: No, I don’t think the gallarija has any European influence. In Malta a balcony is found in all the houses and buildings. Whereas in Europe the enclosed balcony is rare, very rare. It would be interesting to locate the architect who designed the first one. Even the Italian do not use the word gallarija for a cantilever outside structure. They use ‘balcone’.

JB: Can you imagine Valletta (a World Heritage Site) without the Gallarija ta' Malta, although the city is widely renowned for its fortifications.

GB: Very difficult to imagine Valletta without Gallarija. Whereas the fortifications are stunning and monumental even on a global scale, the Gallarija is more modest, rendering it in a minor level. The Gallarija has become characteristic of Valletta. Valletta cannot be imagined without the Gallarija. The traditional buildings in towns and villages would not be as attractive if someone did not come up with the idea of the Gallarija. The Gallarija profiles Valletta and old towns in Malta.

JB: How does the Gallarija ta' Malta reflect the Maltese lifestyles?

GB: The Maltese lifestyle was different in the rural and urban environments. The rural people were frugal and not so show off. The city people were status orientated – merchants, professionals. The city dwellers were always trying to imitate whoever was ruling the Order, the British. Malta being a small island with foreign occupiers most of its history. Therefore, the Maltese always strove to imitate the rulers.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Prof. Richard England

Date: 9 - 12 - 24

RE- Richard England

JB- Julia Bianco

JB: I was drawn to a photograph that you took of a series of Gallariji ta' Malta. What do you think was the origin of the Maltese Balcony?

RE: The origin of the wooden Gallarija is very difficult to place because a lot of people are under the impression that the modern balconies in Malta are much older than the Spanish miradors or the Arab *muxrabija*. It is not a fact. The first modern balconies which appeared were those that appeared in the late 17th century and if I remember correctly Giovanni Bonello makes a very good point about that. All the pictures and paintings of the city of Valletta prior to the late 17th century do not feature any closed wooden balconies.

The first painting that depicted a Gallarija was near the Manoel Theatre in Old Theatre Street. Then in the late 17th century, the Gallarija became a ceremonial stage for the Grandmaster, like watching the parade from the balcony. So, we don't know exactly how the design evolved. Could be the craftsmen who came with the Knights. They had very skilled carpenters.

It is interesting how the Gallarija assumes a "visual threshold" in a way as opposed to a physical threshold like the portico – between the front door and the "*antiporta*" where there is space where you are neither in nor out. The balcony also has a threshold between inside and outside. The inside private world and outside the public world. The balcony gives one the means to peep

into the public world without the public world peeping on to the private. It also makes part of the social structure of how people lived. It also was a way from where “*stajt tnemmes*” without the public seeing you.

It was also a sort of intermediate space between outside temperature and inside. We know very little about that because before all balconies were made of stone. Wonderful examples of stone carved balconies are in Għarb, Gozo. There is little writing about the Gallarija besides those articles written by Dr Giovanni Bonello who is an expert historian.

J: How do you see the Gallarija reflecting the Maltese identity?

R E: It is very interesting how the Gallarija reflects the Maltese character in the way how curious we are about other people. We like to gossip about everything that moves. It is a perfect place to sit out and watch what is going on in the street.

An interesting point is when the first wrap-around balconies came in Valletta. The impressive and huge closed balconies of the Grandmaster Palace of Valletta.

J: Why do we call it ta' Malta?

R E: We call it ‘*ta' Malta*’ because in a way it architecturally became part of the typology at this stage. It was also about status symbols. There grew a competitive streak of whose gallarija was the best and the biggest. It is the same with parish churches I remember when at 22 years of age I designed the Manikata Church the villagers did not like it as they wanted a bigger Coppola than Imgarr. 12 years in the making and total cost was 20,000 Liri and most of it was voluntary work, for a population of 500.

History eradicates that which is no longer convenient to know or remember.

J: What do you think about the comparison of the Gallarija with the *muxrabija*?

RE: The whole concept of the *muxrabija* is totally different from the Gallarija totally. There is another interesting feature of the Gallarija – the “*saljaturi*”, the corbels which besides the supernatural meaning in the gargoyles, the craftsmanship of the Maltese ‘*scarpellini*’ was incredible. Most of the corbels are carved very intricately.

JB: Most of the popular non-academic literature targeted for tourism refer to the East and North Africa as influencing the design of the Gallarija.

RE: I do not agree that the Gallarija could have originated from the Arab influence because the Gallarija appeared in the late 17th century and there is a gap of 500 years since the Arab occupation of Malta. The few remaining *muxrabija* in Malta are the only architectural elements examples of the Arab occupation. It does not work out that after a gap of 500 years the Gallarija is attributed to the Arab influence. It is very weird how the Arabs who were renowned for their craftsmanship left nothing in Malta except the gravestone of Marmuna. Wherever the Arabs occupied they left lovely carvings. It could be that the religions of Christianity and Islam clashed and anything Muslim was wiped out by Christians.

JB: Where does the Gallarija fit in the Maltese Collective Memory?

RE: Well, it gives the impression of people who want to be reserved but still able to observe the public. Very much a Maltese thing - the gossip! Another interesting feature is how it is used for decorations during feasts, political events, riots and carnivals.

JB: Do you regard the Gallarija as national heritage?

RE: Yes of course. There are conservation and preservation aids to protect this heritage.

Although there was a horrible period when the wood was replaced by aluminium. Absolute disaster to get away from the high maintenance work required. There is also a special type of wood used. Red deal, *tal- Aħmar*.

JB: What are your views on the colours used to paint the Gallarija ta' Malta?

RE: Well, Malta has always been colourful by nature. Malta could be said to be monochromatic because of the stone, but once you enter churches, the *dghajjes* and the Gallarija – all give a colourful scenery. There is a lovely building, the House of Four Winds, which is a considerable high rise with many Gallariji. The inspiration of the print you showed me came from the façade of that area near Hastings Garden facing Marsamxett.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Prof. Reuben Grima

Date: 29 -11- 24

JB- Julia Bianco

RB- Reuben Grima

JB: The scope of my study is to explore the social and cultural significance of the Gallarija ta' Malta. I will be using a phenomenological approach rather than an architectural approach. Not concerned with the scientific and factual aspect but basing my observation on visual representations and interpretations.

RG: That is very interesting. Theresa Vella who happens to be your supervisor has a very interesting article on paintings depicting Pjazza San Ġorġ and how it has been transformed over the years. This includes the changes that happened over the years to the Grand Master's Palace. Both herself and Giovanni Bonello have puzzled over the origin of the Gallarija. The paintings are valuable documents that give us indications of the period and dates and are very valuable for your study.

JB: Another source I am researching is the travelogues and visitors guide to Malta in the 18th and 19th centuries to study their interpretation of the Gallarija ta' Malta.

RG: One strand in this topic is the comparisons that get made about the Gallarija with Tunisia, with Spain, and with Ottoman Turkey. To what extent are those independent evolutions, or did one inspire the other? Did I mention that I live in a house with three Gallariji ta' Malta?

JB: Yes, you did say, and I would like to take your point of view as a resident too. However, on the idea that cultures influenced each other in the evolution of the Gallarija. Henry Frendo, in conversation with an architectural student for her dissertation, says that there is the possibility that Maltese emigrants who settled in Izmir took the idea of the Maltese balcony to Izmir (Smyrna) in the late 19th and 20th century.

RG: That is very interesting! But what about the balconies in Istanbul where you find a very similar idea? By no means is it limited to Izmir. You have variations and they are not identical. The ones in Izmir are probably quite close to the ones found in Istanbul but the closed balconies in Istanbul were already present before the 19th century and were even a feature of the architecture of Tunisia. Similar balconies are also present in Spain.

JB: Why did the closed timber balcony in Malta take the specific name of Ta' Malta?

RG: You are reminding me of what Giovanni Bonello puzzled over. Before tackling why we call it "Ta' Malta", there is the puzzle of why we use the word "gallarija". The Palace closed balcony was perhaps the first one and may have given rise to the name, as it functioned as a *galleria* in the sense it was used in Italian, meaning an elongated connecting *loggia* or corridor.

The word Gallarija is so embedded in our discourse for example "*Toqgħod Gallarija*" an expression meaning "sitting on the fence" without taking any action one way or the other. Not taking sides. Coming back to your question "Ta' Malta", the Maltese can be somewhat as the Italian word indicates "*Auto referenzjali*". We are "self-referential" we call the siege of 1565 – the Great Siege, we call the fault that crosses Malta the Great Fault. Prof. Mallia Milanese used to tell us in an ironic sense that everything the Maltese do is "Great". So likewise, the eight-pointed cross becomes the Maltese Cross. We love adopting. And the gallarija becomes the Maltese

Gallarija partly due to this insular, self-referential outlook. It is the same way that we imagine that the festa is a Maltese invention and then we go to Spain and Sicily, and we say, “Goodness they copied our festas!”. They copied our Good Friday procession! Naturally there would be little variation from all the examples we mentioned. The closed balconies in the Ottoman world are not identical to ours.

JB: So, when did we start calling it Ta’ Malta? In which period?

RG: I suspect and I’m taking a leap here that this type of romanticization would have happened during the British Colonial period. Remember the streetscape of Valletta was not thought of as Maltese. Valletta was thought of as a cosmopolitan, multicultural, pan-European city. The architectural styles are making references to Rome, France, and elsewhere. They were not trying to create a distinctive Maltese stamp in Valletta. And the closed timber balconies are a part of that fabric and therefore were not invented as Maltese. At the time they were not even thought of as Maltese or Ta’ Malta. I think it is safe to say that the name stuck during the period of the British Colonial period (1814-1964). Somewhere in that window.

JB: The Gallarija ta’ Malta was so ubiquitous in Valletta that it must have impressed the visitors landing at the Marina in Valletta.

RG: True, the fact that there were so many visitors in the Grand Harbour, including artists who painted Valletta scenes, documents it mainly in the 19th century.

JB: Would you say that Valletta is such a unique city without the balcony?

RG: Well Valletta has many things, and the city was Valletta before the closed timber balcony. Valletta as we know today would not be Valletta without the closed timber balcony. It has

become - putting it in the jargon of cultural heritage – the gallarija has become one of the character- defining elements of Valletta. What I find especially mind-blowing and beautiful is the cacophony of balconies you get because the streets are so straight. When the balconies catch light, and because they are painted in different colours, I can spend hours just photographing these balconies.

JB: What does the Maltese balcony tell us about our identity?

RG: The statement that the Maltese balcony reflects our identity is rather obtuse and not clear. Would it be a digression if we stopped and thought through what a gallarija is first and foremost, and why and what does it do? Why is it useful and why do people spend so much money on having it?

To begin with, where do you have it? For instance, in Gozo there are not many Gallariji ta Malta. You tend to find it in urban, densely inhabited environments. Where space and light are at a premium. So, what does it do? It extends your space out onto the streets, like an extension of your room out over the street space. You are “stealing” a few square meters. It creates spaces in many of these houses where light is limited. In the balcony there is abundance of light. It creates additional filters from the external conditions. Many of the balconies of comparable structure in the Islamic world – North Africa and so forth, usually have shading screens not glazing.

Occasionally in Malta you do see examples with Venetian blinds which provide shade and let air flow through. The Tunisian ones have a lattice, so they are also ventilating, especially for the summer. There is also the idea, particularly in Islamic society, and we also had it in Malta, of being able to see the street without being seen. So those lattices would permit that. So, these are all functions that this architectural form could perform. It also afforded a vantage position onto

the street. Here comes the idea of the “*muxrabija*” and the notion of “seeing out without being seen”! But in the case of the Gallarija ta’ Malta one is putting oneself purposefully to be seen as in a festa. The Gallarija has also become a space where you may put yourself on display.

JB: I have a problem with the comparison of the “*muxrabija*” and the Gallarija. The concepts of their uses are totally opposite to one another. One is to veil and to shield while the other is to expose and to show off. The small number of examples of “*muxrabija*” present in Malta date back to before the Middle Ages, possibly to the Arab period with the Islamic religion. Whereas the Gallarija can be dated to (through iconography) early modern times where the culture was more pan-European and governed by the principles of the Catholic Church and a Chivalric Order of Knights that crusaded and defended Europe from Islam.

RG: In Merchant Street there is a good example of one that has Venetian blinds (*persjani*).

JB: Ronan describes collective memory as a dual process of remembering and forgetting. Could it be possible that we have named the closed balcony specifically “*ta’ Malta*” to move away from the Islamic/Arab occupation/influence in Malta? Like the case of the Arab artifacts and archeological findings that were hidden away in the Domus Romana.

RG: Yes, very true and you are right. Another example is the Wembley exhibition in 1924, which was devoid of Arab artifacts. The time of Sir Temi Zammit and politicians like Strickland who denied the Arab influence on Maltese culture. It could be that the closed balcony was labelled Maltese as a political statement. These views tie in with the notion of ‘cultural exceptionalism’. We want to be unique and different. The name “*Ta’ Malta*” stuck when politically the Maltese and British mentality did not want any connections with North Africa and the Arabs. It is also true that in the British period Malta wanted to be seen as more European.

When I see examples of the Gallarija ta' Malta that we have in Merchant Street I wonder if originally, they were all like that and maybe only later were glazed. Therefore, one questions whether it was more common to have Gallariji with louvres making it more like a *muxrabija* in the way it functions. Glazing makes you very visible. Another detail in the older ones is the design of timber paneling and architectural elements. The design may have been modified in the British period, as earlier the bottom timber part was made of vertical pillars or columns as opposed to the paneling and carved roundels. These variations may give an indication of the date of different examples. The ones without paneling are older.

I want to mention also that some of the older examples of the Gallarija in Valletta had a small opening in the lower part of the timber frame that had a sliding door purposely included for the benefit of small children; not tall enough to look out through the upper glazed part of the Gallarija. This is a sort of peep hole and was very practical for preventing children from climbing dangerously on the balcony ledge.

JB: According to the article by Giovanni Bonello glass was expensive and not easily available and was produced in small squares, the size of a mobile not in large sheets that could be cut to size.

RG: Therefore, that is why in some examples the glass is cut in half, into smaller panes, and there was probably more use of timber louvres in the *seicento* and *settecento*.

JB: The timber was not a native raw material; however, the trend of wooden balconies became very popular.

RG: Timber was largely imported of course.

JB: Is there the possibility that due to scarcity and cost of the timber, wood used in the Gallarija was recycled from the Order's galleons during the British period?

RG: Wood was not thrown away. It was recycled but not necessarily all the balconies used recycled wood. Finding evidence for balconies that recycled wood would be very difficult. To find recycled wood you will have to look for signs of old dowels and joinery that are not part of the construction. A similar example of recycled timber is in the floorboards in Auberge de Provence in the Punic Hall. To substantiate this claim, one must look for traces of joinery that do not make sense in their present location.

JB: Another claim by Prof. De Lucca is that it was the Ottoman slaves of the Order that originally introduced the idea and design of the Gallarija ta' Malta.

RG: Here you have an opposite idea of the previous claim that the Maltese immigrants took it to Izmir. After all, Mediterranean countries have the same climatic conditions. Therefore, a design that works well in one place can work elsewhere whether you are a Muslim or Christian. It is not a surprise that a functional design works well in several locations with similar climates. It is rather curious that very few examples of the closed balconies are found in Sicily and Italy. In fact, the only example of a closed timber balcony that I know in Rome is on Palazzo Bonaparte, on the corner of Via del Corso with Piazza Venezia. Extremely rare in Rome.

JB: Do you consider the Gallarija ta' Malta as heritage in its own right?

RG: Yes, not only because it has a pedigree that may go back to the 17th century but also for its modern-day significance as a character-defining element of the Maltese streetscapes. It has become a part of the social interaction and lifestyle of the Maltese.

JB: Glazing makes you very visible. The *persjani* “works” more like a *muxrabija* as it hides you.

RG: A lot of the interaction between the neighbors who live in a street with Gallariji ta’ Malta happens in the Gallarija. In my neighborhood I can still see people who lower the basket (*qoffa*) for delivery of fresh bread by the baker (*tal-ħobż*). They even lower the money for the seller. Communication goes on between the person in the Gallarija and the person in the street of the latest news/gossip.

JB: The utility of the Gallarija became pronounced during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown.

RG: Exactly, people could not go out but still participated in what was going on outside.

JB: The Gallarija affords a view of the spectacles that go on at street level. The procession, a political gathering and the parades.

RG: On a personal note, when we moved to Valletta as a family, I am reminded of an occasion when the bells at St Dominic’s Church sounded the “*mota*” a sign that somebody died (or funeral) and then someone came down the street talking to someone in the Gallarija, telling her if she knows who died, spreading the news in the community. Therefore, the news spread from one Gallarija to another as if cascading down the street. There is interaction between the outside and inside but still maintaining privacy of the home. In Maltese we say “*qraba u ħbieb sal-bieb*”. The Gallarija in a respectable way that permits one to interact with the outside while still maintaining privacy.

JB: The most interesting thing about interviewing you is that I regard you as an “expert” but also as a “resident” of a house with a Gallarija.

RG: There is a book called “Who needs Experts” in the light of the Faro Convention, edited by John Schofield (2014). The argument is that if you know someone who is homeless and lives under a bridge – he *is* the ‘expert’ of homelessness not the professor at university. The knowledge of that place from the person who is homeless is more valuable than anybody else – a form of expertise. The residents in a sense are the experts of what it means to live in a house with a gallarija.

There is a whole issue of how the soundscapes of these urban areas are changing. So, in Valletta there has been a dramatic increase in tourism since the COVID-19 pandemic, also because of the way it is being managed, and the policies being applied, which encourage more tourist activity.

You have quite poor control of noise/sound in Valletta, and there was legal notice a couple of years ago which allowed music to be played until 2AM. How is this connected to the Gallarija?

The connection is that any traditional aperture being a Gallarija or a window has a low sound proofing capacity. As part of the background to this issue, there is also a directive across the EU which encourages the improvement of passive climate control measures. There is strong encouragement of installation of more double glazing. The danger of this is that traditional apertures like the Gallarija, and other timber work, will come under pressure to be replaced.

Therefore, on two accounts the Gallarija is under pressure; (1) to improve insulation properties to comply with the directives and (2) to improve sound proofing because there is much more noise pollution, especially at night. It’s becoming a nuisance. Whereas the idea of the Gallarija was partly one of permeability. Now we are under pressure to create more isolation. There are these big tensions. Traditionally the Gallarija ta Malta windows had quite thin glass, the woodwork is not a perfect seal, it is not soundproof, so the outside noise is heard as if it was inside. The Gallarija is very physically permeable.

JB: What comes to mind is Lord Byron's Valletta impression "smells bells and yells". How true is it presently?

RG: Yes true. That happened in 1820! Now if you're trying to sleep at night you are woken up by a couple of people walking home from an evening out at the bar at 3am. The way the acoustics work in Valletta does not help, because you have stone floors, pavements and stone walls in narrow streets. The sounds reverberate and from inside you hear it as if you are out in the street. The people in the street are practically indoors with you.

JB: For ventilation, the '*purtelli tal-gallarija*' were left open to allow a breeze to enter, especially on summer nights.

RG: Absolutely. This is really very important. The '*purtelli*' are like a sailing boat where the sails are adjusted accordingly to capture the breeze to move the boat forward. It allows you a lot of flexibility and adaptation to the specific conditions, precisely as you are saying. The Gallarija louvres may be used to block out sunlight during the days in summer, and to encourage cool air currents during the night to get in.

Now recently, in the past three years, with climate change I have been finding that even at night the air in summer in July and August does not cool enough to have a cooling effect when you open at night, partly because of the increasing temperature but also because air conditioners are pumping hot air out into the street from the outside compressor.

So, the air in the street is becoming hotter and staying hotter during the night to the point that you don't cool the house. I used to be convinced that using passive measures is enough, but I am reaching a point where we must install an A.C. because it is cruel if one cannot sleep well during

summer. I am seriously giving up and introducing A.C. in the house. Note the difficulty and complexity of installing A.C. without damaging the fabric of the house.

JB: So how is it that you have three Gallariji? Was it your parents' house or did you buy it yourself?

RG: I will show you on google maps the façade of my house, which dates from the early 18th century. If you would like to see the view from inside you are welcome. Another detail which I haven't mentioned yet is the small metal loop fixed to the centre of the panel to attach the lighting (*mixghela*), they used to put a small glass oil-lamp (*brazz tal-ħgieg*) with oil or paraffin to be lit during feasts, "*L-armar tal-festa*". Nowadays my neighbours decorate with '*pavaljuni*'. This metal loop allowed the fixing of a bracket which would hold a glass oil-lamp, identical to how they used to light up the facades of churches during feast days.

JB: How do you use the Gallarija in everyday life?

RG: In one of the balconies, we hang our laundry. We open the *purtelli* and windows to dry clothes as the washing machine is on the same floor. Another gallarija is half open and half closed – most probably was open originally but previous owners decided to close part of it. The last one – we use it to look out on processions on feast days.

JB: The Gallarija is also used to demonstrate one's loyalties in politics/football, etc.?

RG: True... in bigger blocks of flats/apartments the Gallarija is the only outside space that one can call his/her own for interactions with the street, as most do not have a roof or terrace. The Gallarija is the only space for interaction with the street. The only permeability with the outside.

JB: There are instances and examples where a lavatory and kitchen were installed in the gallarija due to lack of space as an extension of the room.

RG: Yes, Paul Cassar wrote about that and about the carved apotropaic corbels (*saljaturi*) supporting the Gallarija especially in upper St. Paul's Street. The Gallarija was handy because the drain was placed externally on the façade, down to the street.

JB: Are you aware that in the Sette Guigno 1919 riots, the Gallarija was used as a place of defense as the house owners drilled a hole in the floor of the gallarija to insert a rifle in case the front door was attacked to defend the house?

RG: Interesting! I was not aware. They were some extreme circumstances. Another intriguing characteristic is that many examples show that the *saljaturi* were shortened at some point.

JB: Could it be that the original open balconies were wider and of stone/timber. Why did they have to be shortened?

RG: There is the need for more research when and why the corbels were shortened. It is obvious that many balconies were shortened, some examples of 17th century and 18th century balconies were shortened for some unknown reason. Maybe they realized that smaller balconies were safer. There are several examples of wide Gallariji, whereas others are less wide. Usually, they are 70cm wide. Some are closer to 1m.

JB: What drew you to living in Valletta? Was the Gallarija a deciding element?

RG: Yes definitely, the Gallarija was one of the elements that helped me decide to live in Valletta. The house that I was looking for had to have these characteristic elements. Among the characteristics were the stairs and the Gallarija.

JB: If you were to live in a house without a Gallarija would you miss that space?

RG: I would most certainly miss the Gallarija. Around the corner we have a smaller Gallarija that in winter months, when there are less sun hours, my wife and I start the day by having breakfast together at a small table in this Gallarija and try to finish a crossword. Only a brief time of 10-15 minutes every morning as our own special space. Then during the day, it is a space to read.

Structurally there are those that are supported by corbels with the floor made of stone slabs (*xriek*). This type of flooring requires more attention to the furniture one can put inside the gallarija, as the stone slabs can easily break.

JB: Does your family appreciate the Gallarija as you do?

RG: Yes, both my children are passionate about Valletta and its heritage. Another interesting element of the Gallarija is the metal fittings that nowadays are hard to find. When we had to change one of the balconies, I made a point of keeping the original hinges “*firrol*” and “*ganċetti*” as their style was different ‘*mhux b’ganċ imma b’boċċa li tidhol go slot u tillokja.*’

JB: In your street are there still elderly people living in houses with Gallariji?

RG: Yes, there are still but getting less. It is a permeable space where you are in the comfort of your home, wearing indoor attire but still can converse with someone outside. The Gallarija

breaks down the boundary between the public and private. It is also part of the social capital of a person, a platform from which one can voice an opinion. In Valletta people are known to use this space as a stage (*palk*). If a woman has a quarrel or argument with the husband, she might use the Gallarija to tell everyone about it. So, the woman comes out on the balcony and starts shouting all sorts of things against her husband, so everyone in the neighbourhood hears her. It is a regular occurrence, maybe once a month there is such a drama in the neighbourhood. One becomes aware that this happens on purpose, since the woman knows very well that there will be an audience listening to her.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable in my study.

Interview with Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici

Date: 11-11- 24

UMB- Ugo Mifsud Bonnici

JB-Julia Bianco

JB: You were for several years the Minister of Education and Culture. What is the Heritage Cultural Act?

UMB: Yes, I piloted the Act in parliament but cannot be credited for enacting it. Malta had and still has a lot of culture but did not have a law regarding culture. There was a law regarding the set-up of museums. There also was a good number of people who appreciated the ancient Maltese culture. For example, Sir Temi Zammit and Vincenzo Bonello. These were the people that created the Maltese Museum. There was already a huge appreciation for the past Maltese Culture, but this knowledge and appreciation was not disseminated enough. The academics who studied archaeology and history were aware of the rich cultural heritage that Malta possessed but the man on the street was somewhat ignorant. It was imperative to promote the ‘culture of Culture’ in the mind and lives of the Maltese citizens. Before, the mentality was that there was no place or use of antiquities within Maltese society. The mind set was that antiquities and artifacts were objects of the past. There was the need for the citizens to appreciate that everything and anything pertaining to our heritage has a value because it pertains to the culture of humankind. It translates into the fact that everything of the past was the work of man.

JB: What are your views on how the Gallarija ta’ Malta portrays our identity?

UMB: Il-Gallarija ta Malta is part of our identity for two reasons. Firstly, il-Gallarija ta Malta developed into a civilization that had buildings in stone and a strong culture of fortifications. We are constantly defending ourselves from the “others”. Malta, being a small defenceless island in the middle of the Mediterranean and the Muslims used to drop in to attack the place. There were times when the Muslim resided in Malta and left, while on other occasions they occupied these Islands. Therefore, our culture from earliest times was one of defence and of isolation, being an island. As opposed to the countries on the continent, Malta did not have a level of protection from the neighbouring countries with fixed boundaries and frontiers. Malta was rather an isolated land that had to relate to everyone who came and visited the Islands. It must be said that many times not the ideal visitors landed in Malta (Turks). We forever had a mentality of “insularity” of being an island not part of a continent. This mentality influenced how we think of ourselves and our culture. Always on the defence because we do not have protection from neighbours.

JB: Therefore, can we safely say that il-Gallarija ta Malta is indigenous?

UMB: indigenous in the sense that the Maltese adapted it. There are other countries that have similar typology of balconies. But our type could almost be considered as a living room. For the Maltese il-Gallarija ta Malta is a space where the inhabitants of the house spend time in, looking on the outside. Sometimes reciting the rosary, others for sewing and other crafts. Therefore, for the Maltese il-Gallarija ta Malta was a space and place where one can sit in and view the world outside and around him/her. You are in your home but seeing the world. You are connected to the world around you but still in your own privacy. In the gallarija you are protected from the outside. Il-Gallarija ta Malta offers protection to your privacy.

It is also ideal for the Maltese climate. In summer the days are long, therefore, a lot of the time was spent in the house to work in or to read. Il-Gallarija ta Malta is also a way how the outside enters the house. As well as those inside interact with the outside.

JB: Il-Gallarija ta Malta has been described in articles I have read as being a grandstand and as if being in a theatre. Sitting in it enables you to watch the street theatre. Watching what is going on down in the street.

UMB: Yes, watching the street theatre, however those in the balcony are not on a stage. In the Gallarija one is not for exhibition. One is there to observe what is going on. A spectator.

JB: Most articles indicate that the Gallarija is influenced from the Muslim culture and evolved from the Muxrabija for the purpose to hide and shield the women. Do you agree with this?

UMB: Well, the Gallarija is a space where you are in the privacy of your home looking at the public. We can say that the Gallarija is the best invention in such a way that you are safeguarding your private life in your home while at the same time observing what is going on in public outside. From a practical point of view there is the element of light. Do not forget that the old stone buildings are marvelous in protecting you from the elements but obscures light. The closed balcony evolved with big glass windows to allow light into the rooms. However, the glass windows of the Gallarija allow a lot of exposure. Il-Gallarija is considered better than a window regarding exposure with the addition of it being enclosed.

JB: Were the corner balconies of the Grand Master Palace the first one?

UMB: Let us be clear about the fact that our buildings are all constructed in stone for the fact that Malta lacked trees and timber. Therefore, we minimize the use of timber in buildings as

much as possible. The knights coming from several nations and cultures were used to different methods of building. One can observe that their apertures were much larger than what the Maltese were used to. Take a look at the windows of the Grand Master palace. The knights aimed to connect the outside to the inside. Hence the balconies sprouted in their buildings.

JB: What are its historical and social values?

UMB: Firstly, Il-Gallarija ta Malta has historical values as it reminds us of the time when the Maltese were under siege. We were always protecting everything, our land, our property. In the Gallarija, we are looking on to the streets but also are protected in the privacy of our home. There is an element of being closed in, protection from what is going on outside. In the past, there was practice and the idea that the family stays within the safe walls of the home and avoids exposure to the outside. In this way the people in the house were inside but under the protection of the Gallarija were participating in what was going on outside. The basic values of the Gallarija are that one enjoys the outside while being protected. There are still a few examples of balconies in Valletta that have louvers *persjani* or *gelosia*

JB: The Gallarija is not only an ornament on the façade of the building, an aesthetic value but also a semi-public space.

UMB: Exactly. As soon as you go into the enclosed Gallarija you are stepping in the social arena space. Therefore, the Gallarija became popular because of this fact,

JB: Where do you think the Gallarija evolved from since one can see similar types around the Mediterranean littoral like Spain or the past Ottoman countries.

UMB: The principal social and commercial contact were with Sicily. In those days, the women were most often working at home and did not venture much outside the home. In Malta also it was customary that the woman stayed at home to avoid other men seeing her. Il-Gallarija provided the women a space to be outside but not too exposed.

JB: Do you consider elements of multi-culturism in the Galarijja ta' Malta?

UMB: As for multiculturalism, I would say it is definitely a Maltese architectural element but also includes features that other cultures have. For example, features from Turkey, Spain and Sicily. There is that important aspect that women can look out but are not entirely exposed.

JB: In which period of our history did the Maltese identify this closed balcony and christened it Ta' Malta?

UMB: What happened was that during the period of the Knights it became very popular in Malta. The knights were a group of men who were not married, but nothing stopped them from looking at Maltese women. Therefore, il-Gallarija served an important function of protecting the Maltese ladies from the knights while still having a social life away from the streets below. This situation is very different from the Muslim women who were totally secluded from society. I consider the Gallarija as a halfway house.

JB: Could we say that the concept comes from the *Muxrabija*?

UMB: Not really because muxrabija afforded the Muslim women total seclusion with the very small holes in its design. In the Gallarija you are exposed and are seen from the street. In fact, the Gallarija projects out on the street for the occupants to be seen.

JB: There is the question of how timber was procured since timber is not a raw material found in Malta.

UMB: We know that during the Orders period timber was imported.

JB: Could it be that the timber used to construct the closed balconies was recycled from the galleys and ships? Maybe during the British reign?

UMB: There is an element of truth in this fact, but the closed balconies were already in vogue before the British. Take the Grand Master palace in Valletta when the closed balconies were constructed this typology of balconies became popular within the Maltese, so everyone wanted one. Considering the climate, the Gallarija protects you from the sun, heat and rain, beside light the Gallarija allows a breeze to cool the room inside. The use of louvers popular in Italy and Spain serves this purpose of allowing a breeze inside. The word “*persjani*” indicates something that comes from “Persia”.

JB: Is there a possibility that the Ottoman slaves in Malta were instrumental in the evolution of the Gallarija since they had the knowledge and craft of how to construct it?

UMB: I discount this idea because the concept of the Muslim *muxrabija* and *persanja* is that those behind them should not be seen from the outside. Do not forget that the Maltese families were very tied together within their home and governed by the Catholic principle. The household is protected.

J: Do you believe that such an architectural element has a role in building a nation’s cultural identity?

UMB: Architecture and the way of life reflect each other. In Malta we have high temperatures, we stay indoors in summer to avoid the sun, not because it is cold outside. Our climate has conditioned our way of life since the sun is vital, but we need to keep our home cool. Therefore, the Gallarija serves the functions of keeping the direct sun rays out, light in and provides a cooling effect to the house. The Gallarija is very well thought and developed according to the climatic conditions of the land. Its design affects ingenuity as form followed function in other countries like Spain. The knights, especially the Spanish knights who were numerous in Malta were used to this typology and it was easy to introduce it in Malta. The trend to construct the closed balcony was established by the one of the Palace of the Grand Master. Once the *“Sultan ghamel hekk kulhadd ried waħda bħalu”*

JB: Do you think that the Gallarija was a status symbol especially when these balconies were being built in towns and villages outside Valletta?

UMB: Yes. People who had the Gallarija in their houses had to be able to afford the timber as this commodity had to be imported. The houses with the Gallarija are usually found in the core of the village in the main streets near the church and main square.

JB: Do you recall any political activities in which Gallarija was a protagonist?

UMB: Yes, especially in Sette Giugno.

JB: What was it about Sette Giugno?

UMB: During the Sette Giugno people from the Gallarija shouted and encouraged people on the street to riot against the British administration. Therefore, exposing the occupants' loyalties publicly.

JB: Interestingly, Giovanni Bonello shows how during the Sette Giugno riots occupants with the Gallarija made a hole in the floor of the balcony to point a rifle into the street if the need be that the demonstrators attack the front door of the house and to see who is at the door.

UMB: True but in the Sette Giugno riots only. In the past the idea was to protect the front door by means of the Gallarija. Mostly the balcony was situated above the door.

JB: Can we safely conclude that the Gallarija is a mirror of our social, cultural and political way of life? Does it make part of our collective memory?

UMB: Yes, besides its utilitarian function, it is an element embedded in our collective memory as a consequence of our strong religion and beliefs and the many occupations of different cultures that left a strong influence in the creation of Malteseness.

UMB: There are instances of men and women who lived inside the house their entire life. A means of enjoying life without hardships. Their only excursions were to the church for religious purposes. Fortunately, the Gallarija satisfied all our human needs. I regard it not so much as a veil and seclusion but more of an observation post. The Gallarija became very popular because it served many functions to the people of Valletta. On a personal note, I recall my mother telling me that inside the house the Gallarija affords protection and safety whereas outside one comes across all dangers and obstacles. I reinforce the vital functionality of the Gallarija in regard to climate and social interaction. One is shielded from the sun but enjoys the open views.

JB: The Maltese especially in Valletta utilises the Gallarija for other purposes like a laundry/washroom or toilet.

UMB: Of course, when the Gallarija is well positioned it is called “*Nixxiefa*” in the absence of the roof or courtyard as in the case of the high Valletta flats/apartments. It also protected from dust and dirt at street level. It has a lot of merits.

JB: How do you value the Gallarija in comparison with other icons that we call Maltese i.e Maltese Cross?

UMB: The Maltese Cross is a reference of the Orders of the Knights time in Malta whereas the Gallarija is here to stay. The knights left but we still continued to construct balconies afterwards.

JB: What is the future for the Gallarija ta’ Malta?

UMB: The young generation will adopt the gallarija as cultural heritage because it still has value and function in our society.

JB: As a politician yourself and having your father a politician too, did you make use of the Gallarija as a political platform?

UMB: Yes, during the political elections when I was elected for the first time a small crowd of constituents gathered to cheer in the street in front of my house. I came out of the balcony to thank them as I could not accommodate everyone inside the house.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.

Interview with Mr. Joe Zahra

Date: 19-11-24

JZ- Joe Zahra

JB- Julia Bianco

JB: Why do we call the closed timber balconies in Malta il-Gallarija ta Malta?

JZ: Personally, I have an issue with the name although I have been somewhat corrected too. The balconies evolved through the ages in other countries. Locally we have adopted and adapted the closed balcony. The Maltese added some elements and made it functional to Malta. However, despite my issues with the name there is some validity too. My preference for the gallarija is the Traditional Timber Balcony.

JB: Does the word traditional also means it is indigenous?

JZ: Traditional denotes a lot of meanings. Regarding age, it has a history. There are five most important factors that constitute the construction of a traditional Gallarija ta' Malta: the materials that are not modern man-made, together with the craftsmanship (*sengħa*) that is manifested in the proportion, design and finish. There are instances where the design is good but the proportions are bad.

JB: What is the role of the planning authority as regards the Gallarija?

JZ: It is within the Authority's legal remit to protect the Cultural Heritage of Malta. The Authority does not solely list architecture. Article 57 involves an exercise of "*skedar*" of

buildings. “*Skedar*” is legal protection. When a building or an architectural element is listed, the Authority recognizes its existing value.

J: Skedar is the same as listings?

JZ: The British law for planning consists of 2 elements of *skedar* and listing, which does not completely apply to Malta. Here we do not have “listings” as such. We have an inventory list. Firstly, a building is assessed and catalogued before putting into the inventory. This exercise does not offer protection, but the building is merely put under a spotlight for further investigation into its heritage and cultural values. In “*skedar*” the buildings are legally protected. However, there are always appeals and arguments against these legal protections. This legal protection of “*skedar*” is simply a recognition that the architectural and historical factors in a building already have significant value to society. When a building is put in the National Protective Inventory (NPI) the building already has been recognized as having value. Having said that, there are buildings that are not in the NPI but still have architectural and historical values and importance. Here is where the Authority has many appeals with the arguments that said a building is not in the NPI it does not have any value and needs not to be protected.

The PA is not only concerned with the building itself but also the many elements within the stone buildings. Buildings and dwellings are not made only of stone. I feel there is a lack of appreciation for other architectural elements and features. In fact, when a Restoration Statement is submitted, the focus is almost always on the stone unfortunately. There is also iron work, the different elements made of timber outside and inside.

The Authority’s role is always to safeguard these buildings, and the elements found in them.

Although the general perception of the PA may be rather negative due to mistakes done,

generally the Authority strives to protect the Maltese heritage. Most of the decisions are taken in good faith but since not everyone has insight and knowledge the general perception of the PA is rather negative. The PA tries to find the best solution and balance between protection and planning for the public needs. Sometimes this balance of protection and planning is not what everyone was expecting.

JB: My perception of the PA was that it is only concerned with issuing building permits, and I was not aware that there is a department for cultural and heritage protection. To evaluate a building's value the department must be involved in historical research.

JZ: Absolutely a lot of research is carried out. Cultural and social research is an intrinsic element in the PA's work, especially in decision making. Potentially all decisions taken can affect short term and long term cultural and social aspects. In cases of cultural heritage, the planning authority tries to understand what the building served in the past to make the best decision.

JB: In the case of the social and cultural value of the Gallaria ta Malta what has been done?

JZ: Besides the social and cultural aspects of this element you are researching, there are other perspectives on how to research the Gallarija ta' Malta. For example, from the technological and scientific point of view. In fact, we tried to take part in an E.U. project to map the balcony technologically to establish the weak points of the Gallarija ta' Malta. This scientific exercise could have yielded valuable information towards better knowledge or conservation of the Gallarija ta' Malta. Unfortunately, our participation did not materialize. The recent technological advances, like 3D, have also helped for better understanding regarding the protection and conservation of Gallarija ta' Malta.

JB: In 1996, the PA issued a scheme for restoration of buildings. Did this include the Gallarija ta' Malta?

JZ: In fact, the first schemes were specifically for the restoration of the Gallarija. In 2010 the scheme was “*Investi f'darek*” and again in 2017 and continued thereafter. The 1996 scheme was targeting the Three Cities.

JB: Were you involved in the setting up of these schemes?

JZ: I was not involved in the earlier ones. However, I do not think that the earlier schemes included guidelines and justifications for why the schemes were proposed. In 2021, we wanted to focus the funds on the streets in UCA, (*Zona ta' Konservazzjoni Urbana*) that have a strong commercial and traffic element. Obviously, traffic and pollution affect the facades. It was a pilot project to gauge the difference with the uptake of the scheme.

JB: In 1996, what prompted the Planning Authority and government to view the Gallarija as having a cultural value that required protection and conservation? What prompted the introduction of these schemes?

JZ: I am convinced that the Gallarija was always a dominant architectural element on the streetscape. It is an element in the street that you cannot ignore or overlook. In the case of the architectural element “*muxrabija*” their number is very small and limited on the island. The Authority has to look for their presence to document them. However, you can see Gallarija everywhere wherever you look. There are different types of Gallarija with different colours that define and give life to the streetscape. The Gallarija is regarded as important from the tourism

aspect. If you were to ask the tourists to make an architectural element that dominates the Maltese streetscape for sure they will refer to the Gallarija.

JB: For the tourism industry the Gallaria is being marketed as portraying the identity of Malta. As in souvenirs with the Gallarija depicted and “Malta” written below. This recalls the reference to Malta by the Maltese Cross, *Is-Salib tal-Kavallieri*.

JZ: True. I think in 1988 there was the Temporary Provisional Scheme and the Establishment of the Village Core boundaries. Practically from the base maps of Malta and Gozo, mapping was done on the organic parts of the villages and towns like *sqaqin* (cul de saq). This exercise served to establish the UCA. During this exercise the Gallarija was highlighted for its importance and eventually a small number of functional provisions to focus on this architectural element that dominated the streets in the village/town’s cores. In the process of discussions on the planning of the UCA fabric the Gallarija may have been chosen as the ideal architectural element to focus on. Undoubtedly, in 1988 there were many restrictions on urban planning, although planning goes back to the British era in Malta way before the PA was established.

JB: The Gallarija became part and parcel of the town/village streetscape, like the dichotomy of Valletta and the Gallarija.

JZ: Allow me to refer to a presentation that did on the Maltese Balcony which kicks off with the concept of what a balcony is used for in society and its social significance – the Pope, Politicians, Royal Family. There is an element of a showcase, showing yourself to people, to others, a sense of exposure.

JB: Do you consider the balcony as a space where the occupant is a spectator on the street like a theatre?

JZ: Yes, because a vantage above the street level you are viewing what is going below be it a procession, a riot, carnival and other social events. What comes to mind are two opposing notions. The Gallarija affords the notions of refuge and prospect. These notions are not something new because the troglodytes unemployed them when choosing their cave dwellings. The notion of refuge needed for protection whereas at the same time the notion of prospect was employed to find a place where one can have a view of the surrounding environment as a lookout in case of approaching an enemy. One can safely apply these two notions to the Gallarija. One is safe in the refuge of a closed balcony; inside one's home and at the same time in a location where to know everything that is going on around in the street.

Any architectural element that is constructed starts off from the need for it. Furthermore, its construction requires technology (tools) and requires the person who is going to construct it. In the old days the profession of the *perit* was not academically established. Vernacular buildings are called "architecture without an architect". However, there was the person who by trial and error built something and after many failures perfected it into a craftsmanship.

JB: You refer to the craftsmen of the past. What is your idea of its origin? What do you think of the perception that the Turkish slaves from the Ottoman Empire during the Knights Order introduced the design and craftsmanship?

JZ: I doubt the fact that the enclosed balcony originated from one specific area in the Mediterranean region. I believe there were many needs and elements and when combined resulted in the enclosed balcony as a solution. The most simplistic explanation of its origin

would point to the Arab world because there was a need for something similar regarding the Islam religion and the role of female gender in their culture. But I feel this explanation is debatable as there is no proof that it originated from there. Around the Arab world one finds many examples of closed balconies with the principal function of shielding the women from outside. By extension we can say that because the Arabs ruled Spain for several years, the enclosed balcony was adopted there too. In the Arab world the enclosed balcony satisfied the basic needs of a culture. As in necessity, it is the mother of all inventions. One aspect that is tied to the explanation of its origin is an interesting fact that I discovered in my conversation with the present-day carpenters who still construct the Gallarija. There was a good number of these craftsmen who recounted they learned the “*sengħa*” craft of the building “Gallarija ta Malta” from their forefathers who in turn learned it from someone from Morocco or from an Arabic land. There were several who presented with this lineage of generations ago. However, the circumstances of how these original foreign craftsmen (Moroccan or Arab) ended up in Malta is unknown. Nevertheless, there is an Arab element in the Maltese collective Memory.

This architectural element seems to refer to our collective memory to the Arab influences and occupation in Malta. However, it is difficult to establish the origin of the enclosed balcony, and it has been my aim to study. It would be interesting to participate in a pan-Mediterranean project studying and exploring the origin for better understanding. In the social context there is the element of climate regulation in the form of AC especially when it allows cross currents with a window opposite. There is a functional element of climate regulation in the Mediterranean context.

The enclosed balcony of Grandmaster Palace is the earliest documented, but this does not exclude the presence of enclosed balconies before that. We cannot date exactly the appearance of

the first closed balcony in Malta but because the Grandmaster Palace gallery is documented we have a dated reference.

Another element is the timber, which was expensive and not easily available, rendering their construction available to the wealthy. Besides, it has become a status symbol for wealthy people. When the British came to Malta the timber balcony flourished since the government imported more timber and became more available.

JB: Regarding the timber during the British do you find any validity in the concept that the timber to build the balconies was recycled from the Order's galleons.

JZ: I do not have an opinion on the validity of this argument. However, considering the general trend of the past, everything was recycled as opposed to present day practices that we dispose of everything without attempting to repair. Let's take the stones of demolished buildings; they used to recycle them in new buildings. Likewise, furniture, therefore it is a possibility that the wood from the galleons will be recycled. A readily available resource that doesn't need any work but only needs to be adapted to the new project certainly there is some level of validity in this perception.

JB: What are your opinions on the colour – a religious connection?

JZ: There is the possibility that the religious factor influenced the colour paint used in the village. During my 30 years of working at the Planning Authority I never considered this connection. "Vienna Green associated with the British Services in Malta". More than anything else people made use of what was available in those days. Normally the colours were rather lighter tones. The colour depended on the paint mixture, a concoction that was used very

differently from those days when paint used to contain lead. Black, brown and green were popular. These days there is a trend of painting the Gallarija in turquoise, but I have some reservations about how appropriate and acceptable it is. Sometimes the PA reacts to the trends of the present. The Gallarija moved to a more functional role. When it was adapted for social usage to be a toilet or laundry room. Especially at the lower end of Valletta. This need was required due to the lack of space inside the home. Therefore, the occupants transformed space according to their needs. Usually, the width is 0.75m

JB: What can you tell me regarding the enclosure of open balconies?

JZ: Open balconies were wider. This is evident in the manner the corbels (*saljaturi*) were cut and shortened. The reason the corbels were shortened was because the distribution of weight that caused more stress on the weaker end. Well, that is my impression. Evidence in Casa Bernard in Rabat and numerous ones in Valletta. The functionality of the Gallarija presents a social aspect in that a home does not have facilities such as sanitary or laundry rooms. The Gallarija is integral in the social and cultural celebration of Matla. The Gallarija is mentioned in Maltese Literature, poetry and folklore. The balcony played an important role in the courtship of the past as folklore recounts how the family showed off their young girls who were ready for marriage. The design of the balcony and corbels indicate the period in which it was built.

In heritage conservation it is not possible for the PA to preserve everything of the past. In the case of modern colours, the PA was lenient in allowing this trend because colour can be easily changed and is a diminutive issue. Elements which cannot be reversed are not allowed. In 2011 we also made an exhibition that went round the towns with a cross section of the Gallarija ta' Malta. This made us aware of the lack of public knowledge and research about it.

JB: The balconies were further embellished by the incorporation of iron work which was also expensive.

JZ: The balcony was extended and yes everything was expensive. Finishes were important too. Not recommended to finish in varnish as it cracks and peels more quickly than paint. Even the way the paint or varnish is applied makes a difference in its maintenance. The traditional Gallariji ta Malta was always painted with paint and not with varnish. A particular method of layering paint.

JB: Do you find anyone who shows interest in incorporating the Gallarja ta' Malta in a newly built house?

JZ: I am not aware, but the present-day method of building is very different from the past. Take the base made of concrete, which is not with the appropriate corbels, they are used only for the aesthetic elements. I would say that the trend was more in the 60's, 70's and 80's to replace the timber one with aluminum. A 'Miracle' material that required hardly any maintenance and was cheap

JB: Is there an effort to reverse the inappropriate aluminum Gallarija ta Malta?

JZ: Yes, the schemes are aimed at this goal. The schemes are a driving force to replace the aluminum balconies but noticeably there wasn't a high percentage of those who replaced the aluminum with a timber one. Mainly the funds were taken for restoration of the timber Gallarija. One of the scopes of the scheme is to encourage people to replace the aluminum to timber.

JB: How much were the people motivated to change?

J Z: Unfortunately, the schemes have contributed to the inflation of the price of the balcony. In the 90's it was 2000 euros, now it is 8000-10000 euros.

JB: Can The PA force the owners to change if, for example, there is a whole building with beautiful preserved Gallarija and only one made of aluminium.

JZ: No, PA cannot force the owners to change their aluminium balcony. Very few carpenters are still crafting the Gallarija. We did an educational programme with the carpenters because although they have crafts, they do not know the history and the culture of the Gallarija. There are no training courses on the craftsmanship of building the gallarija. We recognised their craft and issued certificates recognising their experience and craft.

JB: Thank you for your time. Your participation is very valuable for my study.