Census Tabone (1913–2012):
A study in demographic mobility and social dynamism in Gozo through ancestral research

Simon Mercieca

The history of rural mobility is normally studied in terms of outward migration to the city rather than inward migration to the rural areas. Even if inward mobility had some effect on the structures and spaces of the rural world, it is more often ignored in our historical annals since the net migration balance always tipped in favour of outward movements to the big cities while the numbers of those moving to the rural areas, in the nineteenth century, were negligible and thus escaped the scrutiny of quantitative analysis. There are two models of analysis used to study migration. The first is based on accumulative data. The second seeks to study the individual. The first model seeks to analyse, through a series of aggregate calculations, individual behaviour according to a unit space, such as the local council or parish. This type of analysis does not normally differentiate between class and social background of the migrants but attempts to manage accumulated data for a pre-selected geographical area. The net-migration balance during the nineteenth century was in favour of the harbour towns and their neighbouring villages. The rural areas, particularly in Gozo, had a negligible in-flow with the result that if one wants to study this factor through a series of accumulative calculations one risks obtaining a distorted picture. The second model of analysis allows us to differentiate between one family and another; this is based on the study of individual histories and their influence on society. This type of analysis highlights the fact that certain families had more social impact than others on the formation of their contemporary world.

The present study adopts the second model. There is no doubt that the family of the late President of the Republic, Census Tabone, fits perfectly well in this category. The present paper highlights the motivation that drove a branch of this family from Malta to Gozo, precisely at a time when the migratory flow was steering in the opposite direction. My own family, for example, on the Mercieca side, moved from the hamlet of San Lawrenz in Gozo at the end of the nineteenth century to Hal Tarxien in Malta because of financial constraints; my great-great-grandfather, Giuseppe Mercieca, migrated to Hal Tarxien for work. Dom Mintoff's grandfather, Danjeli, moved from Ghasri to Msida while Anton Buttigieg recounted how his family relocated from Qala to Hamrun.

In all these changes of residence, the mobility to Malta was direct, that is, without any intermediaries, as was normally the case with rural migration. Gozo's only town, Rabat, was being completely bypassed. Generally, it was after settling in Valletta or in any of the nearby towns or villages that Gozitans and other rural migrants sought to venture overseas after failing to find a job in the harbour area. In the case of Census Tabone's family, the opposite happened. There is no doubt that the offer of work alone did not constitute sufficient enticement for families in

1 Simon Mercieca is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Malta. His field of specialization is Demographic History and he coordinates the teaching of Contemporary Mediterranean Studies. He occupied, until recently, the post of Director of the Mediterranean Institute at the same University. In 1990, he graduated B.A. in Maltese and History and continued with his studies graduating B.A. (Hons) in History in 1991. He read for a Master's degree in History and during this period of study was awarded a scholarship from the Italian Government to undertake research in Rome on the political relations between Malta and Italy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while studying at the University La Sapienza of Rome for a period of one year. After finishing his studies at Master's level, he won a scholarship to attend the Sorbonne Paris IV. In 1995, he obtained his second Masters for advanced studies D.E.A. (Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies) which allowed him to continue his studies at a doctoral level which he finished cum laude in 2002. During his period of study in France, he was selected to undertake a period of study at the University of the European Union in Florence. He is a regular guest at international conferences held by Universities in Germany, Israel, Greece, Morocco, Italy, France, Spain and England. He is also a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Ban in Italy and Szeged in Hungary.

2 Acknowledgements are due to Mrs Maria Tabone, the widow of Census Tabone, Mr Vincent Tabone and Mr Franco Masini; the latter was invaluable for the biographic information he provided about the ancestors of Mrs Elisa Tabone née Calleja. Without their help, writing this paper would not have been possible. For this reason, I wish to thank them and also express my gratitude to Mr Vincent Tabone and Mr Franco Masini for giving me permission to publish the photos that accompany this paper.

3 Parish Archives (P.A.), Gharb, Marriage Register, Date of act, 13-01-1838. Vide also P.A. Tarxien, Status Annonarum, 1901, 65, 88.


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Malta to move to Gozo during the nineteenth century. The Government had to offer lucrative incentives to its civil servants before they accepted to be transferred from Malta to Gozo. However, these incentives ensured that the city of Victoria had a committed middle-class, which in turn contributed to the modernisation of Gozo.

Thus, this study on the family history of Ċensu Tabone is intended primarily to honour the memory of a man who was one of the most outstanding personalities born on the island of Gozo in the twentieth century. I shall not be commemorating Ċensu Tabone for his medical achievements, nor for his political career. On the contrary, I shall be employing the tools of demographic history to delve into his family’s distant past in the hope of unearthing the social dynamism that existed amidst future leading Maltese families. Social mobility was acquired over generations through perseverance and stratification of existing social ties. This is how families with non-ostentatious surmes made it up the social ladder, a process that took generations. Ċensu Tabone’s family fits neatly into this pattern. Yet, the person who consolidated and indeed was the driving force behind the success of the family was his mother Elisa. Her story confirms the pivotal role that mothers have had in the formation of Maltese and Gozitan families and played an important part in the success or failure of their children. It is not a coincidence that various anthropologists labelled Mediterranean societies as matriarchal; Ċensu Tabone’s family is one such. The management of the family fell squarely on his mother’s shoulders following the early death of his father.

Ancestry...

Ċensu Tabone’s ancestry is a perfect example of the mobility that was taking place in nineteenth-century Malta. While his father, Nicolò, was from Victoria, Gozo, his mother, Donna Elisa, was originally from Cospicua, but as is the case with all the families of Cottonera, their ancestry needs to be traced in the adjacent parishes of the harbour area, if not, beyond the local shores. His mother’s in-laws were Pasquale Calleja and Anna Maria Colletti. Pasquale was originally from Senglea. After the arrival of the British forces in Malta in 1800, he joined the Calabrese Division which was part of the 20th Hussars LightDragoons Regiment and served in Sicily from 1810. Sicily and Malta were then under British rule. The historian Michel De’Angelo claims that Messina was then the nerve centre from where the British extended their military control over the rest of Sicily. It was there that Pasquale met his future wife, Anna Maria Colletti, 15 years his junior. They were married at the Church of San Biagio in Messina on 25 August 1812. It was a church of great social significance. It was situated within the precincts of the monastery known as that of the converted women, whose aim was to take care of women who wanted to walk away from prostitution. It also housed a confraternity to assist those condemned to death and offered help to poor persons caught in usury. On his return to Malta, Pasquale Calleja continued to move up the social ladder. He was considered one of the Maltese who could be trusted by the new rulers. In fact, on 5 February 1822, he was appointed deputy to Lieutenant, the Noble Giuseppe dei Marchesi Testaferrata responsible for the district of Mdina, Rabat and Dingli. Pasquale and his wife took up residence at the Magisterial Palace at Mdina, then known as Palazzo del Governo, earning the family the nickname Tal-logiument.

6 For more information about these two aspects in the life of Ċensu Tabone see H. Frendo’s Ċensu Tabone, The Man and His Century, Malta 2001.
7 He was born in 1784.

8 The following information is based on a manuscript entry in possession of Mr Franco Masini, ‘epoca in cui era in servizio militare nel Corpo della Divisione Calabrese sotto il comando del Genera!simo Lord Bertram (sic).
10 According to the Statuta Animarem of 1824 for Rabat, Maria Anna was 26, while her husband was declared to be 41 years old; Wignacourt Museum Archives, Rabat, Statuta Animarem 1818–1824, vol.9, Russillo delle Persone abitanti nella Citto Notabile e suo Borgo fatto nell’anno 1824 dal Reverendissimo Signor Arciprete D. Giovanni Battista Delia.
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12 G. Buonfiglio e Costanzo, Messina Città Nobilissima, ristampa fototipografica dell’edizione originale del 1660 con introduzione dell’anno delle opere nove. C. Virtà, Messina, 1976, 27.

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... and Language

The way Ċensu Tabone spoke Maltese possibly reflected the humble origins of one branch of the family. What he learnt in his childhood years reflected the way members of his family articulated the vernacular. When Ċensu spoke Maltese, he pronounced with great precision and clarity the phonetic distinction between the Semitic ‘qaf’ and the ‘k’ consonant. He followed exactly the Semitic lexemes. Contrary to what is normally upheld, this linguistic feature of the use of the ‘qaf’ was not only a distinctive phonetic hallmark of Gozo and the town of Senglea in Malta, but it was also present in the neighbouring town of Cospicua. Perhaps, the best proof in favour of this argument is offered by the Bormla born-author and self-made historian, Pietro Paolo Castagna. His history of Malta, written in the Maltese vernacular, was first published in 1888. It is a living attestation of the type of Maltese spoken around the mid-nineteenth century at Cospicua. The use of the ‘qaf’ by Castagna is not much different for the way it was articulated by Ċensu Tabone.

According to Henry Frendo, such an articulation, in particular ‘the ubiquitous Gozitan ‘ka’’, was also a Cottonera-like way of talking. Frendo concludes that this ‘was not a speech impediment but a 19th century cultural inheritance’. Today this particular articulation has disappeared completely from the Three Cities. Other features of Cospicua’s idiom, i.e., the specific speaking habits peculiar to Cospicua and the surrounding area, are gradually disappearing too. One of the last individuals from Cospicua who had a natural articulation of these Semitic sounds and like Ċensu, spoke in elegant vernacular, was Father Bonaventura Chetcuti OSA who passed away recently. Ċensu’s mother is an example that this distinct pronunciation was already dying out in Cospicua by the middle of the nineteenth century, because according to one of her granddaughters, who remembers her very well, Donna Elisa did not pronounce these consonants which expressed an aspect of Cospicua’s idiom. As will be explained, there could be other diachronic reasons why Ċensu had such a precise Semitic pronunciation.

Like all men of strong character, he never made an attempt to hide it. On the contrary, he was extremely proud of his Maltese pronunciation, for he never resorted to code-switching by shifting to different variety of Maltese when speaking in public. The roots of such pronunciation should, of course, be traced back, in part, to Cottonera. This type of lexicon was definitely to be found spoken by his mother’s ancestors who hailed from Senglea. Yet, this side of the family was also very well versed in Italian. Besides, the above-mentioned marriage of Ċensu Tabone’s maternal great-grand-father in Messina (Sicily), the family had relatives still living in the Three Cities throughout the nineteenth century. One of Donna Elisa’s aunts migrated to Tunisia and she must have been among the first migrants from the harbour cities to leave for Tunisia during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Ċensu spent his childhood days in Gozo in the company of friends and relatives, in particular his cousin, the Gozitan poet Gorg Pisani, whose mother was Donna Elisa’s sister. Such an environment could only strengthen Ċensu Tabone’s linguistic richness and his natural love for rhythm, besides the correct use of the Maltese language with its distinctive characteristic which became a trait in this man. Hence, the roots of the love of the Maltese language in both Ċensu Tabone and Gorg Pisani need to be sought in mid-nineteenth century Cospicua. Both their mothers were born and baptised in Cospicua. The first words these two women heard in Maltese were very likely to have been here. Today, migration and mobility – so characteristic of cities – have taken their toll on the language. The old pronunciation of Maltese in the harbour cities has been lost forever. Donna Elisa’s Cospicua no longer exists and its vibrant social and cultural community has been relegated to a bygone age.

This study is an attempt to reconstruct, through the use of oral history, aspects that may have been overlooked in the history of Cospicua. The study may indeed revive such memories though it is not its purpose to create feelings of nostalgia. However, genealogical research can help to create an ethos towards this city, which in recent decades has been allowed to evolve into an area of major concern. The lack of a consolidated middle class in cities leads to social deprivation. Unlike the nineteenth

17 Frendo, 173.
18 I owe this information to Dr. Ċensu Tabone’s daughter, Marielle Azzopardi.
19 According to Mr Franco Masini, an aunt of Elisa lived and died in Tunis. Her name was Francesca (born at Mdina on 12 June 1822). She died in Tunis on 4 January 1849 having contracted smallpox. She was the wife of Felice Flaminigo, an employee of the British Consulate in that city.
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century, there are no incentives today to attract a new middle class to a socially detached area. Despite the bad name that Cospicua has acquired in post-war years, Ċensu Tabone never denied his family roots in this city. Once, during a debate in Parliament, he referred to his origins, comparing them to those of Dom Mintoff’s; both their mothers hailed from Bormla (Cospicua): both their fathers were Gozitan.

### Elisa Calleja

Čensu’s mother, Elisa, was born in Cospicua on 2 July 1869. She was baptised the next day at the Collegiate Church of Cospicua, together with her twin sister Teresa. Teresa was baptised first, Elisa immediately after. This meant that Elisa was born last and was therefore the elder. They were baptised by Canon Bellotti, after the required dispensation had been obtained from the archpriest Don Michele Albanese. It was common practice in those days for baptisms to be considered the prerogative of the archpriest and any baptism administered by a substitute priest needed the archpriest’s approval. In keeping with tradition the Acts of the baptism of both Teresa and Elisa were written in Latin and read as follows:

*Eadem die [3 July, 1869]*

_Admunm Reverendissimus D[o]m[ini]us D[omi]ni Iohannes Andreas Canonicus* Bellotti delegatus *baptizavit infantem heri natam ex Antonio Calleja et Maria Annunziata Mišud coniugibus, cui impositum fuit nominem Teresa, Valentina, Philomena. Patrini fuere Paulus Cassar filius Andrea de Civitate Victoriosa et Maria Anna Cassar eiusdem Pauli mater ex Civitate Senglea._

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In translation it reads:

20 According to a biographical note given to me by Mr Franco Mašini, Teresa was born at 7:30 am and Elisa at 7:45 am.


On the same day [3 July 1869]

The most highly revered Don Giovanni Andrea, Canon Bellotti, on behalf of the parish priest baptised the baby born yesterday to Antonio Calleja and Maria Annunziata Mišud, who are married and [the baby] was given the name of Teresa, Valentina, Filomena. The godparents were Paolo Cassar, son of Andrea from Vittoriosa and Anna Maria Cassar, mother of the said Paolo, from the town of Senglea.

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Elisa and Teresa were the last children to be born to the Calleja family. A few years later the family moved to Gozo. The Calleja lived for about fifteen years at Cospicua and had five children. The dates given here are those of their baptism in Cospicua: Paschalis (19 March 1862), Joseph (9 April 1864), Maria Concetta (15 March 1866) and Elisa and Teresa (03 July 1869).

Elisa’s mother, Maria Annunziata Mišud, had married at the church of Porto Salvo on 10 July 1849. She was the daughter of Giuseppe Mišud and Giuseppa Muscat. Her parents were of humble origin. They lived at the lower end of Valletta. It seems that Antonio Calleja had broken the rules of social protocol when he took as his wife Maria Annunziata. One could say that she was of an inferior social rank. These were times when social rank played an important part in the choice of a partner. Elisa’s parents got married at their home, situated in the parish of Porto Salvo. Their marriage act in parish register of Porto Salvo states the religious reason; the marriage vows were exchanged at a private residence and not in a church because it was contracted in *articulo mortis*, that is, they got married quickly as one of the spouses was at the point of death.

23 P.A. Cospicua, _Baptizatum_, vol.17, 1852-65, f.185r.
26 P.A. Porto Salvo, _Valletta, Liber Matrimoniorum Ab Anno 1837 usque ad Annum 1859_, 300, 69.
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Elisa’s mother, Maria Annunziata Mifsud, had married at the church of Porto Salvo on 10 July 1849. She was the daughter of Giuseppe Mifsud and Giuseppa Muscat. Her parents were of humble origin. They lived at the lower end of Valletta. It seems that Antonio Calleja had broken the rules of social protocol when he took as his wife Maria Annunziata. One could say that she was of an inferior social rank. These were times when social rank played an important part in the choice of a partner. Elisa’s parents got married at their home, situated in the parish of Porto Salvo. Their marriage act in parish register of Porto Salvo states the religious reason; the marriage vows were exchanged at a private residence and not in a church because it was contracted in articulo mortis,26 that is, they got married quickly as one of the spouses was at the point of death.

Elisa's father, Antonio Calleja, was a legal procurator who had stopped practising and instead joined the Police Force on 1 August 1845, making a career at the service of public order. This new occupation obliged the family to change residence according to the father's postings. At this time, the Police Force was divided into five sections: the Office of the Superintendent, the Marine Police, the Interior Police, the Medical Police and the Public Dispensaries which were located within the police stations of the rural districts. For some time after their marriage, the family lived at the lower end of Valletta, where their children, Pasquale, Vincenza and Antonia were born. At a time when child mortality was extremely high, even middle class families could not escape such a cruel reality: both Pasquale and Antonia died a few months after birth.

Antonio Calleja had been working as an inspector for about four years by the time of his marriage, working within the Interior Police section. He must have joined at the lowest rank of the inspector class, or as it was known then by the title of Inspector 5. The mobility of the family was linked to promotions within the Police Corps. His next appointment was at a rural branch and the family moved residence to Hal Lija where they were blessed with another three children, Francesca, Maria Càrnélia and another Francesca, who was named after her elder sister who had died a few days after birth. Around 1862, Antonio Calleja was transferred to the Cottonera district, as can be attested by the birth of Paschal. In those days, inspectors of the interior branch were ranked according to position within the district; it seems that the Cottonera district was served by two inspectors and this transfer must have earned Antonio promotion to Inspector 3 because in a few years' time, he was promoted to Inspector 2, which was the highest grade that an inspector of police could reach in Malta. The position of first inspector was reserved for Gozo.

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27 Friedo, 17.
28 **Blue Book 1870, Malta 1871, M 151.**
29 P.A. Battesimi 1845-18, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act 13.4.1849, 389.
30 I owe this information to Mr. Franco Musini.
31 P.A. Battesimi 1852-57, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act, 31.7.1852, 37.
34 P.A., Morti 1842-59, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act, 23.9.1855, 522 no. 138.
35 P.A., Battesimi, Lié, vol.6, date of act 2 October 1856, 43.
36 P.A., Battesimi, Lié, vol.6, date of act 23 October 1857, 50.
37 P.A., Battesimi, Lié, vol.6, date of act, 4 February 1860, 68.
39 **Malta Blue Book 1870, Malta 1871, M 6.**
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\textsuperscript{28} Blue Book 1870, Malta 1871, M 151.
\textsuperscript{29} PA, Bassetini 1845-18, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act 13.4.1849, 389.
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\textsuperscript{31} PA, Bassetini 1852-57, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act, 31.7.1852, 57.
\textsuperscript{32} PA, Bassetini 1852-57, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act, 12.12.1854, 272.
\textsuperscript{33} PA, Morti 1842-59, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act, 14.8.1850, 332.
\textsuperscript{34} PA, Morti 1842-59, Porto Salvo, Valletta, date of act, 23.9.1855, 522 no. 138.
\textsuperscript{35} PA, Bassetini, Lija, vol 6, date of act 2 October 1856, 43.
\textsuperscript{36} PA, Bassetini, Lija, vol 6, date of act 23 October 1857, 50.
\textsuperscript{37} PA, Bassetini, Lija, vol 6, date of act, 4 February 1860, 68.
\textsuperscript{38} PA, Liber Baptemorum ConsPra, Vol 17, 1857-65, f.125v.
\textsuperscript{39} Malta Blue Book 1870, Malta 1871, M 6.
was appointed Inspector 2 on 1 July 1868 and this new post entitled him to an annual salary of £110.40

The family immediately integrated within the parish community, which was made up of various migrant families, in particular Italian exiles and British servicemen. Proof of such integration can be found in the Baptismal Records. One of the girls born at Cospicua was named after the Immaculate Conception, It was common practice among the families of this city to name one of their female offspring after the town's patron saint. Another historical proof that this family was considered a fully integrated member of the parish community is recorded in Elisa's baptismal document. By the time of her birth, her elder sister, Maria Anna was on the threshold of adulthood and was asked to act as godmother to her sister Elisa. Canon Bellotti, who baptised her, attested that the father, Antonio Calleja, was a fully-fledged member of the community, stating in Latin that Antonio was 'de hac civitate', which means that, he was from this town of Cospicua.

It is extremely unfortunate that the parish church of Cospicua stopped keeping Status Animaum records after the 1850s. These records were a sort of annual census drawn up by the parish priest of all the families living in the town and registered according to place of residence. Fortunately, the civil records make up for this deficiency. The job of police inspector earned Antonio the voting right to elect a member to the Council of Government. His name is included in the electoral list published in the Government Gazette of 9 July 1870. He is listed as residing at No. 61 'dentro il mercato'.41 In other words, his home in Cospicua was at the centre of the town, in the area still known today as 'Is-Suq' or the marketplace overlooking the quay. From her home, Elisa could enjoy the daily hustle and bustle that the open market in front of her home brought with it. All sorts of vendors gathered to sell their merchandise, in what was the most important market within the Three Cities.

Elisa treasured these childhood memories throughout her life. Her love of cooking was well-known and appreciated by Censu Tabone. His career and travels offered him the opportunity to taste many different cuisines, but the food prepared by his mother competed with that of the best chefs. According to his son Vincent, Censu had only words of praise for his mother's food. Another aspect of Elisa's childhood days in Cospicua was her love of dance, particularly the polka. Together with opera singing, the polka was the pop music of the 1860s and 1870s. Cospicua had the necessary infrastructure to provide good music, at a time when music could only be enjoyed through live performances. The love and enthusiasm for music was very vibrant in town. In 1862, the parish church bought a big pipe organ from Milan, one of the main music hubs in Europe. During the same period, a new band club was set up, with its premises situated in the area of Is-Suq. With a home at the centre, Elisa could not miss the music of the local band club situated nearby. Elisa's grandson, Mr Vincent Tabone told me that his grandmother was so much in love with the polka that she would still dancing it at the venerable age of 92. She also had a particular love for rhythm, another factor brought over from her childhood days in Cospicua. This town was the cradle for a distinctive Maltese ethnographic music, known as 'l-ghana tal-Bormliza'. This confirms the importance that improvised singing had among this particular community. Rhyming was part and parcel of the past culture of Cospicua, a feature which still continues to be expressed during the procession with the statue of the Immaculate Conception today.

Other aspects of intangible inheritance that Elisa brought from her childhood years at Cospicua included the distinct way she pronounced the diphthongs in 'tieghi' or 'ti' against the normal usage of 'tieghi' pronounced as 'tiži'. Throughout her life in Gozo, she continued to pronounce them as she learnt to pronounce them at Cospicua. Even the semantic meaning of certain words remained typical of her early days at Cospicua. In Gozo, she never referred to the inner door as 'antiporta' but called it 'boxla' (compass). This was how people at Cospicua referred to this particular feature of the house.

The life of Elisa and her siblings in Cospicua came to an abrupt end when her father was appointed the new inspector for Gozo. His appointment came into effect on 17 October 1874 after the previous incumbent, Police Inspector Felice Attard, retired from service.43 This meant that Antonio and his family had to settle in Gozo. In those days a job in Gozo necessitated moving the whole family. Even if there was

40 Malta Year Book 1879, Malta 1871, M 150,
41 The Malta Government Gazette, Saturday 9 July 1870, 179.
43 Malta Year Book 1874, 157.
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42 Notarial Archives Valletta, Notary Salvatore Scifo, R. 432, Contratto 448, 1459-60; S. Mericci, ‘Orgni Maestuz ta’ Bormla ghalan 150 sera’. Annales Celebrations in Honorem
Deiparae Immaculatae Conceptionis Civitatis Cospicuae, Malta 2012, 63-71.
43 Malta Year Book 1874, 157.
a ferry boat that operated daily between Cospicua and Mgarr harbour, communications between Malta and Gozo were lacking.44 Thus, being a police inspector for Gozo meant that he was de facto the police commissioner for the island. The Malta Blue Book for 1874 confirms that this appointment carried a £10 increase in salary, an extra allowance of £35 to cover transport expenses and a further allowance of £20 for being an inspector ‘detached at Gozo’.45

**Moving to Gozo**

This feeling of detachment or isolation was exploited by the British to relegate to Gozo undesirable leaders but at the same time made it difficult for the administration to find suitable personnel to fill vacant posts in Gozo, Emanuеle Vitale, the ring leader of the Maltese revolution against the French in 1798, ended up being transferred to Gozo, as the island’s lieutenant in 1812. Without doubt, this was a diplomatic move to get him out of the way for the same posting at Mdina (Malta), which had been offered, as already explained, to a leading nobleman. Such decisions could only instil and strengthen the feeling of isolation and reluctance to move to Gozo unless accompanied by good incentives. Failure to find suitable persons in Gozo forced the Government to search in Malta, for the right personnel to implement the proposed educational reforms. Clemente Busuttil, one of the minor figures of the Pre-Raphaelite artistic movement, ended up taking-up the offer to move from Valletta to Victoria to teach painting at the Government school in Rabat (Gozo) which was a golden opportunity for him to be with his father Michele who had married a Gozitan lady, Antonia Buhagiar, whom he met while working on an artistic commission for the Cathedral Church of Gozo. The couple set up home in Rabat near the Conservatorio but once Michele terminated his commission he returned to Malta.46 Pietro Paolo Castagna was another civil servant entitled to move to Gozo. This time, the transfer was from Cospicua to Nadur. As in the Busuttil case, this was the direct result of the educational reforms proposed by Cornwall and

Lewis, He took the job of head-teacher at the primary school of Nadur, which opened its doors around 1842. For a Maltese salaried employee, living at Nadur turned out to be an awful experience.47 Castagna quit a few months later after accepting in 1851 to return to a teaching position as the master of the Primary School of Vittoriosa.48 Finally, there was a handful of cases where marrying a Gozitan would entice the couple to remain in Gozo, usually because the Gozitan partner already possessed a home in Gozo. This, for example, was the case of the parents of the priest, Dun Giuseppe Diacono, known as ‘Tai-Bambini’, who decided to set up home in Rabat, Gozo.49

In Gozo, Antonio Calleja took up residence in a large house in Victoria.50 When this move took place, Ċensu’s mother and her sister Teresa were still very young. At first, Antonio resided together with the rest of his family at 30 Strada Mercato. Thanks to the historical research undertaken by Consigilia Azzopardi for her Ph.D,51 one can now construe how the match-making between Elisa Calleja and her future husband Nicolo Tabone was conducted. The key figure was Felice Attard’s kinship, whose family was known in Gozo as ‘Tal-İspettur’, in direct reference to his job. At the same time, Felice Attard was interested in genealogical research and built a very important Ġültàns or collection of birth, marriage and death records of all Gozitan families stretching back to 1552. Today, thanks to the generosity of Mr Franco Masini and his wife, this Ġültàns has been donated to the Gozo Public Library.52

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44 Frendo, 28. Frendo makes reference to this service offered by a ‘dghajsa’ between Mgarr and the Grand Harbour. Generally the boat continued sailing to Cospicua.

45 Malta Blue Book 1874, Malta 1875, M.157.


48 Malta Blue Book 1870, Malta 1871, M.8.


50 The electoral list of 1875 refers to two individuals with the same name and surname of Antonio Calleja, both living in Victoria Gozo. The first one resided at 25 Piazza Sabha. The second lived at 30 Strada Mercato, Most probably, Elisa’s father was the second as members of his family continued to live in this street during the early twentieth century. The Malta Government Gazette, 22 October 1875, 356. By 1900, both families moved residence as none of them is registered residing in the above mentioned streets. But again, the electoral list of 1900 gives two individuals by the name of Antonio Calleja. The first one lived in 1A Strada Palma. The second one resided in 19 Strada Cappuccini. The Malta Government Gazette, 23rd April 1900, 402,403.


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originally bought by Franco Masini's father, whose father, Dr Giuseppe, in turn, had married Elisa's sister, Francesca.

In her doctoral research on the history of lace making in Gozo, Consiglia Azzopardi discovered that Felicè Attard's three siblings, Pietro, Marianna and Genesia were responsible for the revival of lace-making in Gozo around 1846. What is of particular interest to both the history of lace in general and this genealogical research in particular, is the fact that Felice Attard was married to Amada. Amada's sister Regina was the first to open a lace school in Gozo and according to Dun Giuseppe Diacono, she taught lace-making at this school for many years, probably well into old age. The girls' mother was Maria Tabone who married a Greek merchant by the name of Ignatius Papa, hence they came to be known in Gozo as 'Tal-Grijj'. This same Maria Tabone was a collateral ancestor of Dr Nicolò Tabone, the future husband of Elisa.

**Settling in Gozo**

The Tabone family had strong roots in Gozo. According to ancestral research undertaken by Mr Franco Masini and which he kindly shared with me, the Tabone family by then had been well established in Gozo for over two centuries. Their presence in Gozo goes back to the eighteenth century. But it was only at the turn of the nineteenth century that the family entered into the limelight of Gozo's politics when Nicolò Tabone, Dr Nicolò's grandfather, graduated notary public and began to get involved in the social and cultural life of Victoria. Together with Dr Francesco Pace, the father of the future Bishop of Malta, Gaetano Pace Forno. Notary Nicolò Tabone was a member of the unique Gozo community who lobbied for the creation of a separate diocese for Gozo. On 30 December 1836, Nicolò Tabone, together with two Gozitan prelates, went to Rome to present a petition to Pope Gregory XVI, requesting that Gozo be recognised as a separate diocese. The petition was signed by 146 Gozitans. Nicolò's son Antonio followed in the footsteps of his father and became a lawyer. He was appointed Registrar of the Gozo Courts in January 1861. The long standing family tradition of legal studies was broken by Antonio's son Nicolò, who graduated as a medical doctor in 1886 and started a new professional line within the family becoming the first Residential Medical Officer at the Charitable Institutions of Gozo on 1 October of that year.

Thus, two distinct families, that of the Tabone in Gozo and the Calleja in Malta, were making social strides within the new political structures of their time. Once the Calleja had settled on the island of Gozo, they benefited from the kinship ties proffered by the family of 'Ta l-Ispettur', it was only natural that an alliance was sealed through the marriage between Antonio Tabone's son Nicolò and Elisa. The couple got married on 7 April 1891 when the bride was 21 years old at the Rabat church of Saint James. The marriage was recorded in the registers of the Cathedral Church. Elisa was above the normal average age when girls married at the turn of the twentieth century. Most importantly, she nurtured an aspect of social solidarity which was extremely common in those days among families in Malta, irrespective of their social standing; she took care of her old parents at her home, first at 1A Strada Palma, where her father was the first to die in 1909. In the same year, the family moved to a new house in Strada Corsa. Elisa's mother joined the Tabone family and continued to live with them till her death in 1920.

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53 A.P. Liber Materialium, St George, Gozo, 1792-1836, vol IV, Azzopardi, 867.
54 Anon, Memoiri u Taghim, Bizzillì li jinhadna l'Malta u Chessed, Malta 1920, According to Joseph Bezzana, the author of this book is Giuseppe Diacono; Bezzana 1998, 65.
55 A.P. Liber Bapitizrarium, St George, vol VII, 56.
56 Ibid, In the baptismal act of his daughter, Ignatius Papa was described as 'Es nativus Corea'. The surname Tal-Grijj survived in Rabat Gozo among some of his descendants.
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Thus, two distinct families, that of the Tabone in Gozo and the Calleja in Malta, were making social strides within the new political structures of their time. Once the Calleja had settled on the island of Gozo, they benefited from the kinship ties proffered by the family of 'Tal-l-Ispettur'; it was only natural that an alliance was sealed through the marriage between Antonio Tabone's son Nicolò and Elisa. The couple got married on 7 April 1891 when the bride was 21 years old at the Rabat church of Saint James. The marriage was recorded in the registers of the Cathedral Church.58 Elisa was above the normal average age when girls married at the turn of the twentieth century. Most importantly, she nurtured an aspect of social solidarity which was extremely common in those days among families in Malta, irrespective of their social standing; she took care of her old parents at her home, first at 1A Strada Palma,59 where her father was the first to die in 1909.60 In the same year, the family moved to a new house in Strada Corsa.61 Elisa's mother joined the Tabone family and continued to live with them till her death in 1920.62

54 Anon, Memoria u Taghlim, Bizzizzu l-jinhadna l'Malta u Gozo, Malta 1920. According to Joseph Bezzina, the author of this book is Giuseppe Diacono Bezzina 1998, 65.
55 A.P. Liber Matrimoniorum, St George, vol.VII, 56.
56 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Frendo, 21.
60 The Malta Government Gazette, Thursday 24 January 1861, no. 2066, 5.
61 Frendo, 21.
64 Bezzina 1999, 1.15.
65 The Malta Government Gazette, no. 5 152, Friday 26th March 1909, 348, Dr. Nicolò Tabone was given as residing a 9 Strada Corsa in Vittoria Gozo.
66 Annunziata, widow of Anton Calleja, nicknamed 'ta l-Ispettur' died on 27 January 1920 at the age of 91 at 4.07am and was buried at the Church of Saint Francis in Rabat. The house was situated where the Astra Band Club is today. Bezzina 1999, 14.
Elisa had a large family. Nine of her children made it to adulthood while another did not. Large families were a common feature of all Maltese families at the time. The Tabone family were following the same pattern. All classes of society in the past practised what is known as the natural fertility model\(^7\) and the middle classes had the same sexual behaviour as the lower ones. Nicolò and Elisa had the following children: Anton, Mary, Olga, Anton, Giovanna (known as Janie), Giuseppe (known as Josie), Helen, Victor (Totò), Carmelina and Vincenzino (known as) Censu. The first child, that is, Anton died in infancy.\(^8\) As often happened within such large families, at least one would either become a priest or join a religious order. Censu’s sister, Olga, became Sister Nicola in the Sisters of Charity.

The passing away of Nicolò Tabone

At nine years of age Censu Tabone lost his father. Dr Nicolò Tabone died on 8 October 1922, at the age of fifty-nine and was buried in the Cathedral of Gozo.\(^9\) It is in such circumstances that the values of family solidarity are set in motion and kinship consolidated.

Since Censu was young, responsibility for his upbringing had to be shared by his older sisters, Mary, Janie, Helen and Carmelina. His elder brother Anton, who had just graduated as a physician, one week before his father’s death, became the family breadwinner.\(^10\) He was the only one with a job at the time.

The death of a father is a dramatic event in the life of any family. In the past, the death of the father was often followed by that of his wife, thus putting in jeopardy the chances of survival of his children. The death of one of the parents was a widespread phenomenon. Recent demographic studies disclose an indisputable fact about nineteenth-century demographic history: one in every two offspring would have been orphaned of at least one parent by the time of marriage.\(^11\) In the case of the Tabone family, the destiny of the surviving parent was not much different from the general pattern of behaviour in the rest of Europe. The chances or interest of widows with children remarrying were far lower in comparison to those of the widowers in the same situation. The fact that the elder brother assumed the responsibility for the family, as was normal in such situations, reduced the need for the mother to remarry. This avoided a common situation that existed amongst widows (but not widowers) at the time, which was to have their children shifted between in-laws so that they could create the most amenable condition for them to remarry. In the long run, the death of the father had a limited effect on orphaned children and once the initial shock was overcome, children in such situations were to follow the same fate as that of other infants whose father was alive when it came to marriage.

The fact that Censu had reached puberty reduced the risk of demise owing to the death of the father. The mortality risk increase after the demise of the father was mostly present for babies. Moreover, Censu Tabone’s story proves the general tendency unearthed through aggregate analysis and shows the incontestable pattern that orphaned children try to emulate their father’s life. Both his professional career and his choice of what in demography is known as the marriage market, were on par with his late father. Despite the negative economic consequences that such an event might have had on the family, Censu took his education very seriously, succeeded in becoming a medical doctor like his father and also married within the same social class as his father. Censu married Maria Ėe Wirth.\(^12\) Maria’s father was a magistrate and was often sent to Gozo to preside over court sittings. For this reason, he rented a holiday house at Marsalforn. At the turn of the twentieth century, this remote part of the Maltese islands became one of the selected spots where members of the Maltese judiciary spent part of their summer holidays.\(^13\) It was at

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\(^7\) O. Faron, La ville des désirs croisés. Recherches sur la société Maltese du XIX siècle (1811-1860), Rome 1997. O. Faron and J. Ricard, 'The varied repercussions caused by the demise of the father among post populations, A comparative analysis between Vernon (Normandy) and Maltese', eds., R. Deroaya and M. Oris, When Did die: Individuals and families coping with family stress in past societies, Bern 2002.


\(^9\) G. Bonello, Notizie di Gozo. Images from 1880s to the 1950s, Malta 2007, 135. Censu’s wife, Mrs Maria Tabone also confirmed to the author of this paper that in pre-Second World War times members of the judiciary used to enjoy some days of rest at Marsalforn.
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68 Bezzina 1999, 14.
70 Frondo, 24, Bezzina 1999, 15.
73 G. Bonello, Nuns. In: Images from 1800s to the 1950s, Malta 2007, 135. Censiu’s wife, Mrs Maria Tabone also confirmed to the author of this paper that in pre-Second World War times members of the judiciary used to enjoy somedays of rest at Marsalforn.
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Henry Frendo states that Gozo was ‘Mizzian’ in the early twentieth century. His source was Ċensu Tabone himself. ‘The Tabone were Nationalists’, Frendo states, ‘actually Mizzians, as all the Gozitans Nationalists were called. They were always Mizzians.’ The story, however, is in fact more nuanced. It seems that the Calleja side were originally ‘Panzavecchians’, which makes more sense considering their Cottonera background. In fact, this is also another legacy from the Cottonera days of the family as the Unione Politica Maltese (UPM) originated in this harbour district at the turn of the nineteenth century. According to Franco Masini, who has researched the family history extremely well, the Calleja, Tabone, Masini, et al voted for the UPM in the 1921 elections. It is a period which Ċensu may not have recollected very clearly as he was still very young at the time and the UPM’s existence was short-lived. Soon after Mgr. Panzavecchia’s death, the Nationalists led by Enrico Mizzi and the UPM of Panzavecchia merged into one party. This was the period which Ċensu remembered best and by now Nerik Mizzi had become one of the dominant figures of the newly set up Partito Nazionale.

Ċensu was not Elisa’s only child to decide to enter politics. His brother Anton did likewise, becoming part of the Gozo Civic Council and later a member of parliament with the Nationalist Party to represent the district of Gozo. He married Estella née Camilleri, the sister of Sir Luigi Camilleri, Chief Justice and President of the Maltese Courts. Ċensu’s other sister, Janie, married the lawyer Già Pace, brother of the late bishop of Gozo, Mgr Guzepp Pace. As already indicated, Elisa was a twin with her sister Teresa who was better known in Victoria as Žeţa. Žeţa married Paul Pisani, a Gozitan wine merchant. It was into this family that the well-known Gozitan poet Gorg Pisani was born. Another sister of Elisa, Francesco, married Dr Giuseppe Masini. One of his children, Francesco, became a lawyer, known in Gozo as ‘Kikku’. He eventually set up the Gozo Party. Elisa’s brother Pasquale, or as he was better known in the family by the Maltese name of Baskal, became an architect. He married Elena and one of their offspring was the Hollywood actor Joseph Calleja. Thus even Joseph Calleja can trace his roots to Cospicua, as his father, like Elisa, was also born and baptised there. Yet the umbilical cord that tied him to his place of birth was never completely severed. One of the important architectural projects of Pasquale, and perhaps the most successful, was the rebuilding, according to his own design, of the façade of the church of the Conventual Franciscans at Pjazza San Frangisk at Rabat, Gozo. Incidentally, the main feast celebrated at this church is the same one as that celebrated at his home town Cospicua, the Immaculate Conception.

In Gozo, Ċensu’s mother sought to live close to her twin sister. They succeeded in setting up their homes next to each other. In a biographical note written by notary Dr Paul George Pisani about his father Gorg and published in the religious magazine Kultura Frangiskana in 2005, the author discloses that ‘the walls of their home gardens were so low that the children could jump over and go and play at each other’s house. One of the companions who participated in Pisani’s games was his cousin, Ċensinu Tabone’.  

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Plate 2. The three sisters with their nephew Joseph Calleja. From left to right, Eliza Tabone (née Calleja), Francesca (Čikka) Masini (née Calleja) and Theresa (Żeża) Pisani (née Calleja). The gentleman behind them is the actor Joseph Calleja.

Plate 3. Front row from left to right: Marilise Tabone, Eliza Tabone (née Calleja and Ċensus Tabone’s mother), Colin Tabone. Back row: Ċensus Calleja (Joseph Calleja’s brother), Joseph Calleja, Maria Tabone (Ċensus Tabone’s wife), Anton Tabone (known as il-Principal and Ċensus’s elder brother).

Plate 4. Front row from left to right: Patricia Tabone (now Montanaro) and Francis Tabone. Back row from left to right: Maria Tabone (wife of the Ċensus Tabone), Eleonor Calleja (wife of Joseph Calleja) Eliza Tabone, Joseph Calleja and Ċensus Tabone.

Conclusion

This family history has been based mainly on an oral tradition transcended within the family and supported by archival research, which was triggered by my personal interest to discover Ċensus Tabone’s roots in Cospicua. Ċensus’s son, Vincent, was a very informative source. He shared with me several facets regarding his family history and introduced me to his second cousin, Franco Masini. At the end, Vincent Tabone admitted, quite understandably, that in recalling the past, ‘you brought back some lovely memories of Nanna Lisa. She was a wonderful lady and I have been lucky that I could enjoy her last 15 years’. Eliza died in 1963 and was buried in the cemetery of Santa Marija at Xewkija. Today, her son Ċensus Tabone is resting peacefully in the same grave.

There is no doubt that Ċensus Tabone was one of the past Gozitans students who, like his ancestors, believed that a wonderful future beckoned all Gozitans. At the same time, study and eventual settlement in Malta did not make him deny his roots. On the contrary, they strengthened them and he sought to pass on his love for his mother tongue and Maltese culture to his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. As one of his grandchildren told me, ‘Mur oqghod bin-nannu kicku ma l’af bi-Malti!’ (Grandfather would never have given
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us peace had we not known how to speak Maltese correctly. It is only
benefiting to close this study with a quote which Censu Tabone used
repeatedly. Coming from him such a quote bears more significance when
one considers all the disadvantages he had to overcome to succeed
in life. Be proud that you are Maltese and never allow the size of your
country to hold you back from achieving your aspirations. Always hold
the Maltese flag on the highest summit.

The family-tree of Censu Tabone with particular reference to his siblings and maternal lineage
The family-tree of Censu Tabone with particular reference to his siblings and maternal lineage

- Naima Tabone
- Vincenza Castar
- Pasquale Calleja
- Anna Maria Colletti
- Giuseppe Mifsud
- Maria Annunziata Mifsud

- Anton Tabone
- Giuseppa De Gaetani
- Anton Calleija
- Mabilia
- Pasquale
- Francesca
- Carmella
- Pasquale
- Maria Concala
- Teresa

- Nicola
- Vinzenza
- Antonia
- Maria
- Francesca
- Joseph
- Elsa

- Anton
- Mary
- Olga
- Anton
- Giovanni (Jamie)
- Giuseppe (Josie)
- Helen
- Victor (Tofo)
- Carmelina
- Vincenzo (Censu)