

Family life and neighbourliness in Malta (c.1640 – c.1760): Some preliminary observations based on evidence from the *Magna Curia Castellaniæ*¹

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Between 1530 and 1798, the Maltese islands were governed by the Order of St John the Baptist of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta. This military-religious organisation was made up of knights from the noble families of Europe who took religious vows; their mission statement was to care for the sick and fight the enemies of Christendom. This theocratic regime established the *Magna Curia Castellaniæ* in September 1533 as a new tribunal, divided into two branches, a civil and a criminal one.² The evidence for this paper is drawn from the latter section and covers the period from about the middle of the seventeenth century to around the middle of the eighteenth century. It aims to present some preliminary observations on family and community life in Malta using a number of case-studies from the *Castellaniæ*. Throughout, there will be a particular emphasis on the roles and voices of children and adolescents within an urban setting and in relation to notions of family life and neighbourliness.

History, historiography and sources

1676 was a particularly difficult year for the inhabitants of Malta: an outbreak of plague claimed 11,300 lives, one of the worst demographic disasters to hit early modern Malta.³ We can only imagine what a usually bustling city like Valletta must have felt like shrouded in death and collective mourning. Medical experts commissioned by the government were able to point out the moment when the plague started. During December 1675 and January 1676, the young children of the wealthy Valletta merchant Matteo Bonnici fell mysteriously ill and died. Doctors initially attributed the death of Bonnici's two-year-old boy to teething: "while in a paroxysm [or fit of disease] he died. This is very common in little



A detail from the highly artistic sculptural composition found above the main entrance of the former Castellania in Merchants Street, Valletta

children while teething".⁴ There was nothing unusual in this; teething was an extremely common cause of death among young children. An old Maltese proverb plainly stated: '*Mannejbiet lesti l-kfejniei*', that is, 'When children begin to cut the eye-teeth, get the shrouds ready'.⁵ Bonnici's son may have died due to problems related to teething, or he may have succumbed to the plague, or it could have been a combination of both. What is certain is that the rate of mortality among children and young persons during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was extremely high. In the Valletta

parish of Porto Salvo, of 1,600 mortality cases during the 1640s, ninety-nine were children aged between one and four, and 774 were aged between five and nineteen.⁶ Newborn babies buried in the first month of life in a rural Maltese village between 1750 and 1789 amounted to approximately 163 per 1,000 registered baptisms, while infant deaths amounted to 281 per 1,000 baptisms.⁷ In the parish of Qrendi, between 1758 and 1779, 144 infants less than a year old died, leading to an infant morality rate of 224 per thousand live-born children.⁸

The seemingly matter-of-fact manner in which the doctors dismissed the death of Bonnici's son as commonplace, and statistical information such as that quoted above, have left historians wandering about the nature of family and community life in pre-modern / pre-industrial societies. The idea that parents in the past were indifferent and resigned to their children's death as a way to shield themselves from pain has become an accepted 'fact' and is often taken for granted. Such a perspective became entrenched in historiography through the work of Philippe Ariès, Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone.⁹ In their view, good parenting came about only in comparatively modern times. Maltese traditions and folklore would seem to concur with such a conclusion. Proverbs such as '*Aħsbilhom għall-magħmudija u wara għat-tmiddija*' ('Prepare the child for christening and then for burial') and '*M'isbaħ il-Ġenna għal dik it-tarbija li tmut fil-fisqija*' ('What can be better than Paradise for the child who dies when still in its swaddling clothes?') are seen as indicating parental acceptance of child death and rejoicing rather than mourning since the young, as yet untainted by sin, went straight to heaven. There is a continuously growing body of work by historians and archaeologists which disproves the idea of pre-modern parental and societal disinterest in the young, and yet the old stereotype proves to be incredibly resilient.¹⁰

The issue underlying the debate about feelings and mentalities is the nature of sources available and the way these are utilized.¹¹ What current investigators of the past adopt as their primary sources were seldom, if ever, created with the intention of satisfying the curiosity of future researchers or to fit the analytical categories of the social sciences. Literary texts, diaries, advice books, paintings, objects, parish

registers, court records, and so on, can and do provide historians with insights into particular societies, which we interpret through modern analytical concepts. The important thing is to maintain an awareness of the specific nature and place of sources from the past. At any one point in time there is a range of experiences and a multiplicity of meanings attached to childhood and adolescence, depending on which children and adolescents are being looked at, in what settings and at which point in history.¹² To return to the case of Matteo Bonnici and his family, he brought in doctors to treat his children and other members of his household and he himself died through his continued contact with his offspring. Such a case study raises questions of familial and societal attitudes towards younger – and often more vulnerable – members of society. This paper will draw upon a number of cases from the *Castellanix* to formulate some initial answers to these questions.

'Inhabiting' the urban landscape of Valletta

Trial records such as those of the *Castellanix* are extremely rich in details about various socio-economic aspects. They contain depositions from across the social spectrum of early modern Maltese society but their particular value lies in the 'recorded voices' of those segments of society which left few traces in the historical record: the illiterate, the poor, small-scale artisans, peasants, women and even children. Naturally, like all primary sources, trial records have their limits; the court setting was far from their normal environment for most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century people and information given in court was coloured by the surroundings in which it was presented and by wider societal expectations. Even so, the vast quantity of court records that have survived and the variety of issues dealt with therein are a clear indication that recourse to legal arbitration was common throughout Maltese society.¹³ For instance, on 7 July 1760, thirteen-year old Josepho Sant from Birkirkara, who described himself as 'one of the carriers' ('*uno de bastasi*') of Valletta appeared in the *Castellanix* to denounce a certain Giuseppe known as *Ta' Sich*. Josepho described how during the previous Friday he had been playing with other *bastasi* in Valletta when Giuseppe hit

him with a pipe on the right-hand side of his face, wounding him and causing Josepho to bleed. Therefore, in front of the court, Josepho declared " I accuse you [Giuseppe] and expect satisfaction for what I was suffering".¹⁴

Through trial records it is possible to gain access to the world of contemporary mentalities and learn about the nature of slurs, issues of honour, family disputes, sexual intrigues and the spatial/architectural setting within which these unfolded. In this vein, information gathered from the trial records of the *Castellanix* can be used for the purpose of 'inhabiting' the urban landscape of Valletta. The term 'inhabiting' is used here to signify the need to move beyond a strictly architectural and cartographic history of Valletta and instead seek to understand the lives of those who over the years occupied its buildings and walked its streets. We are used to accounts of Valletta which focus on how the city looked; and truly Valletta was an incredible feat of engineering, combining war and art. There were detailed regulations about the construction of buildings, the decoration of façades and corners, and the need for drainage pipes and water reservoirs.¹⁵ Maps of Valletta – like maps of other cities – present a 'moralised geography': the streets were clean, neat, monumental and largely devoid of people. Early modern cartography had a practical purpose, as well as a political one, of emphasizing a vision of discipline and godliness.¹⁶ When viewing such maps it is easy to forget that such idealized representations were in fact a far cry from the messiness of daily life. The bell-ringing, sacred music and chanting of the many churches and religious houses had to compete with the noise and shouting of the daily market, workshops and various sellers and buyers. The scent of incense would have been mingled with a myriad smells, ranging from bread being baked in the Order's bakery to the sweat of the mass of souls going about their daily business. The neatness, order, discipline and godliness projected by the maps quickly dissolve into the chaos, activity and irreverence that emerge from the records of the *Castellanix*; through an analysis of these trials the past inhabitants of Valletta can once again reclaim the streets and spaces which were once theirs.

One of the first noticeable elements in the



The Auberge de Provence which today serves as the Museum of Archeology found in Republic Street, Valletta

records of the *Castellanix* is the way in which people identified landmarks which made sense to them in the urban spread of Valletta. The *auberges* of the Order of St John – buildings dedicated to the eight 'nations' represented within the Order – were regularly cited as clear points of reference. Thus, in June 1640, fourteen-year old Angelo Invam described a fight between galley soldiers which he witnessed "in the Spanish quarters of the city", presumably the area around the *Auberge* of Castille.¹⁷ More unequivocally, in August 1720, Caroli Ricard described how one Saturday while he was sitting on a stone bench outside his house "which is close to the Venerable *Auberge* of Provence" (today the National Museum of Archaeology), he was pelted with the peels of a melon by fourteen-year old Lorenzo Momal.¹⁸ In October 1720, thirteen-year old Bartholomea Gatt described how while she and her aunt stood with some merchandise in the space between the *Auberge* of Aragon and the *Auberge* of Germany (the area that is now Independence Square), she had seen a cloaked woman and a boy hanging around the door of the house of



A painting showing *Porta del Monte* (lower right corner) on the Grand Harbour side of Valletta

the Knight de Teler, but she could not recall whether the woman had actually gone into the said house.¹⁹ So the area between these two *auberges* may have been used for some kind of market or place of exchange. The *Castellaniz* records provide further insights into Valletta's economic life. There were tailors' workshops and tobacco merchants; the area around *Porta del Monte* (today's Victoria Gate) connecting Valletta to the Grand Harbour seems to have been a particularly busy commercial area.²⁰ While giving witness during July 1760, Josepho Tonna mentioned how snow was sold in the environs of *Porta del Monte*.²¹

In parallel with the situation across early modern Europe, violence was a pervasive element of life in Valletta (and throughout Malta), as is made clear by the *Castellaniz* records.²² The phrase *con gran effusione di sangue* (with copious shedding of blood) and its variants recur repeatedly.²³ According to Natalie Zemon Davis, violence is a form of drama that has its own meanings, rather than simple haphazard actions. When violence broke out it not only involved perpetrators and victims, but also those around them who became witnesses.²⁴ Children and adolescents on the streets of Valletta participated in the theatre of violence in all three of these roles. In August 1720, the Valletta tailor Andrea Scicluna and

Maria Muscat were summoned as witnesses to testify against Giorgio Grima, a crewmember of the Order's galley *Santa Caterina*. Scicluna and Muscat said that one day Grima, who was very drunk, approached a group of young boys who were sitting on the steps of the Palace of the Knight Commander Chais and asked these boys to go buy him some tobacco. When the boys said they did not want to, Grima got into a rage and kicked one of the boys called Melchiore Agius. A passer-by intervened to stop Grima from further hurting the boy. The boy's father, Andrea Agius, petitioned the Grand Master to punish Grima, for the kick he had given Melchiore had led the latter to be hospitalized; Andrea Agius emphasized the fact that Melchiore was a minor and that he performed service as a deacon within the Order's Conventual Church of St John. The Grand Master ordered the arrest and detention of Grima.²⁵ A number of reflections can be made based on this episode. In an age before institutionalized education and when work patterns fluctuated according to the seasons, children could have considerable time to while away and the steps of houses and palaces were popular places for them to congregate. Grima's demand that these boys run an errand for him reflects the fact that children were regularly asked and expected to perform such tasks.²⁶ The presence of unsupervised children on the

street and the violence shown by Grima against Melchiorre could be taken as evidence for the argument of societal negligence of the young; on the other hand, the unnamed passer-by who helped Melchiorre and the Grand Master's decision to apprehend Grima could be used to counter this argument. What is significant is that in his petition Andrea Agius emphasized the young age of Melchiorre and his upright character as a Conventual deacon to highlight even more the seriousness of the assault. Andrea Agius used the *Castellanix* to appeal to the sense of justice of the Grand Master; this was an episode focusing on children as victims and the role of the state in punishing unlicensed violence.

Minors could also be perpetrators of violence and unlawful acts. Such was the case in August 1640 of the seventeen-year old Francesco Lia from Noto in Sicily. Lia and his accomplice Norando die Hiez de Samiglio were accused of having stolen a silver candlestick worth 15 *scudi* 10 *tari* from in front of the holy and venerated image of the Madonna of Philermos, which was located in an apposite chapel inside St John's Conventual Church. Lia was described as having laid his "cursed and hell-hound hand" on the candlestick. The news of the theft of this object spread like wild fire. Thomaso Lodovico de Sosa, a court official, was standing on the corner of the *Castellanix*

building (today the Ministry of Health) across from the bell tower of St John's when he heard the news and immediately set about to discover who the thief was; Lia was apprehended and he helped de Sosa recover the candlestick which he (Lia) had buried outside the *Porta del Monte*. On being interrogated Lia explained that he was a shoemaker and had come to Malta to visit his brother Michele, but upon arrival learnt that Michele was in the Levant on a corsairing vessel. The *Castellanix* pondered about what punishment should be meted out to Lia, particularly in the light of his "being a minor". Judge Joannes Caloritius condemned Lia to a public flogging and to row on the galleys for ten years with his feet bound in chains. Severe as this punishment was, Francesco was very likely spared an even worse treatment because of his young age and because he was a "silly youth of poor judgement, who was not able to discern good from bad".²⁷ Therefore, age and character were taken into consideration by the authorities when deciding on a punishment and its severity may have been somewhat muted by such factors.²⁸ At a time when corporal punishment as retribution for an offence was acceptable, physical violence was a prerogative of the state through which it disciplined a wrongdoer and tried to deter other possible offenders. In a city whose population by 1680 numbered at least 8,028 souls (compared to 6,309 in 2008) and where there was a constant coming and going of



The Conventual Church of St John in the seventeenth century by an unknown artist, found in the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta

people both from within and outside Malta, the use of force was legitimated in order to create the 'moralised geography' depicted in maps.²⁹ Nonetheless, in the records of the *Castellaniæ* we have a clear indication that underneath the gloss of officialdom, Valletta was a living, pulsating city of inhabitants (including children and adolescents) who refused to fit into this moralised mould.

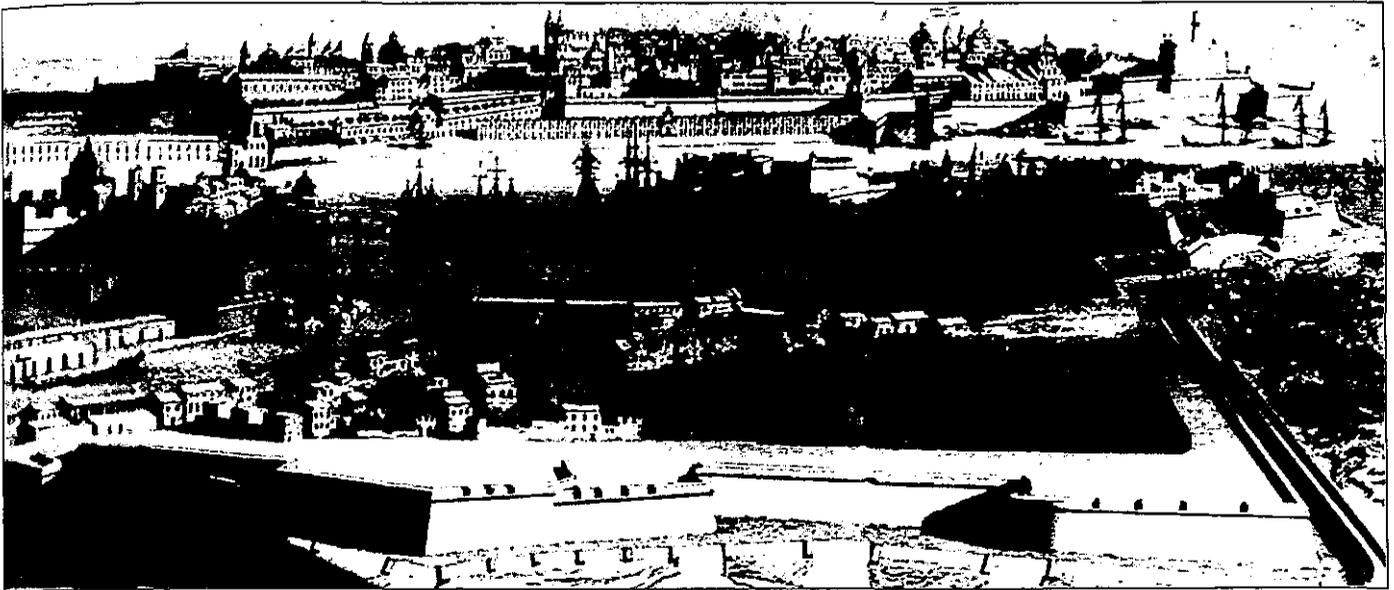
Family and community life

An exploration of the records of the *Castellaniæ* can take one in many directions; there is enough quantity and quality to engage generations of scholars asking a whole array of questions and as digitisation transforms the archival and research world, new things can be done with even the oldest and most cited documents.³⁰ With the emergence of women's history in the late 1960s and its subsequent evolution into gender history, the search for both feminine and masculine norms and experiences in the past has become a key area of study.³¹ It becomes even more urgent to look at manhood and womanhood in the past when one realizes the highly matriarchal nature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Maltese society.³² Particularly in Valletta and the harbour area where many men spent considerable time away at sea, women – and inevitably associated with them were children – played prominent roles within their communities. The records of the *Castellaniæ* are a very rich, and as yet largely untapped, source through which it is possible to explore issues related to women's lives, including relations between the sexes, parent-child relations, and questions about community feeling and notions of neighbourliness. The debate about the 'decline of neighbourliness' in early modern England has been a source of major discussion in English historiography. The idea is that massive agrarian and religious changes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reduced the scope for 'neighbourliness', taken to mean a sense of belonging to a particular place, personal knowledge of a place and its people, participation within that community, avoiding conflict and trying to live according to Christian precepts of charity.³³ In a study about the parish of Qrendi in the second half of the eighteenth century, Frans Ciappara has revealed that despite a population turnover rate

of 51 per cent and behaviour which disrupted village life, factors such as charity and kinship (both familial and spiritual) reinforced social cohesion and helped to maintain a strong sense of neighbourliness.³⁴ Such observations can be gauged against data from the *Castellaniæ*.

Take for instance a fight which broke out in July 1740 between Gratiella Tabone, wife of Angelo the baker from Bormla and Maria Balzan known as *ta' Siriedech*. Gratiella Tabone had commissioned a certain Madalena di Lorenzo of Bormla to prepare some stockings for her and she sent Paulica "her daughter of seventeen years still a spinster" to fetch these stockings from Madalena. After a while Tabone was alerted by her neighbour Petruzzo that Paulica was being beaten up; Tabone rushed to the door to find a tearful and battered Paulica who said she was beaten up by Maria *ta' Siriedech* and her son, who were neighbours of Madalena. Tabone therefore sought out Maria to ask her why she had beaten Paulica, to which Maria replied that Paulica had offended her daughter. Tabone told Maria that she "had not behaved in the manner of honourable women", after which a fight ensued between the two women who had to be separated by onlookers. While Tabone was redressing herself, Maria hit her with a cross-bar on her head causing her to bleed; a neighbour intervened to restrain Maria. Tabone, who described herself as a baker, asked the *Castellaniæ* to make Maria compensate her for the losses she was suffering because of her inability to work due to her injuries. Other witnesses were called in: Gratiella Darmanin known as *ta' Piziezen* said she was injured by Maria while trying to help Tabone, while Maria Micallef known as *ta li zeccailla* said she gave refuge to Tabone after the fight with Maria. Another witness was twelve-year old Petro Falzon. He said that one evening he was walking in Bormla along a road (known as *ta' Mact'rittin*) which led to the mill next to which lived the "almoner of Bormla", when he saw a woman called *ta' Siriedech* beating up Paulica "daughter of a baker who lived in Crucifix Street in Bormla". Petro told *ta' Siriedech* that she should not harm Paulica and he went and told Tabone what was happening. The court fined Maria *ta' Siriedech* 4 *uncie* for her violent behaviour.³⁵

So how does such a case-study compare to



A scene showing the Cottonera (Isla/Senglea, Birgu/Vittoriosa and Bormla/Cospicua) with Bormla in the lower picture

the notion of neighbourliness as outlined above? It is clear that these characters had a sense of belonging to their particular street/quarter in Bormla, knew their neighbours and were participants in the daily life of their community. The Tabone family were known by their occupation as bakers, which probably meant that they were a family with a good income, while other characters were acknowledged by their nicknames: 'ta' Siriedech' (the one who raised roosters?), 'ta' Piziezen', 'ta li zeccaila' and 'the almoner'. These characters also had a clear sense of place, identifying streets and landmarks (such as the mill) which constituted their everyday bearings. What was missing in this community was a desire to avoid conflict, with women abusing each other both physically and verbally, going to court and definitely not living in a Christian manner. Maria ta' Siriedech seems to have been poorer than Gratiella Tabone so that their fighting was likely underlined by a

wider socio-economic difference and conflict. The neighbours of these two women ensured a return to peace by separating and keeping them apart; however, informal neighbourly measures to ensure harmony were not enough and had to be backed up by formal court procedures which punished Maria.

Another insight into family and community relations can be obtained from the case of fourteen-year old Maria Falzon, commonly known as *Manzuna*, which case dragged out in front of the *Castellanix* from January to September 1740.³⁶ Table 1 lists the main characters involved. They were all from Valletta and here again it is a predominantly female cast.

Madalena Vassallo had fallen ill and her niece *Manzuna* was staying with her; two neighbours, Margerita Dingli and Maria Bezzina also regularly frequented Vassallo's house while

Three sisters:		Neighbours of Clara Cumbo:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clara Cumbo, wife of Carlo • Madalena Vassallo • Another unnamed and deceased sister, mother of: 	<p>Maria Falzon, known as <i>Manzuna</i>, daughter of Angelo, niece of Clara Cumbo and Madalena Vassallo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margerita Dingli, wife of Martino known as <i>del maccaronaro</i> • Maria Bezzina, wife of Ignazio

Table 1

she was ill. During this time, *Manzuna* stole some money and objects from her ill aunt and gave these objects to Dingli and Bezzina. The case began when Clara Curmi accused Bezzina and in particular Dingli of having 'seduced the said *Manzuna* to commit the said theft'. According to Curmi, the sum stolen amounted to some ten Magistral *zecchini* and among the objects taken was a skirt made of very fine material (described as *d'Indiana*, meaning printed cotton). According to Maria Bezzina, following the death of Madalena, Margerita took it upon herself to place *Manzuna* in the *Conservatorio delle Zitelle di Monsignor Priore*.³⁷ This institution had been established in 1606 and was originally intended to receive girls from morally unsound homes. Its first premises were provided by the Chaplain of the Order Frà Francesco Condulli (which probably explains its name – Conservatory of the Prior), although it later moved to another building.³⁸ This was one of a number of charitable institutions regularly mentioned in history books, but on which we have little information with regards to its work and residents. The case of *Manzuna* sheds some light on this institution. In her own account of events, *Manzuna* argued that Dingli had convinced her to take objects from her ill aunt and hand them over to Dingli herself for safekeeping. Following the death of Vassallo, *Manzuna* said she moved to the Conservatory where Dingli provided her with food or money, as well as gifts, including a silver medal, a pair of black shoes, a comb of ivory and a pair of gold earrings; however, after a while, Dingli stopped providing for *Manzuna*.

Dingli appeared before the *Castellanix* on 12 February 1740 and she described herself as a fifty-three-year old woman who occupied herself with 'female tasks'. Dingli said that *Manzuna* had taken the money and objects and given them to her out of her own free will. When, at one point, *Manzuna* fell sick and was being administered the last rites, Margerita asked for the opinion of *Manzuna's* confessor about this matter and he told her to keep everything until he told her otherwise. When *Manzuna* recovered and Vassallo died, Dingli placed *Manzuna* in the Conservatory and maintained her out of the money taken from Vassallo, as well as her own resources. According to Dingli, the total paid to the matron of the Conservatory for the upkeep of *Manzuna* amounted to 41 *scudi* 5 *tari*

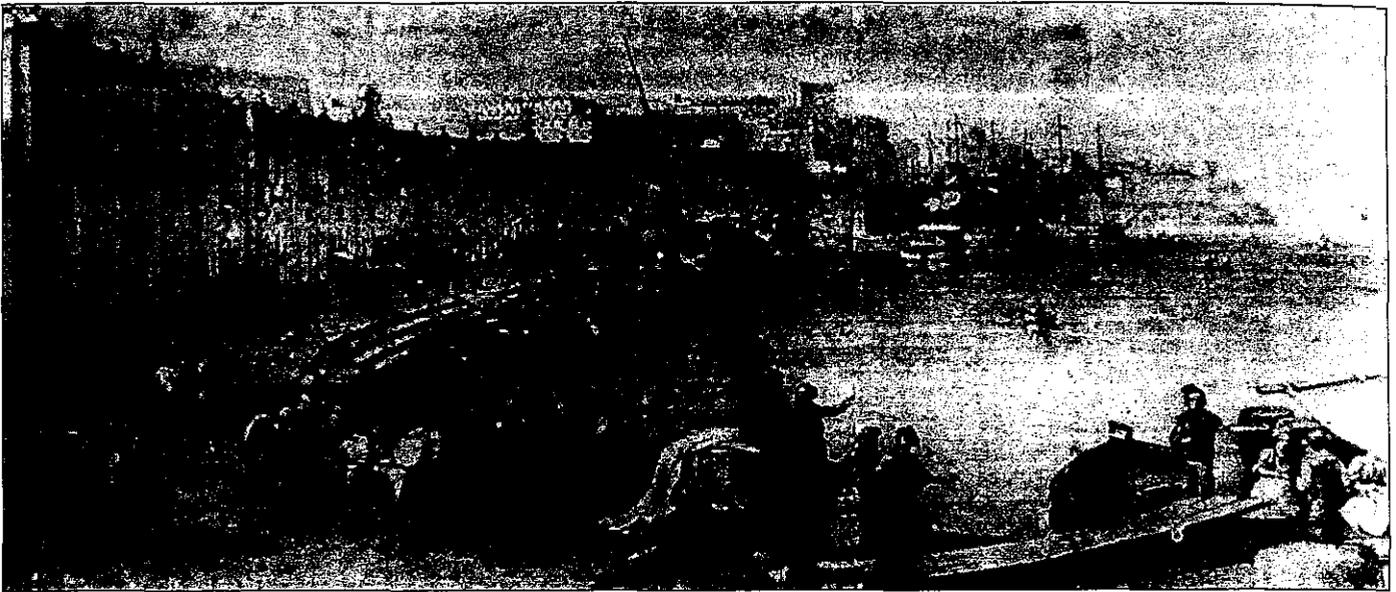
18 *grani*, a not inconsiderable sum.³⁹ A detailed breakdown was given and is reproduced here as Table 2.⁴¹

Underneath this bill is a note which stated that the total owed to the Conservatory was 47 *scudi* 4 *tari*, the total actually paid to the Conservatory was 41 *scudi* 5 *tari* 18 *grani*, which left the sum of 5 *scudi* 11 *grani* 18 *tari* outstanding. In the end, the Court decided that Dingli was in fact innocent of all charges and Cumbo was ordered to pay damages to Dingli, presumably including the expenses paid to the Conservatory.⁴² And so this case came to an end, leaving us wanting to know more about the fates of these women, a curiosity which may never be satisfied. What we can do is try to understand the workings of neighbourliness within this story.

The events described here unfolded within the quarter inhabited by these women and the Conservatory of the Prior. As neighbours, Cumbo, Dingli and Bezzina were well-informed about each other and actively involved in one another's life. It was this very closeness which brought about suspicion of foul play when it was discovered that *Manzuna* had taken items from her dying aunt. There is no explanation within the records as to why it was Dingli who took it upon herself to place *Manzuna* at the Conservatory, rather than *Manzuna's* aunt Cumbo. The expenses incurred by Dingli on behalf of *Manzuna* would seem to indicate a Christian sense of neighbourly duty to look out for a young girl without motherly supervision. In turn, *Manzuna's* case shows that the Conservatory, in its mission to cater for girls from broken homes, took in paying temporary lodgers who would have provided a welcome source of income. At least while living at the Conservatory, *Manzuna* was materially very well off, with plenty of food and luxury items of silver, ivory and gold. All these objects indicate that by the mid-eighteenth century Malta had a sophisticated market of supply and consumption for those that could afford it. What this case shows is that by looking at women's lives from a broad socio-cultural perspective, neighbourly relations in eighteenth-century Valletta emerge as flexible and versatile informal systems which operated alongside the formal structures of the state such as the *Castellanix* and the Conservatory.

	Scudi	Tari	Grani
<i>primieramente alla maestra del conservatorio tari otto per compire li giorni sin al primo del mese</i> firstly to the matron of the conservatory 8 <i>tari</i> to cover the days up to the first of the month		8	
<i>tre mesate pagate alla Maestra sudetta alla ragione di grani dieci al giorno</i> three payments made to the said Matron at the rate of ten <i>grani</i> a day	3	9	
<i>due materassetto filo di merletti</i> two small mattresses with lace	1	4	
<i>due onse filo di cordone merletti</i> two ounces of lace yarn		2	8
<i>un paio scarpe con sue fibbie d'ottane</i> a pair of shoes with their buckles in an octagonal shape		8	
<i>un paro papucci</i> a pair of slippers		2	20
<i>fatturo d'un gilecco e fodera</i> an invoice for a blazer and its lining		4	20
<i>ripezzatura d'un gilecco et un dubletto</i> relining of a blazer and a skirt		2	
<i>un fazzoletto di seta</i> a silk handkerchief		11	
<i>un paro bottoni d'oro per l'orechi</i> a pair of gold earrings	2	2	
<i>un vaso di creta</i> a vase of clay		1	
<i>un pettine d'avolio</i> a comb of ivory		4	
<i>un quarto cotone e sua filatura</i> a quarter of spun cotton		2	6
<i>una corona da Mario di cucu</i> ⁴⁰ (Unable to translate this)		5	
<i>un alora da collo</i> an object (a laurel?) to be worn around the neck		1	10
<i>una medaglia d'argento et un crocefisso d'argento</i> a silver medal and a silver crucifix		6	
<i>aggiungere nel mutar un circhetto d'oro</i> add a gold ring		8	
<i>spingole di merletti</i> lace pins			14
<i>vitto somministrato dalli 11 Giugno 1739 sin 10 Ottobre [...] di tari uno per giorno</i> board expenses for the period 11 June 1739 to 10 October [...] of one <i>tari</i> per day	16	1	
<i>pagati alla maestra</i> payed to the matron	3		
<i>alla medesima</i> to the same matron	1	5	
<i>una scatola d'argento dosata consegnata alla sudetta maestra comprata</i> a box made of silver given to the same matron	7		
<i>dati ai Maddalena sorella per ordine</i> given to Maddalena's sister as ordered	1	2	
	41	5	18

Table 2



Pinto Marina in the early nineteenth century showing the moralised geography as presented by the Schranz brothers in this lithograph

Conclusion

This paper has sought to examine family and community life in Malta from the mid-seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth through a sample of case studies from the criminal procedures records of the *Magna Curia Castellaniæ*; most of the material focused on Valletta and its environs. At the heart of this investigation was a concern with identifying children's and adolescents' roles and voices and understanding life in early modern Malta through their experiences. It is clear that violence, both physical and verbal, was an integral part of life, disrupting the moralised geography depicted in maps and testing notions of neighbourliness. Adults behaved in violent ways towards the young, but this cannot be used to argue for societal neglect of children. Rather, in a dynamic, mobile society with both high rates of mortality and population growth, children and adolescents constituted a substantial segment of the population and played a key role in their communities. The preparedness of parents, neighbours and even strangers to fight to protect the young from abusive adults indicates that care and love were far from absent in pre-modern Maltese society. Furthermore, what has emerged from these case studies is that the discourse about neighbourliness cannot be limited to the

question of whether this declined or not. It is probably the case that bonds of neighbourliness would have been more firmly anchored in a rural community like Qrendi (mentioned above) than in an urban environment like Valletta; yet even here a strong sense of belonging helped to bound people together. In analysing *Castellaniæ* records and discussing family and community life in early modern Malta, I have become aware that historians of this period (myself included) may take too much for granted the notion that religion pervaded every layer of society and sphere of life. Is it inconceivable that there were sectors of Maltese society which were so poor, so alienated, so transient, as to be largely unaffected, on a personal level, by the great religious shifts of this epoch? The evidence presented here would seem to suggest that this was at least a possibility. In these case studies from Valletta, it was the combination of informal neighbourly relations and formal state intervention through the law court which sustained community life, rather than religion. For the moment these are preliminary observations; however, a more systematic study of the *Castellaniæ* records, the testing of the idea of neighbourliness in different moments of Maltese history and on different communities, and a concern for children and adolescents within the historical record, all have the potential to yield exciting new perspectives on Maltese society in the past.

Notes and references

- 1 Archival abbreviations used in this paper: NLM., AOM = National Library of Malta, Archive of the Order of Malta; NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04 = National Archives of Malta, *Magna Curia Castellaniae, Processi Criminali* 92/04; n.p. = no pagination.
- 2 A.P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta*, ii (Malta, 1979), 339-40.
- 3 J. Micallef, *The Plague of 1676: 11,300 Deaths* (Malta, 1985).
- 4 NLM, AOM262, ff.46^v (42^v), 28.i.1676, "nell'istesso parosismo cadde morto. Cosa molto ordinario alli figliolini nell'atto della dentitione."
- 5 J. Aquilina, *A comparative dictionary of Maltese proverbs* (Malta, 1972), 178; J. Cassar-Pullicino, *Beliefs and practices relating to birth and infancy*, (Malta, 1976), 253-4. On teething in England see, W. Coster, *Family and kinship in England, 1450-1800* (Harlow, 2001), 73.
- 6 A.P. Borg, 'Migration and mobility in early modern Malta: The harbour city of Valletta as a case study, 1575-1650', (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta, 2003), 162-3.
- 7 C. Savona-Ventura, 'The influence of the Roman Catholic Church on midwifery practice in Malta', *Medical History*, 39 (1995), 22.
- 8 F. Ciappara, 'Religion, kinship and godparenthood as elements of social cohesion in Qrendi, a late-eighteenth-century Maltese parish', *Continuity and Change*, 25/1, (2010), 166.
- 9 P. Ariès, *Centuries of childhood: A social history of family life* (New York, 1962); E. Shorter, *The making of the modern family* (New York, 1975); L. Stone, *The family, sex and marriage in England, 1500-1800*, (New York, 1977). For a concise summary of these and other perspectives on attitudes to children see, N. Tucker, 'Boon or Burden? Baby Love in History', *History Today*, 43/9 (1993), 28-35.
- 10 A. Classen, 'Philippe Ariès and the consequences. History of childhood, family relations, and personal emotions. Where do we stand today?', in A. Classen (ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The results of a paradigm shift in the history of mentality* (Berlin & New York, 2005), 3-6. See also F. Ciappara, *Marriage in Malta in the late eighteenth century, 1750-1800*, (Malta, 1988), Ch. 8.
- 11 E. Buttigieg, 'Growing up in Hospitaller Malta (1530-1798): Sources and methodologies for the history of childhood and adolescence', in J. Carvahlo (ed.), *Bridging the gaps: Sources, methodology and approaches to religion in Europe* (Pisa, 2008), 129-46.
- 12 M. Rhodes, 'Approaching the history of childhood: Frameworks for local research', *Family and Community History*, 3:2 (2000), 121.
- 13 On the uses of trial records by historians see, E. Muir & G. Ruggiero (eds.), *History from crime* (Baltimore & London, 1994); S. Peyronel Rambaldi (ed.), *I Tribunali della Fede: continuità e discontinuità dal medioevo all'età moderna* (Turin, 2007); M. Laven, 'Testifying to the self: nuns' narratives in the early modern Venice', in M. Mulholland and B. Pullan (eds.), *Judicial tribunals in England and Europe 1200-1700* (Manchester, 2003), 147-58.
- 14 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box471, Doc.42, n.p. (7.vii.1760), "l'accuso e pretendo l'interesse che stò patendo". The documentary material for this paper was originally consulted in 2002-2003. At the time this material was not catalogued and the reference 92/04 was an accession number, meaning that this was the fourth accession of 1992. The reference 'Doc.42' is a personal one which simply means that the document was the 42nd in a particular box. This order may have since changed and the date is the best indicator to be observed by anyone interested in following up this reference.
- 15 Vella, ii, 15-23; J.F. Grima, *Żmien il-Kavallieri f' Malta 1530-1798* (Malta, 2001), 58-61; T. Freller, *Malta. The Order of St John* (Malta, 2010), 248-57.
- 16 On early modern cartography see, D. Buisseret (ed.), *Monarchs, ministers and maps: The emergence of cartography as a tool of government in early modern Europe* (Chicago, 1992); R.L. Kagan, *Urban images of the Hispanic world 1493-1793* (New Haven & London 2000). On maps of Valletta see, A. Ganado, *Valletta città nuova: A map history (1566-1600)* (Malta, 2003); A. Ganado, *Miniature maps of Malta*, (Malta, 2009).
- 17 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box140, Doc.26, f.4^v (vi.1640), "nel quartier delli spagnoli di questa città".
- 18 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.48, f.1^r (19.viii.1720), "essendomi ritrovato a seder sopra un baco di pietra quale è vicino alla porta di nostra Habitatione quale viene ad essere puoco distante dalla Ven Albergia di Provenza".
- 19 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.7, f.1^r (6.x.1720).
- 20 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.9, n.p. (22.viii.1720). NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box141, Doc.26, f.2^{rv}, (11.viii.1640).
- 21 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box471, Doc.23, n.p., (18.vii.1760).
- 22 For an overview of early modern violence see, J.R. Ruff, *Violence in early modern Europe 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 2001).
- 23 *Inter alia*: NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.48, f.1^r (19.viii.1720).
- 24 N.Z. Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France: Eight essays* (London, 1975), in particular 'The rites

- of violence', 152-87. See also D. Riches, 'The phenomenon of violence', D. Riches (ed.), *The anthropology of violence* (Oxford, 1986), 1-27; F. Ciappara, *Society and the Inquisition in early modern Malta* (Malta, 2001), 33-4.
- 25 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.9, n.p. (22.viii.1720).
- 26 On children's work see E. Buttigieg, 'Childhood and adolescence in early modern Malta (1565-1632)', *Journal of Family History*, 33/22 (2008), 149-51.
- 27 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 141, Doc. 26, ff.1^v-3^v, 6^r, 10^r-12^r (9-11.viii.1640), "*mese la mano maledetta et scelerata*"; "*de minoris etate*"; "*un giovane balardo di poco giuditio, no discenne il bene dal male*".
- 28 N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven & London, 2003), 321-8, has an extensive and comparative discussion about children and the law.
- 29 For population figures see, Grima, 144-5; the website of the National Statistics Office of Malta www.nso.gov.mt (accessed on 5 Aug 2010).
- 30 On the impact of digitisation and technology on documents see for instance the project called 'The prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England', www.pase.ac.uk (accessed 6 on Aug 2010).
- 31 O.H. Hufton, *The prospect before her: A history of women in Western Europe. Vol.1, 1500-1800*, (London, 1997); C. Cassar, *Daughters of Eve: Women, gender roles and the impact of the Council of Trent in Catholic Malta* (Malta, 2002); Y. Vella, 'Fejnhom in-nisa fl-istorja ta' Malta?', in P. Mizzi (ed.), *Min kien Callus? Analizi storika taz-zminijiet li fihom għex Ġuzeppi Mattew Callus* (Malta, 2003), 63-9.
- 32 Cassar, 66-7; Borg, 42-4.
- 33 K. Wrightson, 'The 'Decline of Neighbourliness' revisited', in N.L. Jones & D. Woolf (eds.), *Local identities in late medieval and early modern England* (London, 2007), 31, 35, 38-40.
- 34 Ciappara (2010), 161-84.
- 35 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 19, ff.1^r-6^r (13-28.vii.1740), "*mia figlia d'anni dieci sette ancor zitella*"; "*che non aveva fatto da donne d'onore in aver bastonato a detta mia figlia*"; "*che conduce al molino vicino a [?] elemosinario della Burmula, appellate ta' Mact'rittin*"; "*figlia d'un fornaro abitante nella Strada del Crocefisso della Burmula*".
- 36 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 12, ff.1^r-29^r (2.i.1740 - 11.ix.1740).
- 37 Ibid. ff.1^r-3^v (2-22.i.1740), "*l'accuso d'aver sedotto alla sudetta Manzuna di comettere detto furto*".
- 38 C. Savona-Ventura, *Knight Hospitaller medicine in Malta [1530-1798]* (Malta, 2004), 122.
- 39 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 12, ff.4^v-8^r (22.i.1740 - 12.ii.1740), "*tengo l'età d'anni 53, e m'esercito in lavori donneschi*".
- 40 According to Bundi, *cucu* means a type of game with card - cf. G. Bundi, *Dizionario Siciliano-Italiano* (Palermo, 1857), 103. According to Giarizzo, *cuccu* is understood to mean a small piece of worked wood for use in a kitchen - cf. S. Giarizzo, *Dizionario Etimologico Siciliano* (Palermo, 1989), 133. Neither of these explanations fits the context.
- 41 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 12, f.8^r (12.ii.1740).
- 42 Ibid., f.28^v-29^r (ix.1740).

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