

## **BOOMERANGS ON A SMALL ISLAND: MALTESE WHO RETURNED FROM AUSTRALIA**

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### INTRODUCTION

In 1947 there were 3,238 Maltese born persons in Australia. Maltese emigration records show a further 87,868 departing for Australia from mid-1947 to mid-1986, giving a total of over 91,000. The Australian census of 1986 however shows only 56,232 Maltese born persons still living in Australia. The postwar departures, comprising over a quarter of the entire population of Malta (at the start of the period) are a major component of that mass exodus which is one of the most salient and well known facts of Maltese postwar history. Altogether by the end of 1986 a total of some 149,000 were recorded as having departed permanently, almost entirely to Australia, Canada and Britain, leaving a population of 345,000 at the end of the period.<sup>1</sup>

What concerns us in this paper is the gap between the records of departures to Australia and the Australian census figures at the end of the period – the 35,000 missing persons. If these are emigrants who have returned home, they would indicate the departure of almost two-fifths of those who arrived in Australia and the presence in Malta of a large population of ex-Australians, constituting 10% of the population. As we shall see many additions and subtractions do however need to be made to the figure for missing persons before we can estimate return migration.

Large scale return migration would raise many important questions for both countries. Has Australia failed many immigrants? Are they often really 'guestworkers' in their orientation anyway? Why do they return? What becomes of the returnees? How do they experience the change? What impact do they have on the social, economic and political life of Malta? If emigration is not a single action but one part of a complex chain unwinding over a lifetime (and across generations) what kind of continuing articulations does it set up between the source and the receiving country?

It is only rarely and recently that such questions have even been posed in the two countries. Australian records on immigrant settler arrivals have been good since 1959, but on returns they have been (perhaps inevitably) worthless. Maltese data on departing emigrants and

their attributes have been detailed throughout, but it was only in 1975 that returns were first seriously recorded. Until the 1970s the policies of both countries were clear and complementary. Australia sought to attract permanent settlers and regarded any returns as evidence of failure, while Malta encouraged and assisted permanent departures from what was seen as an overcrowded island with an insecure economic future. Complacently, it was assumed in both countries that the plans and desires of the migrants would follow public policy.

Selective figures seemed to confirm this. Malta counted only those few returns who, arriving within two years, had to repay their passage. When in 1975 they started asking all arrivals at the ports if they intended to stay, the numbers recorded as '*returned emigrants*' rose from 63 to 558, with 1,313 the following year. In 1977 the government, in response to these figures (and fearful of the economic consequences of the impending final closure of the British base in 1979) introduced restrictions on returnees, including immediate access to unemployment benefits and to public sector jobs.<sup>2</sup> Since then little attention has been given to them. For long in Australia settler departure records were accepted in good faith, without any questions about whether people might have a motive not to announce such intentions reliably to the authorities. Yet, for example, the Australian figure of 1,395 declared departures 1975–1982 contrasts sharply with the new Maltese records of 7,428 returnees from Australia in the same period declaring their intention to resettle permanently in Malta.<sup>3</sup> In 1973 an Australian Government report questioned the idea that returnees were a handful of failures and Charles Price's appendix, using arrival data and census '*residues*' estimated settler losses of 20–40% for various ethnic groups, after ten years residence, with a figure of 30% for the Maltese.<sup>4</sup>

Very little research on returns has followed from this new awareness in either country, however. One notable exception in Australia is S.L. Thompson's excellent study of returnees to a small and isolated village in Italy.<sup>5</sup> In Malta there are three pieces of work. E.P. Delia carried out a careful extension of Price's method, using wider data, which concluded that in the non-recorded period up to 1974 permanent returns were between a quarter and a third of recorded emigrants – a total of some 19,000 ex-Australians living in Malta by that date.<sup>6</sup> (From then until mid-1986 Maltese records show a further 8,477 returning from Australia, giving a total of nearly 28,000).

Second, there is R.L. King and A.J. Strachan's very interesting study of returnees (mainly and atypically from the United States) to the village of Qala in Gozo. They found 20% of the village to consist of returnees. Most of those who were back for good were households headed by men who had been away 15–20 years and had returned in their late thirties

and early forties to retire early and live on their savings (invested abroad). Their economic and social role was limited. Finally, Russel King also carried out a survey of 185 returnees across the Maltese Islands, 89 from Australia. This concentrated primarily on their experiences abroad.<sup>7</sup>

So far there has been no other study which has looked at returnees from Australia to Malta and the King and Strachan study (like Thompson's in Italy) focussed on the untypical situation of returnees to a small village, isolated from urban labour markets.

Students of migrant labour in Western Europe for long suffered from an opposite myopia to the Australians and Maltese, but for a similar reason. In the 1960s receiving countries such as Germany and Switzerland and source countries such as Yugoslavia, formulated policies for temporary 'guest worker' flows. It was only in the changed climate of the 1970s that it became generally noticed that many of these temporary workers had *de facto* become permanent, having won longer term permits and family reunion through prolonged and repeated stints, when the countries of Western Europe closed their doors to new workers in 1973. Those already there were unable to continue the to and fro pattern of before and were forced to choose whether to settle or to return. Many chose the former.<sup>8</sup>

The result of the prior assumption of temporariness has been that return flows and repeated remigration and their motives and impact were always a major focus of Western European studies. The two sets of one-sided expectations, of purely temporary residence in Western Europe and permanent family settlement in Australia have now been discarded and awareness has been converging. It has become clear that there is no absolute divide between guestworker flows and family settlement. The two are alternative strategies available to workers, who may (often with pain and difficulty) switch in response to changing circumstances in the new country or the old. The Australian and West European experiences are not poles apart but points on a continuum with mutual relevance.

The West European literature on return migration has produced over the years a vigorous debate on the impact of such returns on the home country. We can disentangle three evolving arguments here. The first, set in the modernisation perspective of the 1960s, saw returning migrants bringing in updated skills, investment capital, and modern values.<sup>9</sup> This came to be increasingly contested from an 'internal colonialism' paradigm which saw migration as a drain of resources from poor to rich countries with no *quid pro quo*. The emigrants from Turkey or Yugoslavia, it was shown, were made up disproportionately of the skilled workers of those countries. In Western Europe they were used as factory fodder in deskilled jobs where their skills were more likely

to atrophy than to develop. On their return they invested neither their savings nor their labour in the modern sectors of the economy but, it was argued, frittered them away in the consumption of houses and cars and in setting up petty self-employment ventures which frequently failed. Manual work for wages was seen as incompatible with the status of a returnee, and when the petty enterprise failed and the savings were all spent, remigration was the only way out.<sup>10</sup> A third approach did not contest many of the findings of the second, but evaluated them quite differently. The infusion of resources into the construction of a stock of new houses and into an infrastructure network of trucks and taxis and repair shops has been seen as very valuable. From the point of view of the migrants themselves (often ignored in the first two approaches), years of sacrifice and hard work have paid off with a degree of family independence and comfort.<sup>11</sup>

While this debate is of relevance to Maltese return migration, it is clear that in many ways the situation in the main Maltese island is very different.<sup>12</sup> There is the overwhelmingly working class rather than peasant nature of the population and of the emigrants, from the beginning of the migration period and before.<sup>13</sup> There is the absence of a clear urban-rural division on the main island which is only 27 km by 15 km and linked by an excellent and cheap bus network, so that every part is accessible to every other for work or schooling or social contact. Perhaps most important of all is the growth in prosperity over a period when the contrary was expected, sustained over the last dozen or so years when most countries have experienced reversals. Wages in Malta are low by European and certainly by Australian standards,<sup>14</sup> but abject poverty is very rare, minimum wages are enforced, and pensions and health services are universal. Housing is spacious and solid, home ownership promoted by government subsidies has risen from 32% in 1967 to 54% in 1985 and no more than 2,000 out of 104,000 households are estimated now to be living in substandard conditions.<sup>15</sup> Unemployment has not risen over 10% and is currently under 5% after massive public sector job creation schemes by the previous government.<sup>16</sup>

This paper will first look again at the '*missing persons*' data cited at the beginning and an independent attempt will be made to assess the proportion of returned migrants, in one section of the population – the parents of high school children. The rest of the paper is based on a questionnaire completed by 110 such parent returnees from five of the schools, with the deeper understanding provided by 30 personal accounts derived from long interviews with individuals obtained through personal contact and a snowball approach (with one contact leading to another), as well as letters in response to a request in a local newspaper. The survey

and interviews explored the motives for and experience of return – paying particular attention to the hypotheses of emigration as a means to accumulate savings for self-employment and that of a return to early retirement. The likely impact of the returnees on Maltese society and the nature of continuing links between Malta and Australia will then be evaluated and the study concludes with policy recommendations to both the Maltese and the Australian governments.

## THE MISSING PERSONS

It had appeared easy enough to find returnees, but initial enquiries drew nearly a blank and my suggestion that there could be over 20,000 of them in Malta was met with incredulity. Enquiries among neighbours, shopkeepers and priests in the three cities area where I was staying produced at first only three people, who themselves knew only of their own families. The *'Australian Taylor'* in Cospicua had changed hands since it was opened and the Boomerang Bar in Vittoriosa did not open during my stay. *'Oh Yes'*, people said, *'A lot did come. The wives missed their mothers and pushed their husbands to return. But they found it didn't work and they went back again after a while'*.

The Maltese-Australian Association did not appear to involve many returnees. The Chairman, Nick Bonello, claimed a membership of 200 but did not supply the list. Their publication had died after a few issues due to failure of advertisers to pay and they had been unable to maintain paid staff or their own premises. Both Bonello and Father Attard of the rival Friends of Australia Association thought definitive returnees would not number more than a few thousand, being mainly retired people who found that their Australian pension stretched further in Malta. This often happened where the retired man had missed the mateship of his working life and hoped to find it again in the active bar and club life of Malta.

This did not resolve the mystery. The Australian High Commission stated that only 760 people in Malta were drawing Australian pensions. Second time emigrants would reappear in the next Australian census and would thus not form part of the missing 35,000. It was necessary to re-examine the data.

Maltese records on emigrant departures to Australia have been considered very reliable, however doubts arise when they are counterposed to Australian arrivals data. Since 1959 these have recorded both settler arrivals and a wider category of permanent and long term arrivals which also includes Australian residents returning after a stay of more than one year overseas.

## MIGRANT MOVEMENTS – AUSTRALIAN AND MALTESE DATA

	1959 – 1974	1975 – mid '86	Total 1959 – mid '86
<i>Maltese data:</i>			
Settler departures for Australia	41,022	8,484	49,506
<i>Australian Data:</i>			
Settler arrivals from Malta	36,817	6,513	43,330
Non-settler long-term arrivals	4,915	4,166	9,081
<b>Total permanent and long-term arrivals</b>	<b>41,732</b>	<b>10,679</b>	<b>52,411</b>

Sources: Malta-COS *Demographic review*

Australia: Department of Immigration *Consolidated Statistics* and data supplied by the Department

**Note:** Data by calendar year and data running from mid-year points have been adjusted by halving in some cases

It is clear that for the period 1959 – 1974 the Maltese departure data correspond quite closely to the Australian P & LT figure and thus seem to include those who had returned to Malta for a long visit (whatever their intentions). Such people having been counted twice (or more) have inflated the figure of Maltese recorded as departing for Australia.

### LONG TERM (NON-SETTLER) ARRIVALS FROM MALTA

Year	Annual Average
1967 – 68	161
1968 – 69	193
1969 – 70	246
1970 – 71	479
1971 – 72	529
1972 – 73	735
1973 – 74	783
1974 – 75	535
1975 – 76	282
1976 – 77	478
1977 – 78	628
1978 – 79	754
1979 – 80	475
1980 – 81	435
1981 – 82	330

Our problem with Australian entry data is the absence of information on settler arrivals before 1959 when some two-fifths of all Maltese had arrived. However it is clear that the numbers of 'long-term' returning resident arrivals has risen sharply over the years. The excess of the P & LT figures over the (unavailable) settler only figures for the period up to 1959 cannot be very great. These were 39,605 P & LT arrivals from Malta from July 1945 – December 1958. It is improbable that more than 1,500 of these were thus counted twice. We can obtain the following improved estimate of total settler arrivals.

1947 – December 1958 P&LT Arrivals from Malta	39,600
Minus estimate for Australian residents returning after long absence in Malta	<u>1,500</u>
	38,100
January 1959 – June 1986 Settler Arrivals from Malta	<u>43,330</u>
Total Settler Arrivals from Malta 1947 – 1986	81,430
Maltese born persons already resident in Australia in 1947 Census	<u>3,200</u>
Total Maltese Settler Arrivals recorded in Australia up to mid-1986	84,630
Minus those recorded in 1986 Census	56,230
'Missing Persons' (improved estimate)	28,400

The figure for total arrivals however must include some double counting. Intending returnees to Malta who changed their minds and went back to Australia within a year would be counted as short term returns and those who went back after 1 – 3 years (or longer if they obtained visa extensions) would be counted as long term returnees. However any who allowed their visas to lapse and then reapplied and remigrated would be counted twice. Price and Delia are both aware of this but neither seems to expect it to be of great magnitude. However a count made in November 1987 of files at the Australian High Commission found that of the 147 most recent immigrant visas granted, 20% were to people who had already resided in Australia. Of the first 105 visas granted in 1980 31% were to second time emigrants. If this kind of proportion were projected back to the period of mass immigration (whose files have been destroyed), there would be few 'missing persons' left, but this would of course be nonsensical. Remigration grows as does the pool of returnees.

The scale of second time migrants with new visas is however sufficient to call into question the whole 'missing persons' approach –

especially when it is added to the other unknowns: it is possible that departing Maltese have not returned to Malta but gone to a third country. This is however probably balanced by the arrival of Maltese born persons from other places too. The other major unknown hiding place of the missing persons is among the dead. The age structure of the Maltese in Australia would not suggest a high death rate but it must run into thousands over the 40 year period. No records are available.

While all the above considerations would reduce the expectation of finding 28,400 returned emigrants now living in Malta, we must expand it by the number of their Australian born children who came with them. Russel King's study of Qala suggested many adult returnees were thus accompanied. Many of the returnees I interviewed had brought back such children and several were themselves Australian born. Such children must choose their nationality at 18 and if they do not renounce their Australian citizenship they cannot work in Malta. The Australian High Commission has been recording over 100 such renunciations annually.

The figures make it clear that many immigrants have left Australia and that emigration is not a simple once and for all act, but one stage in a chain of movements for the many who retain links with both countries. However it is not possible to use them with any confidence to estimate the number of returnees currently in Malta. For that a field count was decided upon.

Twenty-four secondary schools were approached, with the cooperation of the Director of Education and they agreed to count the number of pupils who said one or both parents had ever lived in Australia. Five of the schools distributed questionnaires to be filled in by parents of those who had replied in the affirmative. This method ensured a good coverage of the 35 – 49 age groups (85% of questionnaire respondents were in this age range) – a group of which most were likely to be past the age for further moves. The results show a high degree of variability corresponding to some extent to the areas of original heavy emigration to Australia. Clearly returnees are drawn back to their districts of origin, a finding which accords with that of King. (Lockhart also noted strong local residential loyalties in internal movements of Maltese).<sup>17</sup> The higher figure for girls' schools may reflect a greater knowledge by girls of family history or else a greater attentiveness and willingness to cooperate with the school. They suggest the boys' schools' figures are underestimates.



School	% of Children with Parent(s) who had been in Australia
Girls Trade School, Gozo	31.7
Girls Secondary School, Gozo	27.3
Boys Secondary School, Gozo	18.8
Girls Secondary School, Ta' Paris, B'Kara	11.4
Girls Trade School, St Andrews	8.4
Boys Secondary School, Dingli	7.7
Girls Secondary School, Rabat	7.1
Girls Secondary School, Siggiewi	6.7
Girls Secondary School, Sliema	6.2
Girls Secondary School, Mriehel	6.0
Boys Secondary School, Mtarfa*	6.0
Girls Secondary School, Zejtun	5.5
Girls Secondary School, Sta Venera	4.7
Girls Trade School, Vittoriosa	3.6
Girls Secondary School, Cospicua	3.3
Boys Secondary School, Zebbug	3.2
Boys Secondary School, Tal Handaq	3.2
Boys Trade School, Corradino	2.8
Girls Secondary School, St Andrews	2.4
Boys Secondary School, Hamrun	1.9
Boys Secondary School, Corradino	0

	Returns	Total School Population Surveyed	%
Gozo Schools	375	1,567	23.9
Malta Schools	370	8,464	4.4

\* This figure was an under-estimate as it only included children who were themselves in Australia. It has therefore been doubled to take some account of this.

These figures need to be discounted by a fifth to allow for the 40% of children who had had only one parent in Australia giving 19.1% for Gozo and 3.5% for Malta.

The numbers in private schools appear to be very low, about 0.5% in St Aloysius and De La Salle. Maltese migration has been largely a

working class experience both in their background and in their work in Australia. It seems that the return has not given them access to the private schools.<sup>18</sup>

The private schools account for 24% of pupils on the main island and 11% in Gozo. The overall proportion of returnee parents would then be around 3.1% of parents in Malta and 17% in Gozo giving a combined minimum figure of around 4.2% of the age group which is about 3,000 persons. In the Australian census of 1986 there were 23,545 Maltese born persons aged 35–49, over two out of five of all Maltese born persons in Australia.<sup>19</sup> The returnees would then constitute about 11% of the total cohort. This figure may reflect undercounting in some schools and we might suggest a range of 11–15% as a credible permanent return rate. If we multiply this by the total Maltese community in Australia we get a probable range of 7,000–10,000 returnees living in Malta. (To this must be added a couple of thousand of their Australian born children). Some of the differences between this figure and that of the best '*missing persons*' estimate of over 28,000 is accounted for by deaths and perhaps by other '*leakages*' (net departures to third countries, and people absent from Australia on census night who were not subsequently traced). Much of the difference however would be due to the double counting of second time remigrants, who have received a visa more than once indicating that for many, return is no more a complete and definitive act than was the original migration. The remainder of the study looks more closely at those who have by and large resettled permanently and on the whole contentedly in Malta. The others, who left again, may be a different story.

## THE MIGRATION CYCLE

By far the highest rates of postwar emigration in general as well as the highest proportions going to Australia were from the smaller island of Gozo. Gozo is much more agricultural than the main island and its inhabitants, lacking the possibility of daily commuting to industrial or harbour areas have a tradition of overseas migration and return going back to the 19th century. King and Strachan's study of Qala in Eastern Gozo produced a three stage model of the migration cycle. Very young men depart for around five years. After returning to marry, the couple then redepart together for around another 10–15 years. They then return definitively with their pre-teenage children to live on the income from invested savings, supplemented by some part time fishing and farming or else to set up as independent producers or traders (the former pattern tends to characterise US returnees, the latter the Australians). The whole cycle is a planned venture into industrial labour in high wage destinations, aimed at accumulating savings and at an eventual withdrawal and return

to independence or leisure in the place of origin.<sup>20</sup> The data collected in King's survey of the islands as a whole does not entirely fit this picture, but his interpretation is basically shaped by the Qala generated model.<sup>21</sup>

King's picture fits well with many other analyses of migration, especially to Western Europe or America, both in the postwar period in earlier times. These see much of such migration in intent and (insofar as it achieves its objectives) in its conclusion as an articulation between a pre-capitalist peasant or artisan mode of production and modern wage labour. The project is, by means of heroic hard labour and sacrifices for a number of years, to accumulate the savings to establish or re-establish family independence and status on a secure and comfortable basis in the place of origin.<sup>22</sup>

King's stress on early retirement (sometimes even before the age of 40) and on leisure rather than a family business is an interesting variant, and one which makes the project one of wider current relevance. The danger with studies of returnees to isolated rural areas is that they predetermine a dualist model and findings which counterpose the modern, urban wage labour of the receiving country with the traditional, rural petty commodity production of the place of origin and return. In fact many source countries have themselves been undergoing rapid industrialisation and urbanisation over the last 40 years and mass internal migration has paralleled the flows abroad. A survey of Greek and Italian immigrants in Australia found that although most had a village origin, a sizeable minority had worked in major cities of their homeland before emigrating and all but three had relatives living in such cities. Most visits home were not restricted to the village of origin.<sup>23</sup> There are indications that the destination of many returnees is also urban.<sup>24</sup> As much or more than an articulation of modes of production there are internationally mobile wage workers whose kinship and information networks and own movements to and fro link the working class in different industrialised parts of the world.

Gozo contains only 8% of the population of the Maltese islands. The largest number of returnees are in Malta, where the '*villages*' have many of the attributes of conurbation suburbs, and where the population has not been peasant for many generations. Even in the 1948 census only 14% of the population were engaged in agriculture or fishing and the proportion of wage and salary earners in the population has risen steadily from 66% in 1948 to 68% in 1957, 77% in 1967 and 85% in 1985 (a figure no different to that in Australia).<sup>25</sup> Immigrants can return home without losing access to bright lights or modern jobs, though their wages will almost certainly be significantly lower (see Footnote 14). The original emigration was for many of them not a venture into the proletarian

condition but a search for higher wages or a response to unemployment or the fear of retrenchment in the docks and shipyards that served the withdrawing British naval presence.<sup>26</sup> Since then the port has become busy servicing the needs of other kinds of ships – oil tankers and containers and cruise liners, a considerable amount of light industry has been established and tourism has developed. It was decided to restrict the study to the main island of Malta in order to produce a complementary study to the village study of Qala.

The study is based on the combination of two elements. The first is a group of 22 long open-ended interviews. The initial contacts were mainly made through the assistance of the Workers' Participation Development Centre (WPDC) at the University of Malta and their spouses. These then led on to their brothers and sisters, grown up children, parents and workmates. The trail started in the University but rapidly led back into the working class at many points. Most were resident in the harbour conurbation or in the outer harbour area. Had time allowed, the contacts could have been followed further, perhaps indefinitely. There were in addition 11 responses to a letter in the newspaper asking for information. Seven of these were followed up with interviews. Less revealing, though more representative were 114 questionnaires completed by returned parents of five secondary schools, chosen to cover a range of catchment areas and social groups. There were nine responses from the two private schools of St Aloysius and De La Salle, eight from the Corradino trade school, ten from the Hamrun junior lyceum and 87 from Mriehel girls junior lyceum. The response rate was 75% of the households. They covered 65 men and 49 women in 80 households. There were replies from both partners in 34 couples, with a further 7 cases (three men and four women) where only one partner replied though both had been in Australia. In addition there were 28 men and 11 women who seemed to have married non-returnees in Malta.

SURVEY PARAMETERS

Age Now:	Men	Women
	%	%
Under 35	–	9.
35 – 39	13.	(36.
40 – 44	(50.	76% (40.
45 – 49	73% (23.	11.
50 +	14.	4.
	100.	100.
	n.65	n.49

Age went to Australia:		
Under 10 (or born there)	(5.	(9.
10 - 16	10%(5.	13%(4.
17 - 24	78.	64.
25 +	13.	22.
Age of Final return to Malta:		
Under 17	3.	-
17 - 24	22.	20.
25 - 29	30.	38.
30 - 39	38.	40.
40 +	6.	4.
Date of First going to Australia:		
Before 1963	27.	22.
1963 - 1967	(53.	24.
1968 - 1973	68%(15.	41.
1974 - 1986	3.	13.
Date of last return:		
Before 1965	6.	-
1965 - 1969	34.	20.
1970 - 1974	20.	20.
1975 - 1979	25.	38.
1980 -	14.	22.
Length of Stay:		
Under 2 years	2.	2.
2 + 4 years	28.	31.
5 - 9 years	33.	40.
10 - 14 years	16.	13.
15 + years	20.	13.
	100.	100.
	n.65	n.49

The current age of the sample derives from their status as parents of high school children. It is this which has largely determined the emigrant cohorts to which they belong, with 65% going between

1963 – 1973, a period which accounts for only one-third of all emigrants to Australia. given that these are largely now probably permanent returnees, their length of stay is generally less than the Qala experience would suggest, although the age structure would not have precluded a greater proportion of longer term emigrants. Although there are few who returned before 1965, they are scattered through the whole period since.

Neither the interviews nor the survey fit the Qala model of two stage migration. Only one interviewee and only seven of the 34 survey couple husbands married a woman who emigrated later than themselves. In two-thirds of the survey couples the pair first emigrated together and in the remaining cases the woman had preceded her husband to be, accompanying her parents.

More significantly both interviews and survey indicated a far lower proportion for whom emigration had been initially planned as a finite project than either the Qala model or King's general survey indicated.

	Men %	Women %
Finite (Specified or Unspecified) Period of Emigration Originally planned	33.	49.
Went to stay/for good	52.	30.
Other (don't know, went to see, born there, went with parents)	15.	21.
	100. n.65	100. n.49

Amongst the interviewees only one couple had gone with what may be called a 'guest worker' orientation. The Arrigos\* had cut short their planned six year stint to 4½ years when Mary became pregnant because the required level of savings needed two incomes and spartan accommodation. 'We rented one room, from relatives and there were rats'. Their savings were however enough to buy a flat and a car on their return and with that they were well content. Of an orientation to long years of sacrifice aimed at early retirement or the setting up of an independent enterprise there is scarcely a trace. The only retired interviewees had returned in their seventies, to be near nephews, because

it seemed unwise to remain out of reach of any relatives in their declining state of health.<sup>27</sup> In the sample were only two men who fitted the Qala idyll – retiring early to a little part time work on their return. One of these had won a lottery. There were a further four men who did nothing when they returned but two of these were clearly unemployed, seeking work and unhappy about it. The case of the other two is unclear, but they were quite young and perhaps engaged in a black economy they did not wish to declare. At first sight the self-employment goal appears a little more likely.

What did on returning	Men %
Obtained a job	64.0
Nothing (retired, unemployed, ect)	8.0
Self-employed, own business	25.0
At school	3.0
	<u>100.0</u>
	n.65

\* All names of returnees are fictional.

It is true that of the 14 who started in self-employment five abandoned it later. (Three of these five now regret their return and none is contented). What is more counter-indicative is that only four of the 14 say they returned in order to set up a business or that saving for a business was an advantage of their stay, or indeed mention planning their return at all. Half of them had gone to Australia intending to settle and most had returned because of family or homesickness. Among the interviewees moves to self-employment were quite common, but revealed clearly the irrelevance of the model. Edward Balzan and Jack Agius both had the strong commitment to community service which is frequent among Maltese.<sup>28</sup> Edward had worked for many years in Australia as a hospital orderly and found enormous satisfaction in companionship with the sick and in interpreting for immigrant patients. He was very involved with the Maltese Club and also had worked as a volunteer scripture teacher in schools. Jack had been a founding member of community organisations in Australia and Malta and a person of some public standing, who worked for a travel agent in both countries, organising visits between them. Both had considered setting up their own business as a means of making a living, and both had rejected it as likely to interfere with their freedom to devote themselves to that which most interested them.

The Cassars and the Portellis had both decided to come back quite suddenly after nine and twenty years in Australia, in the first case because Lilly missed her parents, in the second because of an attack of homesickness by John while visiting Malta. The Cassars found that the difference in house costs between the countries left a surplus with which they bought a minibus, which he operated successfully for a number of years. When he lost some lucrative contracts he abandoned it and took a better paying job instead. *'It was all very sudden. If we had known we were coming back we might had saved for it, but it worked out anyway'*.

John Portelli's brother in Malta proposed to them a partnership in which he would provide the premises and they would provide the labour to set up a guesthouse. John had always preferred the security of a regular wage, but it offered a means of coming home. Antoinette loved Australia but her work as a catering manageress had opened her eyes to the potential in such a business. The enterprise foundered after a couple of years on a family quarrel about money. By now it was too late to remigrate for the teenaged daughters, tempted back with them initially by sun and sea, were settled and married. John found again a job as a fitter.

Perhaps the most revealing case is that of Carmelo the butcher. He had worked in Australia for eleven years in a bacon factory, working his way up from labourer to leading hand. He had all his family and many friends in Australia, but his wife was alone and prevailed on him to return. He told her he was unwilling to accept the wages and conditions of a Maltese factory – if he could make a go of his own shop, alright, otherwise they would remigrate. The shop worked out well in a traditional style. There are no big supermarkets in Malta and small shops do not need to open for long hours to compete. In 35 hours a week or so he could achieve the same standard of living as had required overtime and weekend work at the bacon factory. He had more time for his family. But he missed his relatives and the social life and the mateship of Australia and the factory. As a butcher he saw only women all day long. Finally after twelve years back, at the age of 40 he took the plunge, obtained a new visa, sold up and packed, intending to return and seek again a job in a meatworks (his resources would not run to a business in Australia). At the eleventh hour sanity prevailed, in the form of the refusal of the children (one engaged, the other completing a trade training) to go with them.

In Australia too the tendency to set up independent enterprises is lower among the Maltese than many other immigrant groups. In the 1986 census 28% of employed Greek born immigrants, 26% of the Italian born but only 12% of the Maltese born were employers or self-employed. The

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Maltese are an admirable and hardworking people. The country has made more of its recent independence than most and achieved much in an unfavourable economic climate. Petty entrepreneurship is not however one of their driving forces. They are too many generations away from a peasant heritage and too accustomed to setting high value on a reliable employer and on job security. Malta is a tiny island with a magnificent harbour, set at what was for long the crossroads of the world, between Europe, Asia and Africa. In Neolithic times it was it seems the founder of the megalithic culture that spread to Stonehenge and elsewhere, but since then it has mainly served as a base and haven for navies and traders from elsewhere and its population have acted as the workforce, skilled and unskilled to service the ships and their masters.

The Maltese migration chain consists of moves within the working class condition from start to finish. Of the migrants to Australia from 1959 – 1985 who had been in the Maltese workforce, 72% had done non-agricultural manual work before migrating.

#### SURVEY OCCUPATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Last Job – Men	%
Skilled Tradesmen (including drivers)	28.
Semi and Unskilled Manual Jobs	44.
Non-Manual Jobs (clerical, real estate sales, driving instructor, foreman)	9.
Own Business (including 2 farming)	6.
Unclassifiable	8.
Did not Work	5.
	<hr/> 100.
	n.65

The 1981 Australian census shows 61% of Maltese born in the workforce were craftsmen, operatives or labourers or transport and communication workers. (Only 30% of the Australian born were in these occupations). Only 6% of the Maltese born were in professional or administrative jobs.

Of the 42 in the survey who became employees when they returned to Malta, nine worked in building jobs provided by the housing boom and eight in the developing tourist industry as waiters, barmen, hotel receptionists, etc. Five became drivers and three went into shipbuilding and port work, (joined by two more whose business failed). Skilled workers tended to remain in their trade, (sometimes moving in and out of self-employment, over time). A few have on arrival or later moved

into higher level jobs, as an accountant, a personnel manager etc, but the large majority remain in what are clearly working class jobs.

It is when we come to look at women's work that the notion of an articulation of relations of production takes on some meaning. Men's work is not fundamentally different in the two countries. Women's work however is much less commodified in Malta where domestic labour enters far more into the constitution of the socially constructed standard of living and where it is integrated into a much more complex set of social relationships than in Australia (we shall return to this in Part Two). In general immigrants in Australia tend to have particularly high levels of female paid workforce participation, even when they have small children. In our sample 74% of the women had done paid work in Australia, 46% of these in factories, 17% in services, 11% clerical, 10% as beauticians, 7% in a family business and 10% 'other' (a supervisor, a training officer in a laboratory, a dress designer and a teacher). Since their return 78% had never done a paid job and half of the remainder had worked discontinuously. The women in the survey were more unambiguously glad to be home than were the men (55% compared with 41%) and the interviews indicated that the fact that they did not have a paid job was seen by many of them as one important reason for preferring Malta. It was '*better for the children*', and they would not like to leave them with anyone else. The contrast was not seen as a personal choice but as a social construct. '*If I was in Australia now I would have to have a job. My sister there is working with a one year old*'. On the other hand '*I couldn't go out to work here, I have far too much to do*'. A local newspaper has been reporting the inability of factories to fill 500 machinists jobs for women.

It is not immediately clear why in Australia, where men's wages are much higher, two incomes are seen as necessary yet, we should note that despite the lower pay rates and the single incomes over half of both men and women considered their standard of living in Malta to be '*the same*' as it had been in Australia. It seems that when people move from one society to another, where social expectations and the mix of commodified and non-commodified values differ, they can suffer a substantial fall in monetary income without experiencing it as a decline in their standard of living – so long as certain basic needs are met.

Many of the components of the standard of living which are paid for in Australia are provided by domestic work here. There seems to be for example more material shops than clothes or home furnishing shops. Home cooking is more varied than that available in the few non-tourist oriented restaurants and there are not many '*take aways*'. Houses are ornately decorated with marble floors, wrought iron arches, lace curtains and glass chandeliers all kept spotlessly clean so they can be

publicly displayed through glass doors that open onto the pavements. Children are much loved and much cared for, and until recently numerous. Family celebrations – births, first communions, confirmations and marriages – are lavishly celebrated with many guests and elaborate food and clothing made by the mother with help from a circle of relatives. There is a lot of visiting. Even Antionette Portelli who had had a long very satisfying and much regretted work career in Australia (while her mother had cared for the children) and who regretted the return, remarked that *'when I came to Malta on holiday I used to admire the young girls pushing prams, taking their kids for a stroll – we didn't have time for such things in Australia – I thought of what I'd missed'*.

Here let us note the articulation. It was migration and the paid work of women in Australia which often made possible the outright purchase of the house and its furnishings and thereafter the maintenance of the 'same' standard of living with a single, lower income. If the Maltese show little inclination to purchase premises and tools for men's work they certainly do so for women's non-waged work.

One might say that people left Malta for economic reasons but that once the pressure of these was reduced (because of the money made in Australia and because of the improving situation in Malta) then non-economic factors were able to have more play and prompted a return. This would however impose the over-simplification of these categories. It would ignore the desire for wider choices and open horizons that was almost always bound up with the 'economic' departure. It would discount the real economic value of Malta's 'non-economic' attractions. In other countries people will pay a lot for sun and sea, boating and fishing on the doorstep and for conviviality, general accessibility and security. It would also forget the 'non-economic' losses involved in return – the relatives and friends and the ethnic community left behind in Australia and the memories of youthful adventure.

For the returnees Australia is a large, new continent, a place of open spaces and opportunities but one where outside the family network and community they have taken with them, in the end for many there may be loneliness and no full acceptance. Malta is a *'very small island'*, where everyone knows everyone and where there is an intense sometimes embittered, kinship, neighbourly, communal and political life. These contrasts prompt both the departure and the return. Some Maltese emigrated because they were unemployed, more because they sought higher wages or saw limited and shrinking work opportunities around them. There is also however a long tradition of emigration going back to the 19th century and increasingly by the 1960s and 1970s they went to join other relatives (sometimes most of their family) already there, in the Maltese suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. *'For the natives of*

*Malta the rocky islands have become perches, affording a beginning in life and some sustenance it is true, but mere footholds on a life which many Maltese feel can only be brought to fruition in the wider world beyond the Grand Harbour . . . happy to leave it and happy to return'.*

The reasons for return essentially involved a complex of personal feelings – missing parents and relatives, feeling lonely, unsettled, fed up, missing the country and the way of life, all of which was often grouped under the name of 'homesickness'. This had motivated 42% of the men and 58% of the women. Family obligations, especially to sick or aged parents added a further 10% to each of these percentages. Men in addition had returned for work related reasons in 13% of cases (to set up a business or take up a job) to marry in 7% of cases and to avoid conscription in 5% of cases. Thirteen percent of men and 15% of women came back only because their spouse wished to come. The stereotype that men only return before retirement '*because the wife misses her mother*' was thus not borne out. If women mentioned their relatives more often than did the men it was perhaps because they were less likely to be in Australia, 75% of the men still have relatives there but only 66% of the women. Women were more likely than men to have followed their spouse into the complete unknown. However men were no more often than women an unwilling returnee and were frequently affected by the same feelings. Homesickness often strikes suddenly, like love, falling upon people perhaps long and happily established in a country where they have chosen to settle. In some cases it affected men and women all of whose close relatives were in Australia. It may be triggered by a setback there, a flood, an illness, a difficulty in conceiving children. In one case a man received a postcard of Msida, his home town, and seeing the new buildings felt a need to be part of the changes. Often it is triggered off by a holiday back in Malta. Once it takes hold it can become a consuming passion like '*an attack of madness*' and though the feeling is most often shared it can sometimes drag an unwilling partner or children in its wake. Barbara Micallef had lived in Australia happily for 21 years. Three of her four children were married there and there were grandchildren. In Malta was only a sister, not seen for years. When her husband died she felt a sudden and overpowering need to return. After three years back now she has already revisited Australia once and is planning another visit, but she does not regret the move. Here she feels an independence that the loss of her husband had deprived her of there. While in Australia she must wait for the children to visit to take her out, here she can get to the shops and the church and the sea on her own two feet and feels she can rely on the neighbours all around. The family would not let her return alone however, and an unmarried son aged 33, for whom Malta was a foreign country and who gave up

a promising supervisory job, was prevailed upon to accompany her. The ultimate irony occurs when as in the case of Sam Mamo the *'sillyness wears off'* and regret sets in, but the originally unwilling family have now become immovable; the wife's parents are now too sick to be shifted back once again and the Australia bred daughter is married with a child and thinks of herself as Maltese.

If departures are by chain migration so, to a lesser extent, are returns. Half of the men and a third of the women had other relatives (apart from spouse and children) who had returned from Australia. Lilly Cassar's parents had a big house in Sydney where the many brothers and sisters met for frequent barbeques. When they returned to Malta this ended, there was *'only work and thinking about work'*. Eighteen months later they too returned and were soon followed by other brothers and sisters.

On the whole however few people in the survey were discontented. Only 14% of men and 15% of women regretted the return. Of the eight men who regretted it, three had not worked since returning, two had opened a business that failed and one had been unable to replace an active social life in ethnic organisations in Australia. In the remaining two cases the problem was unclear, but both had followed their wife back unwillingly. Of the regretful six women, two had been brought up in Australia and had abandoned interesting jobs to become housewives in Malta and two felt their social life had deteriorated.

Many men felt their working lives – conditions and earnings – were better in Australia, but 63% of them and 68% of the women felt their social life in Malta was better. Only 20% of men and 9% of women thought it was worse. *'You can go swimming in the summer after work and always meet someone you know'*, *'There is always something going on'*. The difference between men and women is greater than so far indicated. While 41% of men were glad they had returned and had no desire to depart again, an equal number were ambiguous, glad to have returned but feeling they would also like to return again to Australia. Women had fewer doubts. Fifty-five percent were glad to be back with no second thoughts and only 21% were ambiguous. Such ambiguity is expressed in the view that *'our heart belongs to both countries'*, a sense of dual identity.<sup>30</sup> It is sad that such duality can be trapped in bureaucratic tangles that seek to pigeon hole people neatly – as when Malta requires a choice of citizenship and when Australia refuses new visas. (I heard one case where a returnee with an Australian disability pension was refused a new visa on grounds of ill health).

Though interviewed women spoke with some regret and nostalgia of their lives in Australia, and missed the shops and sometimes the work opportunities, several interviewees insisted life in Malta was better for

women and for children. They spoke of the companionship of a densely inhabited world where few women are absent at work. *'You open your front door and see twenty people you know'*. And certainly Maltese streets and shops in the mornings are full of knots of women talking. In the summer evenings people put chairs out on the pavements by their open front doors and others walk up and down in family groups. The local streets are also the scene of public events. There are religious fiestas when everyone turns out in their best clothes. The anti-clerical half of the population turn their backs on the priestly procession but cheer the statue while everyone is deafened by petards and dazzled by fireworks. There are political demonstrations too, often also family events with Labour Party women in red skirts and their daughters wearing red hair ribbons. The women spoke also of the freedom that comes from easy mobility and from a sense of safety. Antoinette Portelli had brought back with her two teenage daughters of 16 and 19 and despite her regrets felt the move was good for them. *'Our worries were just starting when we left. I've worked in the university there and seen the girls' lives. Drugs, the pill, finding couples asleep on the dining room floor in the mornings. Here we could trust them to go out, to go to discos, to come home at midnight. We never worried, we know they were safe. There we could never have allowed it'*<sup>31</sup>

Rita Spiteri had lived and worked in Australia from the age of 15 to 24. She had not at first wanted to return, but now was glad. *'Social life is better here. I can go out by myself with the baby anywhere, I don't depend on other people. I'm not afraid to go out at night alone, I can go anywhere with the children on buses, I can take them into bars. There are buses every five minutes, and people I know all around. In Australia you need a car to go anywhere. If you are home with the kids, there is no one around'*. Maltese buses are indeed full of women and children and family groups can be seen having a drink in the clubs.

Doris Mamo who had lived in Australia from the age of 2 to 14, had been handicapped for jobs in Malta, despite good school results, by a lack of Maltese literacy and, she felt, a lack of patronage. She was now home with a two year old and thought Malta a much better place to bring up children, not only because of the mothers being at home but because *'you can trust the kids to be outside. They have a better life. In Australia they are always inside, here they are always out, playing with other children'*. The rarity of public drunkenness, the low rates for violent crime and serious road accidents,<sup>32</sup> the ubiquity of busybodies and of communal constraints, between them can be felt as liberating. In a world where everybody knows everybody's business, and is inclined to speak their mind on it; one also suspects that family violence, especially against children, would be rare.

Had the job opportunities for working class immigrant women in Australia been more attractive they might have embraced less willingly the trade off of career in return for an enlarged female role with safety, mobility and companionship and perhaps not felt that freedom lay in the latter direction.

## TO THE SMALL ISLAND FROM THE LARGE CONTINENT

What has been the impact of the migration experience? We can start by looking at the returnees themselves. Although only about one in seven of the survey regretted their return to Malta, nearly all were glad they had gone to Australia in the first place – 95% of the men and 85% of the women. This reply is quite often emphasised with underlining, exclamation marks or further comments, *'we thank God we went to Australia when we were young'*, *'Australia is one of the best countries in the world'*, *'I like both countries because Australia is a beautiful country'*, *'Maltese people feel very close to Australia'*, *'I feel very much indebted to your country'*, *'I will never forget Australia because it was my future'*, *'Australia is a wonderful place to live in'* are but a selection. I asked Jack Sammut whether he thought such replies might be partly motivated by politeness towards me. He was emphatic: *'We love Australia as much as Malta. Because we are so small and limited, when we go to a continent like Australia it seems like a paradise'*. The Falzons spoke enthusiastically of their long holiday coach trips to all parts of Australia and Alfred Bonnici nursed a deep regret that he had never fulfilled his ambition of buying a motorbike and going right around the continent on it.

The questionnaire asked whether the stay in Australia had been useful for people's work or life in Malta and in what way. Sixteen percent of men and 5% of women said it was of no use. Sixty-three percent of men and 40% of women spoke of saving money and 22% of men and 12% of women spoke of gaining work related experience or training. Eight men and three women had learned a trade in Australia. The other major category related to a general broadening of experience. Forty-seven percent of men and 40% of women gave this kind of reply. The question had provided as an example of an answer *'met people from many countries and learned about them'* and though many simply underlined or repeated this phrase, twenty-five people elaborated on it, saying how much such meetings had taught them, how much they enjoyed such friendships, how they had learned to communicate, to be tolerant and how inhabiting a large continent with a diverse population had broadened their outlook. One woman, a teacher now, brought back by her parents at the age of 7 wrote to me that *'I think my parents' stay overseas broadened their personal outlook... it gave them*

*individuality . . . ever afterward I felt they were more open minded than others and I was proud of that . . . I never forgot my childhood in Australia . . . it made me aware of a bigger world and gave me the confidence in later years to go and study in the US'.*

There were however some reservations that emerged. When asked what Australia could learn from Malta 40% said '*nothing*' or did not answer, often it seemed either because they were seen as incommensurable or because the idea of such a small island having lessons for a large and rich continent was absurd. Jack Sammut was a leading figure in the Labour Party and proud of its achievements against inflation and unemployment and considered that in the '*social domain Malta has taken gigantic steps ahead of other countries*' – but he denied that any of this could be relevant for a large country. However some did attempt a reply. Five percent spoke of history, tradition and religion, eight percent of hard work and savings and an equal number of family values and family unity. The largest single reply, 21%, focussed on friendliness, a willingness to help other people and especially hospitality as lessons Australians could learn. In some cases it was clear there was a lingering pain at occasions when they had felt excluded or rejected and been called '*wogs and other names*'. The Falzons, whose enthusiasm for Australia was great after 19 years residence, praised Australians' nice manners but then noted that '*when there was trouble these could break down and then they would call you wogs and bastard new Australians, no matter how long you have been there*'.

We can conclude then that for these migrants themselves the experience of emigration has overwhelmingly and of return largely been positive, though both have involved loss and nostalgia. The question of the impact of return migration on the Maltese economy and society is harder to answer in a more than speculative manner.

The first thing to note is that substantial savings were brought in. These were not so much deliberately accumulated for this purpose as realised when a home was sold in the booming housing market of Australia. Though some amount was often left invested overseas most was brought in enabling a few to set up businesses, others to take their time over their initial job search and most to purchase a comfortable house or flat. As a result only two of the 64 men referred to unemployment as a problem, with a possible two others as well, a proportion no higher than in the resident population.

Neither entrepreneurship nor a relevant enhancement of skills appear to be important contributions. Of those few who had acquired training and qualifications in Australia quite a few did not make use of them. It was clear from the interviews that there was a small but real problem of accreditation and recognition at the Maltese end. While an



accountant had found Australian training to be highly regarded in Malta, a Telecom technician's qualification had been rejected. In particular young people faced a consensus that school standards were higher in Malta and were penalised by the recent importance given to literacy in the Maltese language, a lack of which barred them from state secondary schools, the university and many jobs. Nick Borg had come fifth in Victoria in the public service entry examination. On returning to Malta soon after, he got no credit for this and suffered a prolonged period of unemployment and of special projects work with the Emergency Labour Corps.

The influx of funds will have been useful for the balance of payments and the job creation impact of returnees effective demand, especially in the labour intensive house-building sector, will almost certainly have outweighed the jobs they themselves took up. While 30% of the survey came back between 1975 and 1979, only 17% came back in the subsequent five years which accords with entry data suggesting a recent slowing down. Eighty-three percent of the survey stayed under 15 years, two-thirds under 10 years. Recent levels of emigration since 1974, would not generate substantial non-retiree returns yet to come. There is no evidence of a potential influx putting great pressure on the labour market nor of a need for the continuation of the 1977 restrictions on their access to welfare and the employment register. This may cause great hardship to a few without serving any general purpose.

What of the more nebulous but important area of values, attitudes and behaviour? King's Qala study concluded that the returnees were no more than '*a passive, conservative influence and act within the system not to change it*'. Despite a brief aside suggesting that this might not always apply in the more urban parts of Malta, this conclusion is reiterated in his more general study.<sup>33</sup> Here I would disagree. To that general broadening of awareness and perspectives which as we have seen many returnees consider they have gained, we can add first a broadly critical and comparative approach towards Maltese society. '*Malta has much to learn*'. While 25% failed to reply or said '*nothing*' and there was a wide range of other replies. Nineteen percent mentioned economic attributes of modernity, skills, technology, trade and the creation of well paying jobs. Eleven percent spoke of public cleanliness and the quality of public services. Eleven percent also mentioned the desirability of treating politics less seriously, not allowing it to be a source of discord and six percent spoke of discipline and abiding by the law.

There are two areas in particular that require further elaboration – that of politics and that of treatment at work. A criticism of the place of politics in Maltese life came up spontaneously in the first few interviews and thereafter even those who did not mention it themselves

all responded in the same vein when asked. To the question 'has your work been better here or in Australia (conditions, interest – not including pay)?', 65% of male respondents and 72% of female respondents said it was better in Australia and only 12% and 6% said Malta. If we exclude the self employed, the figure for men rises to 74% preferring Australian work and only 9% preferring it in Malta. It is in the extra comments, written on and especially in the interviews and letters, that the meaning of this widely agreed and not unrelated critique of Maltese politics and work is to be found.

Malta is a dual society, its population divided more or less equally between the Demo-Christian Nationalist Party and the Social-democratic Labour Party. It also has two independence days, two societies promoting Maltese-Australian friendship and two trade union structures. The parties have clashed on the question of clerical power (though almost the entire population are practising Catholics), in foreign and domestic policies and to a certain extent but less clearly in their class base. Sometimes families have been split. Each party has held power for long periods since the war in a country where government or para-statal organisations (including the docks) employ nearly 50% of the workforce, and where political patronage is rife in employment, promotion and the regional distribution of public works, '*politics is our bread and butter*' (Jack Sammut). It is also a passion '*Everyone talks politics all the time, even the children and the old women*' (Carmelo). Everyone's affiliation is generally known. Several interviewees and a number of survey respondents, supporters of both parties, said that the results of an election played a part in their decision to migrate or to return or in their evaluation of their decisions.

In 1981, by a small gerrymander, the Labour Party was returned to office with 49% of the votes.<sup>34</sup> The Nationalists responded by refusing to sit in Parliament and by mobilising all the forces at their command to sustain a continuing crisis, until a constitutional accord corrected the injustice, guaranteeing a parliamentary majority to the party with most votes. At the next election in 1987 the Nationalists came to power. Concerned perhaps lest the country be '*administered from the opposition*' they have since carried out transfers of personnel, especially Labour Party activists and people in key positions. They also proposed measures which seemed to forebode large scale sackings, especially of thousands of people in positions created by recent job creation schemes to counter unemployment (some of which had been allocated by other than formal procedures). The Labour Party and the General Workers' Union responded in turn with mass demonstrations and threats of a general strike (occurring over the period of the study) and obtained in the end an assurance that there had been no intention of sacking anyone and a guarantee that this would not take place.

Maltese society has a lower level of personal and criminal violence than most, but quite a high level of political violence. In the aftermath of an election many supporters of the defeated party remain at home behind locked doors.

To the returnees, Australia seemed to offer an alternative to this politicized setting, a 'healthier' model, where when the citizens had done their duty of voting they could 'leave it to the politicians' and remain 'a united people', where jobs and promotions, contracts and prizes and commendations for sporting achievements were obtained by merit not dependent on political affiliation; where what mattered was 'what you know not who you know'. All the interviewees were clearly committed to one party or the other, some were members and a few were activists, yet both sides were agreed in this critique.<sup>35</sup>

The attitude to working conditions ran partly parallel to this. To some extent people were referring simply to a higher level of provision of, for example, boots and overalls, washrooms and canteens and guaranteed penalty payments. In general however the main emphasis was on the existence of formalised rights: clearly defined normal working hours, non-arbitrary bonus systems, formal procedures for dismissal and promotion so that people need not fear to answer the foreman back or to complain if they felt unjustly treated. The stress was on reward for effort and merit, rather than favouritism and arbitrary power. Craig Littler has argued that 'There is an important distinction between rules prescribing the way in which the task must be performed and rules prescribing the way people should be chosen, trained and promoted. Subordinates fight rationalisation in the first area and want it in the second'.<sup>36</sup> The career open to the talents, what Littler calls the bureaucratisation of the employment relation, was seen as an Australian model for Malta to follow. On the other hand one small employer told me of ex-Australians who had left him after a short while (and returned to Australia) because he said they disliked the absence of clear job demarcations.

To what extent are returning migrants looking back with rose-tinted glasses, using an idealised memory as a yardstick to legitimise their sense of Maltese shortcomings? I am certainly unconvinced that Australian beaches are cleaner or Australian drivers more law abiding than Maltese ones. I remain a little sceptical of Alfred Bonnici's and Jack Sammut's claims that if they had stayed in Australia they 'could have gone much further'. Alfred left school in Australia at 16 and worked as a shop assistant for a year before returning to Malta. At 33 he is head barman in a large hotel. Jack worked for four years in Australia in his early twenties rising from bank teller to cashier. In Malta he became a leading diplomat with a major overseas posting.

More generally the view of Australia as the country that rewards everyone according to merit is contradicted by the experience of many immigrants from non-English speaking countries who found their education and credentials unrecognised and their prior experience discounted. Here however Maltese experience since the last war is clearly distinctive. Maltese tradesmen were apprenticed within a British recognised system and none of the certified tradesmen in the interviews or questionnaires, welders and boilermakers, jewellers and cabinet makers, fitters and mechanics, spoke of any difficulty in following their trade in Australia. Maltese education at the time of high emigration was conducted in the English language and those who had full literacy and high school qualifications found no barrier to clerical and banking jobs. Supervisory or at least leading hand positions were not hard to obtain by Maltese who had an advantage in English fluency over other South Europeans.<sup>38</sup> Insofar as Australia is not a land of equal opportunity for immigrants, the segmentation is structured through barriers set by fluency and literacy in the English language and by the non-recognition of credentials obtained outside the British system, not by prejudice and discrimination.<sup>39</sup> The Maltese indeed largely escaped this in the postwar period and their major handicap of often inadequate formal and grammatically correct literacy, which kept most in the manual working class, was generally accepted as fair. There was however, one of the interviewees who had suffered from Australian exclusionary barriers. Joseph Spiteri had sold a thriving business with the intention of taking his five children to a land of greater opportunity. He sought to reopen the business in Australia but was blocked from joining the Chamber of Auctioneers who refused to credit his experience. After four unfortunate years during which he was tricked out of a part of his money, and was reduced to working as a cleaner in a factory, he returned to Malta and successfully rebuilt his old business. Four of the five children followed Henry with his new wife Rita, in order to join the family business. *'Australia has a lot to offer to workers but not to people like us'*.

What matters for the argument however is not the accuracy of this somewhat idealised Australia but the fact that there exists in Maltese society and especially in the working class, a substantial number of people who feel that their experience in Australia adds weight to their criticism of arbitrariness at work and of patronage in politics. The Maltese working class is numerically large and well organised.<sup>40</sup> The strengthening of such ideas in their ranks cannot be discounted as irrelevant.

There are however some individuals whose impact may be more direct. One of these clearly emerged in the questionnaires and one in the interviews. The first had worked as a clerk in Australia for five years and when he returned found a job in middle management and is now

a personnel manager in industry. Australia helped him *'to broaden my outlook on life and the world around me and see it in the right perspective'*. What Malta could learn was *'especially in industrial relations, based on respect and appreciation for the employee's efforts and achievements'*. The second is George Camilleri. At 21, after working in a family business, he went to Australia on the spur of the moment, *'for a bet'*, but intended to settle because *'that was the only spirit in which success was possible'*. With a good matriculation he found at once a job in a bank and worked his way up over 14 years to a managerial level in the training section. He also acquired a small property. They returned because Jane was lonely, George was becoming bored with his work, *'I had achieved what there was to achieve'*, because the sale of the property brought in unexpected resources and because with the children approaching high school age *'it was now or never'*. The money freed him to seek work that interested him and he is now secretary of an agricultural marketing co-operative (at half his Australian pay). While the Australian experience had no direct relevance it had taught him how to handle people and given him great confidence. More important it had given him the determination to carry out the job without fear or favour. *'In Australia if you want to get somewhere you look at the requirements of the immediate problem. In Malta you have always to look at the political aspect – what type of people are you going to pinch, what the backlash will be. Everybody here knows ministers but I only look at what needs to be done . . . so many people try to influence you, but if you act on principle they all complain but no one challenges you. If someone wants special treatment and I refuse because it is not for the good of the co-operative, they are angry, but when they find that people of the other party have also been refused they hold you in more esteem'*. He has far reaching and imaginative long term plans for the co-operative whose achievement stands no chance unless a bipartisan unity of the members can be constructed and unless there is general confidence in the organisation. Though George has no thought of remigrating he feels himself *'a part of Australia and a part of Malta'*.

## CONCLUSION

Returns from Australia to Malta have been on a large scale and though much of this has been negated by re-migration, there remain probably over 10,000 returnees and their Australian born children permanently settled in Malta. Most have returned to the areas from which they departed, a choice perhaps facilitated by general accessibility. The survey respondents were equally divided between those who had departed with a guestworker orientation and those who had intended to settle in Australia for good. While the latter had failed to make the

clean break they intended and been drawn back by homesickness or family ties, the former seem also often to have returned on impulse or in response to an unexpected event. There was almost no evidence of planned savings being geared either to the establishment of self employment or of early retirement. The difference in these findings from those in Qala seem to derive either from the specificity of Gozo, where more limited job opportunities leave these two options as the only viable mode of return or else because of the more narrow specificity of Qala's returnees, coming mainly from the exceptionally high wages of the United States. By and large for these returnees the original departure and the homecoming have been worthwhile, though seemingly more so for women than for men. Women's productive activities in Malta contrast far more sharply with those in Australia than do men's. In Australia the only escape from the double workload lay in the marginality and loneliness of the suburban housewife. In Malta women's domestic work was more central and less easily replaceable by commodities and it formed part of an extended and supportive network.

By and large neither emigration nor return have involved clean breaks and both left residues of nostalgia and loss – for relatives, country and lifestyle and for memories of childhood and youth – with some perhaps rose-tinted regrets for what might have been. A few have been trapped in Malta against their will (as have others in Australia) by their commitments to relatives and family or by the obstacles to obtaining a new entry permit. There remains with me the image of Alfred, brought back unwillingly at the age of 17, tied here now by marriage, who longs for wide open spaces and withdraws often to the room where he keeps his model train set, in a country where there is not a single kilometre of railway line.

The returning men have found mainly working class jobs, in both traditional areas such as the docks and also in the newer factories and in the expanding tourism and housebuilding sectors. They have not suffered greatly from unemployment and their contribution to effective demand is likely to have more than counterbalanced the jobs they have taken. Only a few have contributed to the establishment of new enterprises or have brought back usable enhanced skills, but it seems likely that they have contributed to currents in the working class which see Malta in a wider perspective which are hostile to political patronage and which would seek an improvement of working conditions and an extension and formalisation of workers' rights. There are also throughout Malta perhaps a hundred people in positions of greater influence, for whom their Australian experience provides a model for innovative behaviour.

Certain proposals for policy reform flow from this study, for both governments. Mass migration was fostered by both countries in what was seen as their national interest. What has followed has not been a neat transfer of population, leading to assimilation, integration or even a multi-cultural society. What has come into being is people with international, or at least transnational roots, networks and loyalties, which are often passed on to their children. While this may be uncomfortable it is often enriching both for the people and the countries thus linked. It is not appropriate or just for bureaucratic regulations to treat such continuing links and movements to and fro as deviant.

The greatest responsibility falls on Malta, where both parties have in the past refused emigrants or the overseas born children of returnees the right of dual nationality. The expectation that young people should make binding decisions at the age of 18 is particularly onerous. There is no justification for continuing the restrictions on returnees' rights to welfare and jobs. Malta has also it seems paid too little attention to the need to give adequate credit to education obtained overseas. In particular the government should, like migrant receiving countries, provide courses in Maltese literacy, to enable youthful returnees to pursue studies and find jobs commensurate with their talents.

It is wrong too that Australia has washed her hands of those who depart. The lapsing of the immigrant visa after more than three years absence has caused much unhappiness and is a major disadvantage to non-citizens. Yet naturalisation is an unreasonable expectation when it involves burning one's bridges back. It is only just to suggest that the same period of residence that gives an entitlement to citizenship should alternatively give a right to a permanent visa for re-entry, and that this should apply retrospectively to those who have currently forfeited their visas. This study was unable to focus on the situation of pensioners and retirees. There are 760 of the former currently in Malta and many others with claims now or in the future. The few I spoke to all had problems of some kind, with claims or payments and difficulty in knowing where to turn. It would be desirable for someone at the high Commission to have a role as ombudsman, to investigate complaints of both Australian citizens and ex-permanent residents.

Such measures would be no more than a recognition of the facts that the immigrants in multi-cultural Australia remain also Maltese and that there is a part of Malta which is forever Australia.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Malta Central Office of Statistics (COS), *Demographic Review*, (1986 figure-estimate supplied by COS).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Census of Population 1947, 1986*.

<sup>2</sup> Russel King, 'Post War Migration Policies in Malta, with Special Reference to Return Migration', *European Demographic Information Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Australia, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, *Australian Immigration Consolidated Statistics*. Malta COS, *Demographic Review*.

<sup>4</sup> Immigration Advisory Council, *Inquiry into the Departure of Settlers from Australia*, Canberra, AGPS, 1973, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie L. Thompson, *Australia Through Italian Eyes*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> E.P. Delia, 'Return Migration to the Maltese Islands', *Hyph n: A Journal of Melitensia and the Arts*, Malta, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1981, pp. 1-8.

<sup>7</sup> Russel King and A.J. Strachan, 'The Effects of Return Migration on a Gozitan Village', *Human Organisation*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1980.

Russel King, 'The Maltese Migration Cycle', *Oxford Polytechnic Discussions in Geography*, 13, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Castles, *Here for Good*, London, Pluto Press, 1984.

Ray Rist, *Guestworkers in Germany*, New York, Praeger, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Kindleberger, *Europe's Postwar Growth*, Cambridge CUP, 1969. See a discussion of this approach in W.R. Bohning and D. Maillat, *The Effects of the Employment of Foreign Workers*, Paris, OECD, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> For example J. Poincard and M. Roux, 'Emigration contie developpement: Portugal et Yugoslavie', *Revue Tiers Monde*, Vol 18, 1977. N. Abadan, 'La Chaine Migratoire Turque', *Sociologie du Travail*, No 3, 1972. Bernard Kayser, *Manpower Movements and Labour Markets*, Paris, OECD, 1971. Suzanne Payne, *Exporting Workers: The Turkish Case*, London, CUP, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*, Cambridge, CUP, 1979.

<sup>12</sup> The inhabited Maltese islands consist of Malta, with over 90% of the population and the smaller more isolated and rural island of Gozo.

<sup>13</sup> Malta COS, *Demographic Review*.

<sup>14</sup> In January 1987 an experienced and skilled welder/burner in the relatively high wage Dry Docks, earned the equivalent of about \$4 an hour (at the current exchange rate, which is a fairly accurate reflection of prices other than construction and public transport). In Australia at this time a tradesman's basic hourly rate was over \$10 an hour.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Lockhart, 'Public Housing Initiatives in Malta Since 1955', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 103, No. 1, 1987, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Malta C.O.S. *Quarterly Digest of Statistics*.

<sup>17</sup> Russell King, 1979, *op.cit.*

D. Lockhart, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> See the ensuing discussion further on in the text.

<sup>19</sup> Australia ABS *Census of Population 1986*.

<sup>20</sup> R.L. King and A.J. Strachan, 1980, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Michael Piore, *op. cit.*

A. Portes, 'Migration and Underdevelopment', *Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1978.



- <sup>23</sup> C. Lever-Tracy and M. Quinlan, *A Divided Working Class*, RKP, London, 1988, pp. 36–37.
- <sup>24</sup> Paine, *op. cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> Malta, COS, *Census 1985*, p. 87.
- <sup>26</sup> R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*
- <sup>27</sup> One respondent to the newspaper letter had returned to retire, with substantial severance pay, after being made redundant at the age of 50.
- <sup>28</sup> The Maltese are great joiners and committee members. In Australia 39% of men and 29% of women had been active in ethnic, sporting, church or trade union bodies and in Malta 26% of the men and 24% of the women were active in church and political organisations, football, regatta and band clubs etc. Many hours of voluntary labour are devoted in Malta to the elaborate presentation of public events. Time and money is lavished on church activities. The dome of the church in Mosta was the third largest in Europe until it was pushed to fourth place by a new village church in Gozo.
- <sup>29</sup> R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
- <sup>30</sup> For most this was no more than a vague wish and only a minority of them had tried to remigrate – prevented by family members or refusal of visa. While remigration at this age is difficult, it does occur, attested by Australian Immigration records. One of the interviewees was planning to remigrate, following Australian born children who, having renounced their Australian citizenship once in Malta, had now gone back again to their country of birth with immigrant visas. For some the dual loyalties never cease to motivate action.
- <sup>31</sup> In 1985 out of 5,587 births only 66 were recorded as 'illegitimate', Malta COS, *Demographic Review 1985*.
- <sup>32</sup> Claimed by the *Times of Malta* to be the lowest in the world, eight times lower than in Australia (in relation to number of cars).
- <sup>33</sup> R.L. King, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.
- <sup>34</sup> Few countries have a system that ensures total equity. In Britain in 1951 and 1974 the winning party had fewer votes than the opposition parties.
- <sup>35</sup> I do not share their view. I think a high price is worth paying for the vitality of democracy. In Queensland where I live, a corrupt government remained in power for 20 years through a gerrymander in which 34% of the votes were enough to guarantee it a clear parliamentary majority. The same government in a politically motivated move sacked 1,000 power workers. Protests were unsustainable and limited. Queensland was not reft by intense political divisions; instead its democracy was sapped by apathy and outraged helplessness.
- <sup>36</sup> Craig Littler, *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies*, Heinemann, London, 1982, p. 43.
- <sup>37</sup> In earlier periods the Maltese certainly met not only prejudice but sometimes systematic discrimination. See Barry Yorke, *The Maltese in Australia*, Melbourne, AE Press, 1986.
- <sup>38</sup> With the additional advantage of being often able to communicate with Italian and Arabic speakers.
- <sup>39</sup> C. Lever-Tracy and M. Quinlan, 1988, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.
- <sup>40</sup> Trade union membership, (in two federations of course) in 1985 was 57% of employees and has been rising since. Malta COS *Annual Abstract of Statistics and Census of Population*.