

The Gibraltar-Malta Nexus: Two European Mediterranean Identities in Onetime Fortress Ports

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This paper is a work in progress exercise, delivered at the Euromed's *La Navigation du Savoir* encounter at St James Cavalier, (Valletta in 2004) which may be extended and revised in due course¹. An upgraded version would comprise more specific comparative references to Malta and Gibraltar both in the context of British naval policies and assessments, especially working and living conditions prevailing during the inter-war period relating to dockyard employment and otherwise², as well as the earlier Maltese migratory movement and settlement before and especially after the building of the Suez Canal, including aspects of cultural clash, ethnicity, crime and possible scapegoating, all of which have continued to some extent to reverberate in a collective memory, in spite of the gradual assimilation³.

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1. (Its preparation was caught in between two public lectures, one at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Valletta, on Cristoforo Colombo, recalling the significance of his navigational feat in 1492, and the other on M.A. Vassalli, "father of the Maltese language", who died in 1829, at Sant'Anton Palace, Attard.)
 2. See e.g. the extensive report on "Gibraltar Living Conditions", Adm 116/4994, ff. 1-67, for the mid-1930s.
 3. See e.g. the 19th Gibraltar censuses data (many thanks to a Gibraltar research assistant Kelly Frendo) as well as exchanges of correspondence between this writer and various Gibraltar researchers, including Tom Finlayson, and residents, including Charles Rosado. With regard to the still simmering British-Spanish negotiations about Gibraltar, there was an intervention in the House of Lords on 14 May 2002 by Lord Wallace of Saltaire, partly inspired by an observation in my paper at the Calpe conference in Gibraltar (*infra*), enc. Wallace/Frendo, 5 July 2002. The archival reference to the Young Liberals, *infra*, ftn. 22 and see below pp. 28-29, was somewhat hilarious because, as it happened, one of their former leaders, Peter Hain, was entrusted with the seemingly ever-stalemated British-Spanish negotiations over Gibraltar in 2004.

Actually this is a follow-up to a still unpublished keynote address which I had delivered at a conference which I had co-organized in Gibraltar, under the auspices of the Gibraltar Museum in September 2002, on the subject: "Gibraltar-Malta: History, Heritage and Identity in a Mediterranean Setting". My knowledge and understanding of the Gibraltarian situation was much enhanced by that delightful socio-historical experience, so I shall briefly refer here to an additional intended input to this *tour d'horizon*, inviting more specialised and detailed attention to various sinews in the thread, some of which I certainly hope to engage in myself more fully in the coming months. They complement my long-standing interest not only in migrant settlement but in imperial strategy, and the impact of these on islands and enclaves, particularly in the Mediterranean region⁴.

Among our speakers in Gibraltar we were privileged to have scholars such as David Lowenthal who, with landscape and heritage mainly in mind, asked whether smallness could sustain survival; and David Abulafia, who spoke about Atlantic expansion and Mediterranean

4. See e.g. H. Frendo, "Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar: Self Identity in Small States", in G. W. Trompf, ed., *Islands and Enclaves: Nationalisms and Separatist Pressures in Island and Littoral Contexts* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1993), 13-30; "The Legacy of Colonialism: The Experience of Malta and Cyprus", in D. G. Lockhart; D. Drakakis-Smith & J. Schembri eds, *The Development Process in Small Island States* (Routledge), (London & New York, 1993), 151-160; "The Naughty European Twins of Empire: The Constitutional Breakdown in Malta and Cyprus 1930-1933", *The European Legacy*, 3: 1 (1998), 45-52; "Ilhna tal-Maltin fid-Dinja: X'Futur hemm ghal rabtiet ta' kultura hajja u identità etnika?", in G. N. Busuttil and V. Pace, eds, *Proceedings and Report: Convention of Leaders of Associations of Maltese Abroad and of Maltese Origins* (Valletta: Emigrants Commission; Ministry of Foreign Affairs & UNDP, 2000), 119-132; "Is-Silta tan-Nisel: Maltin fid-Diaspora u l-Identità Etnika", in D. Massa, ed., *Malta: Esplorazzjoni* (Univ. of Malta, 2001), 34-47. On newspaper articles and chapters relating to the migrant experience, see the list in C. Farrugia, ed., *Old Roots - New Horizons: The History of Maltese Emigration* (Friends of the National Archives of Malta, 2001), 20, including i.a. H. Frendo, "Maltin ta' Tunes" between the Wars: An Interview with Edgar Pisani", *The Sunday Times*, 26 November 1995, 32-33; Malta l-Ohra", *Il-Mument*, 30 January 2000, 20-21; "The Pull of the Homeland" (an interview with the author by Gillian Bartolo), *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, 16 January 2000, 15; "Maltese Settlers in the Ionian Islands", *The Sunday Times*, 11 February 2001, 48-49; *ibid.*, 18 February 2001, 42-43; "The Maltese of French North Africa", *ibid.*, 1 July 2001, 48-49.

decline: in other words, about the Mediterranean before the period that most interests us, from the 18th century onwards. This immersion into Gibraltar's little and peculiar real world was, to me, extremely valuable because it brought me into personal contact for the first time with a few Gibraltarian archivists and historians, and to some extent, mainly through the help of a Gibraltarian research assistant, with the Gibraltarian archives. A comparative examination of the Gibraltar census returns shows, for example, that from the mid-19th century until the beginning of the 20th, of the sizeable Malta-descended population of Gibraltar, most worked as coal-heavers, for whom a special call for applications had been circulated, while a noteworthy number worked as boatmen and "bum-boatmen" in and around the harbour. But as the Bishop of Gibraltar (who is himself the author of a book about it) confided to me, he himself is a direct descendant of a Maltese migrant who had settled in Gibraltar with several other Maltese after works on the Suez Canal had been completed. His name is Charles Caruana⁵ – no relation to the chief minister, Peter Caruana, whose deputy has long been another Maltese-descended lawyer, Keith Azzopardi⁶.

The archivists include Tom Finlayson and Denis Beiso; but also Richard Garcia, whose paper on the rise of a merchant community in Gibraltar in the early 19th century makes for interesting comparison with what was happening in Malta, as has been shown by, for example, Michela d'Angelo of Messina, particularly during the Continental

5. See his book *The Rock under a Cloud* (Cambridge: Silent Books, 1989), including the sometimes controversial Church involvement in trying to improve the workers' lot in and after the 1870s – especially in relation to overcrowding and bad housing, scarce sanitary facilities, under-paid labour. Maltese were among such workers, including boatmen, coal-heavers, porters, stevedores, muleteers, tobacco-choppers, cigar-makers. "There were of course other workers", Caruana writes, such as those who constructed the dockyard – this group consisted of convict labour as well as Maltese, Portugese, and Spanish labourers. These people had no tradition of forming associations for achieving workers' security. When in dire straits, all they could do was rely on the St Vincent de Paule Conferences or the Freemasons "Lodges for relief". *Ibid.*, 114-115.

6. Peter Caruana won re-election and continues as Chief Minister of Gibraltar to this day. In this capacity he attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November 2005. Keith Azzopardi no longer serves as deputy.

Blockade. One other relevant source of record is *The Gibraltar Chronicle*, a publication of truly venerable age in the history of journalism, a subject taken up by Diana Sloma.

Finally, another speaker was Larry Sawchuk, of Toronto University, who now has established himself as leading socio-medical historian of Gibraltar, increasingly with an interest in comparisons with Malta, an interest in which I have been cooperating with him for some years. I am pleased to say that in 2004 one of his post-graduate students was in Malta furthering comparative studies in this field ; this continued in July 2006 during their participation in the 10th world congress of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, which I convened, on “The European Mind: Narrative and Identity”. Here, too, comparisons abound, as in the spread of epidemics by sea vessels, although infant mortality in Gibraltar for various reasons was lower than in Malta until the 1950s. Sawchuk has also referred to some rather negative attitudes to typically poor, less educated Maltese migrant settlers in Gibraltar in the second half of the 19th century; while Finlayson gave an account of them which I felt to be partly an exercise in scapegoating and which he has since revised by looking again, more critically, at crime statistics, and especially at the nature of the “crimes” as reported the practice of grazing animals on the front lawn being obviously a rather different “crime” than murder, even if listed under the same heading.

In spite of the apparent misleading smallness, therefore, we have before us a vast canvas on which to paint many pictures about these two places, which were, as to a greater or lesser extent they remain, geographically, socially and politically harbour-centred human settlements. Plans we had in hand to have a special edition of our *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, successfully published for many years now by our Mediterranean Institute here, with several of these contributions, did not materialise for reasons beyond my control, but there is great scope for further cooperation among “European Mediterranean” researchers and scholars in this area⁷.

7. Among the Gibraltarian researchers who addressed this conference there were Geraldine Finlayson, a cultural research officer who directs the John Mackintosh Hall, Gibraltar, who tackled The Rock’s “history of civilizations past”; Denis Besio, then Archivist Designate who has since taken over the Gibraltar Archives,

Since the Gibraltar experience, one book to which I wish to draw specific attention, and with which some participants here may be familiar, is that put together by Elizabetta Tonizzi, published by Franco Angeli in Milan in 2002, in the series “Memoria e Ricerca” of the *Rivista di storia contemporanea*. It is aptly called: *Porti dell’Europa mediterranea (secoli XIX e XX)* and includes chapters by Gelina Harlaftis on “Storia marittima e storia dei porti”; by Tonizzi herself on the port of Genoa from 1861 to 1970; Paolo Frascani on Napoli, 1860–1960; Samuel Fettah on Marseille during the 18th and 19th century; Albert Carreras and Cesar Yanez on Barcelona; and Vassias Tsokopoulos on Piraeus from 1835 onwards. In addition, this excellent publication contains some historiographical reflections relating to colonialism, European expansion southwards, universalistic aspirations and the formation of national identity in Europe, as well as to the media-related transformation concept of “intermedialità” in history.

A forthcoming and also relevant work, being published under the direction of Professor Marta Petricioli *et al.* by the Università di Studi

speaking about “The Foundations of Modern Gibraltar History” from 1704 to 1969; Richard Garcia, Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, who addressed the rise of a merchant community in Gibraltar in the early 19th century as an example of opportunism; Dr John Cortes, a botanist who spoke of nature conservation. We had Diane Sloama’s paper about the influence of *The Gibraltar Chronicle* on the Gibraltar outlook; Professor Clive Finlayson on “scale in heritage” with reference also to archaeology; and two contributions by the outgoing archivist Tom Finlayson, one on “the Gibraltarians” since 1704, and another entitled: “Gibraltar: Military Fortress or Commercial Colony?” Other pertinent interventions on the side of the hosts were those by The Hon. Keith Azzopardi, Deputy Chief Minister; Cdr Joe Ballantine of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust; and The Hon. Bernard Linares, Minister for Education and Culture. In addition to my keynote, originally entitled “European Mediterranean identities: Spain, Italy and Britain in the Gibraltar-Malta Nexus”, other Maltese speakers included Nathaniel Cutajar (archaeology), Stephen Spiteri (fortifications), Tony Pace (heritage, identity and the problems of being small), Mario Farrugia (the 100-ton Armstrong gun, identical to the one in Malta, which was also tested during our stay), Dr Vicki Anne Cremona (now Malta’s ambassador to France) on theatricality; and Professor Joe Brincat on historical strata in the Maltese language. Dr Beiso, now Gibraltar’s archivist, will be participating in my workshop on “Empire and Nation in the Mediterranean” in the above-mentioned ISSEI world congress (University of Malta, July 2006).

di Firenze next year, will be *Mediterranean Europe (L'Europa Mediterranea)*, these being the proceedings of a conference we had in Firenze in September 2004 in the series *Temps et Espaces de l'Europe*⁸.

Here I shall try to address myself briefly, mainly historically, to some of the issues at hand relating to Mediterranean fortresses, ports and peoples, with special reference to a Gibraltar-Malta nexus, highlighting some aspects of what is the more native and distinct, if similar and comparable, in the Mediterranean context between Europe and Empire.

Britain's acquisition of Gibraltar from Spain in 1704, and its subsequent conditional ratification by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, was a prelude to the creation of three imperial Mediterranean networks in modern times. After Gibraltar, Britain came to possess Malta during the Napoleonic era, an acquisition once again only ratified by international treaty several years after it had actually occurred, in 1814, when Britain also appropriated the Ionian Islands.

Further to the east, Britain went on to take hold of Cyprus in 1878, at the Congress of Berlin. Four years later, as we know, Britain took Egypt to the south, by far its largest territory with a Mediterranean coastline, thus counter-balancing the French regional presence, which had by now established itself in Algeria and Tunisia. By this time, however, Britain already had overriding control over the Suez Canal and its surrounding zone, which meant that through "her" ports and outposts she was really, both militarily and commercially, strategic mistress of the Mediterranean sea lanes and trade routes – as well as the ruler of the colonial subjects ashore. Cooperation with France in the 20th century, mainly as a result of German competition, expansion and rivalry, did not seriously dent this imperial Mediterranean profile until 1956, if not later still.

Spain, which had greatly declined as an imperial power, was further rent apart by civil war, then took time to mend and heal largely in isolation; meanwhile Gibraltar remained an open sore in Anglo-Spanish relations, as indeed it remains, in changing ways, to this very day. Having lost Gibraltar and been unable to regain it from Britain, Spain had to settle for a limited, rickety and generally rather short-lived Mediterranean

8. My paper was called "Strains of Maltese Europeanity : Shifting Identities on the Mediterranean Frontier."

presence in Morocco, losing even the city of Tangier just across the narrow strait from Gibraltar.

The newly-unified Italian state after 1870 was also on the look out for territory in the Mediterranean, wherein it had a large protruding peninsular “boot”, a coastal frontier on three sides accosting its own land mass facing west, east and south. To its chagrin, Italy had lost out to France when it came to taking Tunis in 1882; but finally, in 1911, Italy did get Tripolitania and Cyreanaica, in addition to other earlier or later acquisitions which it had long coveted in East Africa and which, by 1936, were hugging the Egyptian and Sudanese borders, partly commanding the sources of the Nile.

The creation of such imperial Mediterranean networks from the 18th century onwards was not without repercussions on the native inhabitants of the respective territories, be they islands, enclaves or larger coastal territories. Unfolding generationally over time, such consequences came to be fairly incisive and lasting, in some parts more than in others. They were not quite like water over a duck’s back.

I see them as a multi-faceted cultural mould, situated in a three-pronged historical and geographical context: the imperial as it inter-acted with the European, and as this inter-acted in turn, or simultaneously, with the Mediterranean sea and littoral itself. Clearly, there is a further cultural interaction with North Africa and the Near East, although I am afraid the Mediterranean can be seen in time at least as much as a divider as a unifier. With the passage of time and, ironically, as a distillation of difference rather than of convergence arises, any integrated long-term resonance in such a Euro-Arab, North-South relationship renders itself open to further critical scrutiny, in European terms perhaps increasingly so.

The impact of European mainland empires on occupied territory overseas depended to some extent on the colonizer’s own profile and agenda; but it also depended on the nature of the land and on the texture of the occupied society. Of course, colonial empires around the world differed by epoch, by location, by attitude and manner of dealing.

In considering the Mediterranean, the first realisation that strikes me is that only the British did not have to face armed popular indigeneous resistance, as slowly but surely they went about painting one part after another of this region red on their *mappa mundi*.

Nowhere, in the Mediterranean lands which they took over, was there any substantial or prolonged open warfare against their arrival. Not even in Egypt was there an Abd-el-Kader, as in Algeria; or an Omar Mukhtar, as in Libya. Not only was Urabi Pasha's rebellion quickly put down following the bombardment of Alexandria and the battle of Tel el-Kebir in 1882; it was by an agreement reached with the long-indebted ruler, the *Khedive* Tewfiq, supposedly another Western-influenced modernizer, that they established their presence in the country and then consolidated it.

In Cyprus, the Greek Orthodox etnarchy initially welcomed the British takeover as a would-be liberation from the Ottoman yoke; a step in the direction of union with Holy Mother Greece. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire, still nominally sovereign, continued receiving its "tribute" in hard currency.

In Malta, an improvised national leadership sought, and secured from the King of the Two Sicilies, permission so that Admiral Nelson and his men would sail to the rescue of the islands from a dragging insurrection against the besieged French who, led by General Bonaparte on his way to Egypt only some months earlier, had kicked out the Knights of St John. The British then disarmed the Maltese insurgents and stayed on for nearly two centuries.

The far-flung Ionian peasant islanders, who had changed hands a few times before 1814 and retained a Franco-Venetian veneer, had practically no say in the matter. Their demands for *enosis* were eventually heeded. In 1864 they were returned to Greece.

As for the Gibraltarians, to the extent that these may be said to have existed at all as such, they were simply the inhabitants of a "Rock", the strategic value of which, at the Atlantic mouth of the Mediterranean in between two continents, the British were quick to realise, to grab and to hold on to at all costs; so long, that is, as it suited them to do so. In time, as the very ethnicity of the inhabitants changed, and for other reasons, these subjects grew so fond of their protectors and providers that they wanted to belong with them for ever: "English we are, English we stay", one referendum poster proclaimed a full decade after the Anglo-French retreat from Suez. The then "Gibraltarian" socio-political scenario was colourfully and evocatively depicted in 1967 by

John Stewart, who worked for ten years as a journalist with *The Gibraltar Chronicle* and had full access to the Garrison Library's papers⁹. On the other side of La Linea, it must be said, for nearly forty years until 1975, Gibraltar had Franco's Spain – hardly an appetizer for rejoining the onetime mother country, in spite of the economic gains which his conservative, authoritarian regime had been slowly registering.

Dominant at sea, and islanders themselves, the British proved to be experts in obtaining overseas possessions decisively – nurturing collaboration, accommodating compromise, controlling arteries, using intermediaries – what it took the French and Italians many years to secure in more frontal and much bloodier confrontations on the ground, in still vaster territories with trickier hinterlands and tribal configurations. These latter mainland powers were themselves generally more rural and agricultural, less industrial and technological, with an excess of population needing space and opportunity for more productive employment in “annexes” close to their shores, just across the water as it were.

The texture of indigeneous society also mattered, however. With regard to Britain's empire in the Mediterranean, the cultural mould may have been, in a sense, rather more malleable. Gibraltar, Malta, the Ionian Islands and Cyprus were mainly, if not entirely, peopled by Europeans who, for the most part, were also Christians of one denomination or another. Heirs to a Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian heritage, in some cases more ancient or intense than Britain's own, they were also much smaller and more manageable, the Troodos Mountains notwithstanding.

9. See John D. Stewart, *Gibraltar The Keystone* (London : Murray, 1967) and more recently Thomas J. Finlayson, *Stories From The Rock* (Gibraltar, 1996) for many a perceptive insight on Gibraltar's history and the way of life there as this evolved. Tom Finlayson's other work, *The Fortress Came First* (Gibraltar Books, 2000) is really about the civilian population of Gibraltar during the Second World War, but aspects of it clearly complement my study *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience* (Valletta: Midsea 1979, 2nd ed. 1991). See also, *i. a.*, George Hills, *Rock of Contention: A History of Gibraltar* (London: Hale, 1974); records of the discussions on Gibraltar by the UN's special committee (in the 1960s), other reports, and various post-war articles that have appeared on Gibraltar and the Gibraltar question over the years in different sections of the press, often in a decolonization context. The “standard” history has

The one exception would seem to be Egypt. Even here, however, in contrast with the Maghreb, the Pharaonic past provided a rich and, in European eyes, a respectable if not awesome endowment, however backward the condition of the *fellahin* and the infrastructure would have seemed, at least before it started being opened up by railways and suchlike. Moreover, there was a sizeable indigenous Christian population, in all probability the original inhabitants of the country, their facial features depicted unmistakably in temples from Edfu to Komombo – the Copts – whose allegiance (as a deserving, discriminated minority eager for protection) a foreign ruling power could induce and attract; as happened ironically with the Muslim Turkish minority in Cyprus under British rule.

In the Mediterranean, Egypt would turn out to be ultimately the most problematic and dramatic British possession of all. The difficulties were caused increasingly by culture clash, social and economic conflict and expectation, and a growing use of Islam and Arabic separateness to mobilize anti-European nationalism, right up to Nasser's bold nationalization of the Suez Canal. Egypt by 1956 brought the old

been that by a former governor, Sir William Jackson, *The Rock of the Gibraltarians: A History of Gibraltar*, first published in Britain in 1987 with a fourth edition by Gibraltar Books in 2001. A resident author, who also edits the *Gibraltar Heritage Journal*, is Tito Benady, a Gibraltarian Jew, while earlier works by Mesod Benady, especially *The Roots of Gibraltarian Society and Culture* (Gibraltar: Calpe, 1979) are particularly relevant, as is H. W. Howes, *The Gibraltarian: The Origin and Development of the Population of Gibraltar from 1704*; first published in 1951 this is now in its third edition (Gibraltar, 1991). On the "Maltese-Gibraltarian" nationality, culture and politics issue in addition to works already referred to earlier, see also, *i.a.*, my "Britain's European Mediterranean: Language, Religion and Politics in Lord Strickland's Malta, 1927-1930", *History of European Ideas*, 26: 1 (1995), 47-65; "Language and Nationhood: Some Comparative and Theoretical Approaches to the Maltese Experience", in *Collected Papers*, (ed. S. Fiorini and R. Ellul Micallef (Malta: University of Malta, 1992), 439-470; "Italy and Britain in Maltese Colonial Nationalism", *History of European Ideas*, 15: 4-6 (1992), 733-739; "The Influence of Fascism on Maltese Colonial Politics", in *Malta: A Case Study in International Cross Currents*, ed. S. Fiorini and V. Mallia-Milanes (Malta: University of Malta, 1991); "Language and Nationality in an Island Colony: Malta", *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 3: 1 (1975), 22-31. See also, by the same author, "Can a New History Save Europe from Its Past?" in *Towards a Pluralist and Tolerant Approach to Teaching History: A Range of Sources and New Didactics* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1999; repr. 2000).

European imperial powers, Britain and France, to a humiliating knee-deep war scenario which sounded the retreat from Empire and a hastening of decolonisation all round.

European settlers, hundreds of thousands of whom had been born and raised in northern Africa, in Egypt too – including so many Maltese and Iberian families, Italians, Greeks and naturally Frenchmen, who had lived, worked and brought up families there, as many of their parents and grand-parents had done before them – were forced to leave or were thrown out lock, stock and barrel, without compensation, in a mood which is reminiscent of that animating the Mugabe regime today in Zimbabwe – such a beautiful, fertile and once well-serviced land, now famished, torn and repressed, but in 1980 still a potential politico-economic and multi-ethnic national role model for the whole of Africa. Meanwhile, population transplant or shift has not been unknown to Gibraltar either, first in the years following a British takeover when many of the residents left for Spain; and then during the Second World War, when the civilian population was evacuated as a safety measure; or when Moroccan labourers, since integrated, were “imported” in relatively large numbers. Messing around with native populations is a tide which need not lead to fortune, as we have all too sadly seen again and again, as when corsairs earlier carted away scores of inhabitants into slavery from exposed islands, such as Gozo; but in the case of modern Gibraltar no main inter-ethnic problems seem to have arisen.

Apart from Egypt – if we exclude Britain’s mandate over Palestine between the 20th century’s world wars, and its maddeningly interminable complications – the more turbulent imperialist-nationalist clashes and divisions were experienced in Cyprus, until a tripartite agreement of sorts was reached in 1960; and of course later still and differently, particularly in the wake of the attempted Greek *coup* in 1974 and the subsequent Turkish invasion.

Malta and Gibraltar have both had their ups and downs; but, all told, they have had a smoother run. Although the latter is much smaller than the former, in the overlapping three-pronged scenario I have earmarked – Imperial, European and Mediterranean – the similarities here are rather more marked. They bear some interesting comparisons, which may be approached under a number of headings.

An inkling of the parallel and sometimes converging roles of these two places, to some extent also of their physical characteristics and human habitats, as strategic outposts of empire lined up on the Mediterranean route, may be had from an illustrated book which was compiled by an Englishman, approved by the military censor, and published in London in 1915. Called *Malta and Gibraltar*, this was subtitled: "Historical and Descriptive Commercial and Industrial Facts and Figures and Resources." In the first sentence of its preface, Malta and Gibraltar are defined as "bulwarks of the Empire on which the sun never sets, there are no places like them anywhere." Each, it added, is "the complement of the other; and so long as the Union Jack is an emblem of British naval supremacy and of liberty and justice, so long will they be amongst the most valuable of all the widespread British possessions . . ." Fortifications, antiquities, buildings, the port and harbour, the environs, garrisons, governors, commandants, even postage stamps are dealt with. In so far as the actual native inhabitants are concerned, the only insight we get in the Gibraltar section lies in the last chapter on commercial firms. Through these, one can see how both places had branches of some of the same London-based imperial enterprises, be it Saccone and Speed, the wine and spirit merchants; or the Anglo-Egyptian Bank. Surnames of dealers are trickier because both places had so many names of Spanish, Italian or British origin, but a number of these establishments in Gibraltar already had a Maltese ring to them – Fava, Ellul, Cardona, Schembri. These last, Schembri and Co., based at 97, Main Street, Gibraltar, were grocers and provision merchants, such typical entrepot activity being driven by the imperial trade routes, products, markets, and service needs relating to all kind of shipping, the Royal Navy above all. Both localities even had a locally-produced pro-British newspaper called the *Chronicle*, which catered for a readership by the garrison, among others¹⁰.

If we take the strategic component first, location in a geo-political context probably takes pride of place. If Gibraltar guarded the entrance to and the exit from the Western Mediterranean, Malta lay in the European southern flank, *l'ultimo lembo d'Italia*, as some called it, to the

10. See Allister Macmillan, ed., *Malta and Gibraltar* (London: Collingridge, 1915), *passim*.

south even of the northernmost Tunisian promontory. The geographical imperative was rendered more dominant by Valletta's sheltered deep-water harbours and creeks, a special attraction since ancient times. What Britain held out against Spain for in Gibraltar, it held out for against France, then Italy, in the case of Malta. Of Britain's possessions in the Mediterranean, the Imperial presence came to be most pronounced where it lasted the longest of all – in Gibraltar and in Malta.

Malta had not been exempt from an Iberian influence in the past, although that was never as pronounced as it was in Gibraltar. Like Gibraltar, Malta belonged to Spain, but its fortunes changed for two main reasons. First, Emperor Charles V gave it as a fiefdom to the Knights of St John, a multi-ethnic European body with a preponderance of French members. Second, Malta came to be more closely linked to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Naples and Palermo, and hence to Italy, rather than to Spain itself. Suffice it to note that of its 28 Grand Masters between the 16th and the 18th century, eight were Aragonese and three Portuguese. Another three were Italian, the rest, almost half of the total, being entirely French (with only one German exception towards the very end).

Until the early 19th century Spain was one of Malta's trading partners, especially but not only in the cotton industry. Sicily was closer, but it was the Spanish coast, from Barcelona to Valencia to Cadiz, that mostly attracted the Maltese cotton trade and Maltese settlers exporting it as a textile product, including sails¹¹. As the British Empire asserted its influence, however, and for other reasons, trading patterns and practices changed, with the Maltese economy becoming so much more dependent, almost as much as in Gibraltar, on that of fortress and garrison needs. Such needs increasingly affected employment and, in different ways, population shift. Contraband was not exactly unknown in Gibraltar, until quite recently; although it was during Napoleon's Continental Blockade that Malta and to a lesser extent Gibraltar had excelled at that, for obvious reasons.

Changes in population, with an occasional transplant of foreign stock, had a longer history in the case of Malta, where they had

11. See Carmelo Vassallo, *Corsairing to Commerce: Maltese Merchants in Eighteenth Century Spain* (Valletta, publisher, 1997), but see also Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London: publisher, 1970).

sometimes resulted from corsair raids, as in other parts of the Mediterranean from West to East. At other times, people fled in fear of impending doom, as in the mid-1550s, when Gozo's population was just about carted away into slavery by the corsair Dragut, and the mid-1560s, when Suleiman the Magnificent had set his sights on acquiring Malta in the westward advance of the Ottoman Empire, and of Islam. The closest *terra ferma* in Malta's case was Sicily, only 58 miles away. As for Gibraltar, in an Anglo-Spanish confrontation with Protestant-Catholic overtones, one could simply escape to the mainland on foot, or by boat. Geography again helps determine history here, as the absence of a water divide – and indeed of water – would have made it easier to depopulate. Size was also a factor in the rapidity and extent of assimilation or otherwise. The last mass influx absorbed by Malta, that of some 5,000 Greek Orthodox Rhodians, goes back to the arrival of the Order of St John from Rhodes in 1530. There has not been in recent times a mass influx comparable to that of some 2,000 Moroccans imported into Gibraltar as labourers to make good for the Spanish workers who could no longer cross the border when this was closed by Spain only a few decades ago.

The 19th century is crucial to the profile which to a greater or lesser extent begins to mark both places. British immigration policy was fairly liberal, unless this was seen to pose a political threat or security risk. Gibraltar's Jewish community was and (at some 600) remains much larger than Malta's; but we do find a Jewish community flourishing in Malta in the late Middle Ages, with most doctors, for example, being Jews¹². Expulsions rendered Jewish *survivance*, both ethnic and religious, difficult, so that as in Spain persecution led to conversions of convenience or departures, not always followed by repatriations. A small Maltese-Jewish community survives and prospers in Malta to this day, although conventional inter-marriage within the community has become practically impossible. It is clear from the census records to which I have had some access that the Jewish presence has been much more pronounced in Gibraltar in more recent times, even in the political

12. See Godfrey Wettinger, *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages* (Valletta, Midsea, 1985).

sphere. I only know of one Maltese MP, a Shadow Minister, whose mother is a native Jewess (Mizzi, née Cohen). It is in another area that some tension may be arising as the numbers of Arabs and Muslims in Malta have been growing, through immigration and inter-marriage with some of the young Roman Catholic womanfolk, with some of the husbands becoming more publicly assertive.

Pressures from one boat-load after another of mainly Arab and African illegal migrants, many of whom then claim refugee status, has also been growing of late. This inter-ethnic, inter-religious integration or hostility is now a European phenomenon on a much larger scale¹³. Gibraltar and Malta are just microcosms of it and, if only by force of circumstance, they have so far learnt to be more accepting and accommodating than others.

Another possible comparison might be the small Indian minority which, in the case of Malta, hails mainly from Hyderabad in the Sind province of north-western India, near Bombay. These came to Malta during British rule largely from Egypt, starting in the 1880s¹⁴. They have always been mainly traders, mainly in silks and cloth, but they have integrated well, in some cases in post-war Malta inter-marrying with Maltese Catholics in spite of their own Hindu background. School friendships with Maltese Indians, as in the case with Maltese Jews, who pre-date them in time, sometimes last lifetimes and become intimate. As in Gibraltar, a *sari* in a shopping mall need not signify a foreigner as such. It would be interesting to compare intra-communal relations and acceptance levels in coastal communities so small as those in Gibraltar and in Malta. It was probably more those associated by birth or politics with pro-Italian or pro-Spanish sympathies who found the going tough, especially at certain stages. The smaller ethnic and/or religious minorities were not perceived as a threat; they could be the more easily contained.

13. See e.g. Henry Frendo, *L-Identità Ewropea: Teżisti?* (Jean Monnet Seminar, Maltese European Studies Association, 2002).

14. See Mark Anthony Falzon, "Origins and Establishment of the Indian Business Community in Malta", *Bank of Valletta Review*, (Autumn 2001), 73-92; Henry Frendo, *Ċensu Tabone: The Man and His Century* (Valletta, Maltese Studies, 2000, 2nd edn 2001), 290-291.

The other comparable feature is religion. Although there is a higher percentage of Protestants in Gibraltar than there has been in Malta, the Catholic Church having acted as a nationalistic bulwark against colonialism, in both areas Roman Catholicism remains the predominant creed and custom. Such an affinity with the Church of Rome, in British-ruled domains, marked out and rather profiled the separate identity of their inhabitants, as in Ireland or Canada. It is clear from the census records that I have seen (thanks to the CD prepared by my friend Professor Larry Sawchuk of Toronto¹⁵, and some voluntary field research assistance from a Gibraltarian namesake, Mrs Kelly Frendo) that Malta-born settlers in Gibraltar were invariably listed as Roman Catholics, even when they came from Corfu or anywhere else, as were their numerous descendants. This usually devout Roman Catholicism ascertained a European belonging, in spite of Semitic or Moorish traces in the language, in the mores or in the genes. Worth remarking also is that the Anglican bishop was based at Gibraltar but he also had a princely residence in Valletta, just opposite the Anglican cathedral built in 1837.

Census data are very helpful to map out occupations, classes and mobility. Thus it is clear from the 1878 census that most Maltese settlers in Gibraltar – the Azzopardis, the Borgs, the Caruanas, and so on – were working on the wharves, for the most part carrying coal. It is probably what they might have done or seen done back home, before they emigrated, although a notice advertising vacancies for coalheavers was posted from Gibraltar to Malta at one point. In other words, Maltese would have simply have applied for job vacancies in Gibraltar, where as British subjects they would not have been barred as aliens. Most were in their twenties and thirties. It was a gruelling occupation. Maybe the demand was greater in Gibraltar, or the prospects slightly better compared to those prevailing in Malta at one time or another during course of the 19th century.

A few were milkmen, which shows that there was also a small rural-agricultural component in the Maltese immigration to Gibraltar. This was

15. See especially the CD, *Gibraltar Explorer* (Los Angeles, 2001) by L. A. Sawchuk, S. Sharma and W. Grainger.

a typical occupation which villagers came to town to perform, milking the goats and sheep in cans on doorsteps. Working on early Maltese migration in the American Deep South two years ago, I found that one of the earliest Maltese settlers in New Orleans similarly described himself as “the milkman”; he actually had a little dairy adjoining his house on the outskirts of the town¹⁶. One 58 year-old listed as Simon (Xmun?) Frendo in the 1891 Gibraltar census (who like his 40 year-old wife Catalina, and a 20 year-old son listed as Jose, a coalheaver, had been born in Malta) was a goatherd. Six of these Frendo children were born in Gibraltar, the youngest, Spiro, being three years old in 1891. They lived nine to a room at 2, Imossi’s Farm. Others in Gibraltar were, typically, small traders and petty vendors, including the occasional “bumboatman”. Hardly any at all in the first generations of settlers belonged to the professional classes; although the earliest known Maltese settler, in 1791, was an apothecary¹⁷; he must have run the local pharmacy.

Places of residence are also indicative of social and occupational position. Thus in 1878 we may not find Maltese settlers residing in the best areas of town; but that would have changed as integration and social mobility increased, in accordance with the general typology of immigration and acculturation. Given such a situation, scapegoating could arise, as it indeed did in at least one case in the late 19th century during an epidemic¹⁸. Typical Maltese and Maltese-sounding surnames gradually became a feature of Gibraltarian life and clearly span right across the socio-political spectrum from top to bottom. A majority of the settlers being males, such surnames would not have been adversely affected by mixed marriages, although spellings and pronunciation sometimes changed or were changed in transcription, usually it seems Hispanicised or Anglicised.

Another point of interest emerging from these census returns concerns the retention of contacts with the mother country, although Gibraltar

16. This research project is still in progress.

17. A book called *The Gibraltarian: The Origin and Evolution of the People of Gibraltar*, published in 1951, contains an analysis of Gibraltar’s adult working population.

18. On this see L. A. Sawchuk, *Deadly Visitations in Dark Times : A Social History of Gibraltar* (Gibraltar, 2001), 254–257.

was further away by sea from Valletta than was Bona, Tunis or Alexandria. It would be intriguing to establish what percentage of Malta-born emigrants to Gibraltar came directly from Malta or else from Maltese colonies settled in French North Africa, as these tended to retain their British passports for as long as they could and generally resisted naturalisation as Frenchmen if they could help it.

Such contacts would have been facilitated by the common status Gibraltarian Maltese enjoyed as British subjects, and by common concerns arising from Imperial interests in the region. An obvious case would be that at the turn of the century, when major public works were being undertaken in the Grand Harbour, involving the building of major dry docks and of a breakwater. The local labour supply could not cope with such London-financed infrastructural requirements, undertaken in one fell swoop. Italian and Spanish labour was therefore imported. Although similar works were being undertaken in Gibraltar and elsewhere, some Gibraltar workers travelled to Malta with Spaniards for some years. Inevitably, in this process, family contacts would have been renewed, and some inter-marriages taken place, before an eventual repatriation. Much research still needs to be undertaken to determine the quality and extent of such a rapport. One source is the passport applications; another the passenger lists on vessels plying across Mediterranean shores.

Because Malta was larger, as was its population (at some 200,000 in 1900, it would have been twenty times the size of Gibraltar's), more space continued to be available for agriculture, which could hardly be the case in Gibraltar. However, employment with the British Services, particularly at the Royal Dockyard, on the wharves, in the harbour areas, and in entrepot trade, steadily attracted labour supply away from the land, to the ports. What this meant, in Malta too, was a growing economic dependence on imperial needs and interests. These could provide jobs and prosperity when times were good, fostering assimilation, loyalty and allegiance; but they created stalemates, depression and disenchantment when times were bad. The livelihood of native peoples in imperial outposts – in the Mediterranean, most notably Gibraltar and Malta – came to depend largely on the British defence budget, on the fleet's movements, and whatever else needed to be bolstered or run down at

Westminster's or Whitehall's behest.

Psychologically and culturally, native peoples in such imperial outposts were hardly perceived to exist as such, or to do so autonomously, as ethnico-linguistic entities with a geographical-historical make-up peculiar to themselves. It was not uncommon for Malta to be regarded as "the deck of a man-of-war", or, as Winston Churchill once called it in more modern times, "an unsinkable aircraft carrier". For obvious reasons this tendency was present *a fortiori* in the other still smaller fortress of Gibraltar. It was a convenient militaristic terminology which, if applied politically, would dismiss at a stroke any internal demands for greater freedom or respect. What it meant was that essentially government in such territories depended on the Admiralty and the War Office, as their lobbies influenced parliament if and as necessary.

Once again this predicament was more felt in Gibraltar, as indeed it has continued to be in different ways. Gibraltarians obtained the right to vote in 1950, exactly one century after Malta's first elections held under British rule, although a measure of internal self-government was achieved by 1964. But even in Malta, an independent state since 1964, constitutional development was, as has been well said, like a game of snakes-and-ladders. The decision to permit representative government in 1887 (revoked in 1903), and subsequently internal self-government in 1921 (suspended in 1930 and revoked in 1933; restituted in 1947 and then revoked again in 1959), was motivated to a degree by the imperial interest of not unduly antagonizing the otherwise loyal population of an imperial fortress. For purposes of mutual interest, given the situation as it had developed over the years, Borg Olivier's independence in 1964 came packaged with a 10-year defence and finance agreement, which was renegotiated by Mintoff and actually extended until 1979. Conceding autonomous rights, with defence and foreign affairs reserved to the Crown, was thus, in its own way, a control mechanism, a "release of air" strategem that always took place in a strategic context.

Another comparable feature in the Gibraltar-Malta nexus, which certainly deserves more attention, lies in the domain of culture and nationality. In both habitats there has been an ethnic, linguistic and religious mix much influenced by contrasting and often conflicting geopolitical pulls. Equally, however, and simultaneously, there has been an

ongoing moulding which marked the distinctive personalities and profiles of place and people. This complex and profound characteristic has resulted in a special European Mediterranean brew on the margins of the continental mainland, with an inherited British or English residue. It is a residue, interspersed with mainstream lifestyles, which has been less of a veneer than elsewhere, as in Egypt or Cyprus. In the latter two possessions, Arabic and Greek continued to be the predominant languages, in spite of any officialdom. In Gibraltar and in Malta, however, anglicization was promoted, in the former at the expense of Spanish, in the latter at the expense of Italian, in both cases the long-established literary languages. In both the spoken vernaculars, moreover, there was a Semitic streak through varieties of Moorish Arabic. This was more so in Maltese, which was basically a Semitic language written in the Roman script and increasingly camouflaged by Romance components. Ironically, the Moors ruled over Gibraltar for five centuries more than the Arabs did in Malta, but whereas Gibraltar was Hispanicized between the 15th and 18th centuries, Malta was not that Italianized. The Knights of St John, which ruled Malta between the 16th and 18th century, acted like a race apart; although Italian was the main language most of the inhabitants were illiterate, using their old vernacular among themselves. Italy never got much of a chance to standardize an Italo-Maltese, because Malta did not revert to Naples after the French ousted the Knights, before they were in turn ousted by the British.

With British help, Maltese was raised to an official national language, with its own orthography and literature, especially from 1934 onwards, through constitutional changes in the education system, the public service and the court-room. On the Macaulay principle recommended for India, it would serve as a means for promoting English, so that a class of intermediaries, support staff and collaborators could be created. Gibraltar has its own vernacular touch in the popular speech as well, although from what I have managed to find out about it, this retains Spanish at its base much more than Maltese has done with Italian. It is basically Spanish, whereas Maltese has not been basically Italian. To what extent this has happened or not once again seems a fit object for advanced study, given that language is so crucial a component of self-identity, which in turn is likely to influence future development in other spheres.

At the political level, Britain in Gibraltar was from the start keen and actively engaged in excluding Spain and, so far as possible, Spanish from any undue influence over the native inhabitants, change as these did after the 1704 conquest. Anglo-Spanish rivalry at sea, in religious allegiance and internationally, needs no further recounting here; Spain moreover had an imperial past which was more recent and more relevant to Britain than Rome's. In Malta, however, the British were also increasingly keen to de-Italianize the islands, and especially so after Italy had become a unified nation-state in 1870. In a telling instruction as early as 1882, the year when Britain took Egypt, it was made clear that no Maltese who did not know English well would be appointed to any government-controlled job, nor promoted in it. In the words of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson:

Insist on a knowledge of English in all public appointments. Appoint no one and promote no one who does not thoroughly understand it. Pay your public service well and make the public officers as comfortable as possible. And let those who oppose English understand that their opposition shuts them out from all hope of employment or favour from the Government. Appeal, in a word, to their personal interests¹⁹.

As by now the cycle of economic dependence had grown roots, such a policy was no mean threat. It was intended to dissuade the Italian-educated lawyer-politicians from opposing anglicisation while demanding autonomy; and more insidiously to turn against them the lower classes who increasingly depended for their livelihood on the British connection. While Anglo-Spanish confrontation over the would-be status of Gibraltar has tended to concentrate on territory and sovereignty, Anglo-Italian rivalry in Malta became more internalized and was predicated mainly on linguistic-cultural tradition, sentimental affinity, political power and social class.

One common feature in the Gibraltar-Malta nexus clearly were the harbours, the wharves, and particularly the docks – to the point that during the inter-war period comparisons were made between the working and living conditions in the two outposts before any salary rises would

19. Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony : The Maltese Experience* (Valletta, 1979; 2nd edn 1991), 32.

be consented to by the Admiralty, in response to petitions from the unions. As one lengthy investigative report put it:

It is important in this respect to bear in mind the position at Malta as in many ways, the positions at these two places is very closely comparable. Both are isolated Mediterranean communities (Malta, a group of islands, Gibraltar, virtually an island), separated owing to political considerations from the neighbouring countries with which they would normally be united, maintained on their present basis solely for strategical considerations, both carrying a population much larger than they otherwise would for this reason, both Catholic communities, both with a standard of living tending to move more and more away from that of the surrounding countries, both having the same problems of food supply and over-population.

On the strength of such perceptions, which are further elaborated and substantiated at length, the Admiralty would then consider any rises in pay or otherwise:

It seems desirable therefore to consider anything done at one in the light of conditions obtaining at the other. The cost of living at Malta, both from the point of view of supplies and rents, seems to be somewhat cheaper than at Gibraltar, but owing to the larger families, the standard of living is apparently lower. (The birth rate at Gibraltar is considerably higher than in England or Wales but that of Malta easily outstrips the Gibraltar figures.)²⁰

To a relative outsider, the Gibraltar-Malta comparison appears somewhat twisted when it comes to religion. Whereas Gibraltarians remained for the most part Roman Catholic, like their close neighbours across the line, they wanted no truck with Spain politically, before and after Franco. That was dangerous for more than one reason, but there was thus a cultural ingredient within local affinities which international politics and local interest rather kept apart. In Malta, on the other hand, Roman Catholicism acted as a bulwark of nationalism, neighbouring Italy being not simply the land of Dante but also of the Pope; whereas the anglicizing Britons were Protestants and sometimes proseytizers. While there would have been some Catholic-Protestant tensions in Gibraltar as

20. ADM 116/4994, f. 14. I owe copies of this original documentation to Mario Ellul, whose two theses about Malta's Royal Dockyard are unpublished - but see his article "Maltese Imperial Mentalities: Subjecting the Maltese Mind to Imperial Rule", *Storja* '98, 95-114.

well – as indeed we find throughout the Empire from Canada to Ireland to Australia – such tensions could not be perhaps so crystallized into an “us” against “them” mode, as Maltese nationalism sought to do with considerable success in its quest for self-government.

Maltese nationalists who were regarded as pro-Italian or suspected of disloyalty were shunned or persecuted, especially in wartime, including however the First World War; as were others critical of the colonial regime and/or of its collaboration with the established Catholic Church in a generally well-orchestrated effort to ward off dissent. One problem which in varying degrees affected the whole Catholic world concerned mixed marriages, the raising of children in the faith, the fear of civil marriage and of divorce²¹. Malta still does not have this last facility, while Gibraltar under British rule appears to have been more thoroughly secularized, to the point where I have seen Gibraltar advertised as an excellent place where divorcees can come to remarry in “cash-and-carry” fashion within the day, aided and abetted no doubt by the fact that, according to this information, Gibraltar has the highest *per capita* population of lawyers in the world – I thought Malta held that record, but surely it retains the priestly one. And all these Gibraltar lawyers are UK-qualified. Here too, the nexus breaks. Maltese law retained its Continental civil foundations; it was not much dented or infiltrated by English common and statute law, let alone driven by it.

When it came to wartime, and considerations of loyalty or security, “the fortress came first”, to quote Finlayson’s term. Without charge or trial, scores of suspected potentially disloyal Maltese nationalists were “interned” and/or “deported” to Uganda between 1940 and 1942. In the case of Gibraltar, thousands of inhabitants were evacuated to Morocco, Madeira, Jamaica: Gibraltar’s only function would be a defensive one confronting any German invasion across the Pyrenees, no place for civilians, i.e. the native inhabitants²².

Unlike Gibraltar and everywhere else in the British Empire and Commonwealth outside of Britain itself, Malta had a university

21. For a discussion of this, see *ibid.*, and also *The Origins of Maltese Statehood: A Case Study of Decolonization in the Mediterranean* (Valletta: PEG/BDL, 1999; 2nd edn 2000).

22. On all this see Finlayson’s already quoted book, *passim*.

producing lawyers, doctors and theologians well before the British arrived. This had been founded by the Jesuits in 1592 at the time of the Knights of St John, whose spiritual head was the Pope. All the Maltese codes were in Italian, taught in Italian, and they remained so until, well into the 20th century, Maltese started to be used together with English instead of Italian, but the substance stayed. As in poetry, so too in law – a proper transition from Italian to English never took root in Malta: Maltese intervened to stop it. In his 1937 survey of British Commonwealth affairs W. K. Hancock had wondered whether Malta was not too small an entity to survive the strong gusts of wind blowing from outside; it has in fact done so, somehow turning the winds to advantage, drawing water out of the ground, and holding tight.

In terms of resistance to assimilation, culturally if not institutionally, Malteseness comes out as more marked, in spite of the surviving and perhaps growing Gibraltarian flavour permeating The Rock. In his letter to me of 18th August 1975, Gibraltar's then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Maurice Xiberras, wrote thus:

*... although there is ample evidence that the Gibraltarian would wish to enjoy equality of status with Metropolitan Britons, that is, they would wish, in the jargon of the day to be de-colonised, there has never been much organised support for nationalism. Nationality, on the other hand, has always been a central preoccupation.*²³

In other respects, the comparisons hold, even though much more comparative research in this strain is called for. That includes Malta's own referendum for integration with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 1956, in which most of those voting said "aye"²⁴; although in ways by no means comparable to the overwhelming Gibraltarian "yes" eleven years later.

The need to depend mixed and matched with the will to be free. It still does, as the agitated lead-up to Malta's referendum in 2003 about membership of the EU or otherwise, clearly demonstrated. But then again, Gibraltar, which is already an EU member through its British anchorage, geared up for another referendum in 2004 on "dual

23. Xiberras/Frendo, House of Assembly, Gibraltar, 18 August, 1975, ff. 1-2.

24. For a focussed analysis see Dennis Austin, *Malta and the End of Empire* (London: Frank Cass, 1971).

sovereignty”, won again by the Anglophile ‘loyalists’. According to Spanish proposals at the time, a special arrangement would be reached with Britain whereby the latter would continue to enjoy guaranteed naval, maritime and other rights, with Gibraltar allowed a degree of municipal autonomy, on condition however of having sovereignty revert to Spain. Such a proposal bore a striking resemblance to that made by an up-and-coming Maltese nationalist leader, Dr Enrico Mizzi, in 1912, one whereby Britain would similarly be assured of naval, military and maritime rights in Malta, which however would return to Italy, while retaining an autonomous status and certain special privileges, in exchange for Eritrea. The Spanish proposal never had a chance; not then anyway. Nor did Mizzi’s: he was court-martialled in 1917, interned in 1940, deported in 1942, before becoming the Prime Minister of Malta in 1950, the year of his death in office. In 1963, a successor who had striven unsuccessfully for Malta’s integration with Britain, Mr Dominic Mintoff, would himself contemplate some form of integration with Italy, possibly an autonomous regional status²⁵. In the case of Malta, Britain had simply usurped sovereignty from Naples in 1800 without binding itself to any international treaty obligation for the future, as happened in the case of Gibraltar with Spain in 1713.

Let me conclude by revealing what I believe to be a contemporary symptom of this mutual predicament, one tending to characterise the perplexing insecurity and anticipation of islands and enclaves at the margins, where borders meet, cultures overlap and interests clash.

From newly-released archival materials at the Foreign Office, it came to my attention in April 2004 that in 1971 Britain had considered handing over Gibraltar to the Knights of Malta. In these recently declassified documents, The Rock is described as “an extinct volcano” inhabited by “arrogant and unrealistic people”. Britain’s ambassador to Spain at the time was Sir John Russell, who died in 1984. In a 1971 briefing note to the Foreign Office from Madrid, he wrote:

Economically Gibraltar is of no benefit to us and indeed of late has begun to cost the British taxpayer money. Militarily, in the age of the intercontinental ballistic missile, Gibraltar can only be an extinct volcano.

25. For discussions of these proposals see my own books *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony*, *op. cit.*, and *The Origins of Maltese Statehood*, *op. cit.*

The Foreign Office papers show that British officials considered a compromise plan of handing over the territory to the Catholic Order of Malta under a lease agreement. “The Order would allow the citizens to be British or Spanish as they wished”, Russell told the Foreign Office. “We would take a long lease on whatever we need. And there might be a provision for eventual reversion to Spain.”

One Foreign Office official was not impressed, however, by the ambassador’s proposal. In a note attached to Russell’s original letter, he wrote: “I don’t know if Sir John Russell has ever seen the Order collectively assembled. I have. I would rather entrust Gibraltar to the Young Liberals.”²⁶

Having myself seen the same Order collectively assembled in their world reunion at St John’s Cathedral in Valletta some fifteen years ago, I must say that the occasion was certainly not an unimpressive one, and that cannot be simply my traditional Catholic prejudice in an opposite direction. As a former member of the Young Liberals in my student days at Oxford, I can say that I never saw anything quite like it there. Whether the dazzling robes and insignia of knights of so many nationalities in the service of a Rome-based Christian chivalry and charity around the world would have been fit, in the 20th century, to run anything other than their own Order, remains well open to question. What has been leased out to them, in the meantime, has not been Gibraltar, but Fort St Angelo overlooking Valletta’s Grand Harbour, on condition that they restore and maintain it, with conditional public access to it.

To put it mildly, the problem is that, as a Maltese adage has it, “the small fish has never eaten the big fish”; although small fish have ways and means of getting around and surviving too, even as the Mediterranean becomes progressively depleted of them. The Foreign Secretary in 1971 was Sir Alec Douglas-Home. The newly-available Foreign Office documents show that he proposed giving away Gibraltar’s sovereignty to Spain, in exchange for a 999-year lease on the colony. Sir Alec suggested

26. For an overview of these diplomatic exchanges, see “Gibraltar faced secret handover to Order of St John”, *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, 21 April 2002, 4.

it be put on a similar footing to Hong Kong, which was at the time still being leased from China, in order to appease Spain. Spain, his ambassador in Madrid told him, was being reasonable. And he added that Britain would feel the same if the Spanish Armada of 1588 had defeated Sir Francis Drake. "Had the Great Armada succeeded", Russell assured Douglas-Home, "we should today much dislike seeing a Spanish garrison on Land's End or Portland Bill."

Both these proposals were soon dropped. According to *The Sunday Telegraph* of 14th April 1971, "power cuts, the threat of a miners' strike and the three-day week occupied ministers' minds more than the future of Gibraltar . . . ; and by February 1974, Labour was back in power."

Having just found out about these extraordinary diplomatic exchanges, I happened to mention them over a drink to Helen Wallace, one of the research directors at the European University Institute in Florence; and we shared a good laugh at Peter Hain's expense. Peter Hain, Minister for Europe in Britain's Labour administration, and responsible for negotiations with Spain over Gibraltar, had then been the national chairman of the Young Liberals. She promptly informed her husband William, a professor of international politics at London, who e-mailed me for permission to raise this matter in the House of Lords, of which he was a member.

I told him that as a Maltese historian the Knights of Malta proposal did not really surprise me at all. Britain used Malta to the hilt in peace and war, but once it changed its defence policies and budgets it had no qualms in running down the dockyards, dismissing employees by the thousand and forcing the emigration issue, so that depression followed prosperity at regular intervals, with mass emigration supposedly the safety-valve for want.

Moreover, in 1940 – I told our latter-day William Wallace, who is an old acquaintance – on the eve of the Second World War, the British Cabinet had twice discussed the prospect of giving Malta – and indeed Gibraltar as well – to Mussolini's Italy, in the hope that such a donation would induce him to stay out of the war rather than join it on Hitler's side. Just shortly before scores of Maltese nationalists suspected of disloyalty to the Crown were shipped across a bomb-ravaged Mediterranean Sea for deportation to Uganda without charge or trial,

Chamberlain, Halifax and Churchill more than once tossed the dice on a deal with Italy over Malta²⁷. However, they then decided to abandon such a proposal, in much the same way it seems that their successors would do thirty years later, when it came to another little-known proposal, that of handing Gibraltar to the Knights of Malta.

In a covering note accompanying the copies of Hansard for 14th May 2002, my interlocutor assured me that these read very drily in print but that they had “aroused *a lot* of interest – and laughter – when spoken!”²⁸ Historical empathy apart, this may constitute news which is of some direct concern to Gibraltar at the present time. The gist of the exchanges translates into an attempt to cordially reach a compromise agreement over Gibraltar with Spain, in response to a communications blockage or blackmail being imposed by Spain as a bartering card to get a hand, if not two hands, on Gibraltar, in spite of the fact that such behaviour is held to violate EU rules governing free movement and access (ferry, airport, etc.) If the rhetoric is downplayed, we are left with a few telling statements made by the Minister for Trade, Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, which briefly read as follows: “We must continue to do what we believe to be right and in the interest of the people of Gibraltar, knowing that they will have a full say in the final decision. . . . They (the Spaniards) have a claim for sovereignty over Gibraltar, which we do not recognise, given the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht. . . . We have to look at the package of agreements that will be reached. . . .”

Now at the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, for a respite from the Napoleonic Wars, Britain had agreed with France and other European powers to return Malta to the Order of St John. According to article 10 of that Treaty, the islands would be held “upon the same conditions on which the Order held them previous to the war”, except that certain other stipulations were made.

To assuage lingering fears, these stipulations included one for

27. See the bibliographical references (Richard Lamb; Elizabeth Barker; etc) in Henry Frendo, “The Second World War: A Short Introduction to *The Epic of Malta*”, in a 1990 facsimile edition of *The Epic of Malta* (Lond., c. 1943, with a foreword by Sir Winston Churchill), iv.

28. Wallace/Frendo, House of Lords, London, 5 July 2002, enclosing the Hansard debates (House of Lords), vol. 635, no. 137, for Tuesday, 14 May 2002.

international and another for local consumption. The first said that Britain and France, being desirous of placing the Order and the Island of Malta in a state of entire independence of each of those powers, agreed that henceforth there be no English or French language, so that no individuals belonging to such languages would be admissible into the Order. The second said that a *Maltese* language would be established, to be supported out of the land revenues and commercial duties of the Island; adding further that there would be dignitaries with appointments and an Auberge appropriated to this language. Contrary to earlier practice, by which all locally born subjects including those who had been raised to the peerage by Spain in the Middle Ages were disqualified from joining the Order in their own land, henceforth no proofs of nobility would be necessary for the admission of Knights into the said Maltese language. Maltese Knights would be eligible to hold office and to enjoy every privilege in a manner akin to that of the Knights of the other languages. Moreover, the municipal revenue, civil, judicial, and other offices under the Government of the Island would be filled at least in the proportion of one-half by the native inhabitants of Malta, Gozo and Comino (Article X.iii). British forces would evacuate the islands within three months after ratification, and a force would be provided by His Sicilian Majesty in support of the Order's reacquired possession of the Maltese Islands. The garrison would consist of at least one half of native Maltese.

The independence of the Island of Malta and this whole arrangement, said the new Treaty, would be "under the protection and guarantee of Great Britain, France, Austria, Russia, Spain and Prussia. Having repeatedly spoken of Malta's independence, the Treaty then stipulated that the "perpetual neutrality" of the Order and of the Island of Malta was "hereby declared"; and that the ports of Malta would be opened to the commerce and navigation of all nations, who shall pay equal and moderate duties, which duties would be applied – a further sop – to the support of the Maltese language, etc.

It was an international guarantee which brings to mind a more recent one in the Mediterranean, that decreed for the independence of Cyprus in London in 1959, in the wake of EOKA and *enosis*. The status of Cyprus, as an independent unitary state, was subject to a tripartite guarantee precisely by the powers who were most interested in that island :

Britain; Greece; and Turkey, a stone's throw away. By 1974, however, both Greece and Turkey had expressed some considerable interest in the island, while Britain clearly held on to two sovereign bases there.

In the case at hand, between 1798 and 1800 the Maltese had conducted a bloody armed insurrection against French rule for two long years, helped along by a British-led naval blockade, which Naples had granted them permission to request as a temporary anti-French expedient. Such a treaty, agreed to above their heads at Amiens, added insult to injury; it was as unacceptable as it seemed dangerous. Was it for this that we shed our blood against the tyranny of France, they asked. If the Order could not defend Malta against a French takeover in 1798, how on earth would it do so in 1802? And in any case, the Maltese *did not want* the Order back.

In an eloquent and somewhat indulgent *Dichiarazione dei Diritti degli Abitanti di Malta e Gozo* signed on 15th June 1802 by the leaders of all the towns and villages who had commanded the insurrection against French rule, they made it clear that they had asked for British protection and offered the Islands to His Majesty on the understanding that their rights and privileges would be safeguarded and that, given such a pact, Britain had no right to cede Malta to any other power. In that case, sovereignty should revert to the native inhabitants themselves. It would be up to them to decide whether they wished to invite someone else to protect them, or indeed to run the place themselves as they deemed fit²⁹.

The Anglo-French *rapprochement* was short-lived: by 1803 a Third Coalition against Napoleon was in place. The Order never returned to Malta; nor did France; nor indeed did Naples. Ignoring Spain's deed of cession of Malta to the Order as a fief in 1530, and Neapolitan claims to a legitimate sovereignty over it until the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and later still, Britain overturned its decision to evacuate, and dug in. "You see Malta is taken, and the French driven out", wrote Queen Caroline to Lady Hamilton in October 1800. "That is all very well but the King and all of us are mortified that there was no representative of

29. Henry Frendo, *Tifkira tal-200 Sena mid-Dikjarazzjoni tad-Drittijiet tal-Maltin* (Valletta) (Kumitat Festi Nazzjonali/Università ta' Malta, 2002).

ours there although we had troops, ammunition, artillery and positive rights in the Island. The only flag was the English: our being so completely duped is the subject of much laughter here.”³⁰

For half a century after that, Malta did not have a constitution; and no elected majority in a council of government, as a crown colony, before 1887; which by imperial standards was not too bad. The British held on to their prize later when Anglo-French relations took a different turn, fighting wars in common as allies, if warding off the Italians who were too close for comfort, until these too became useful allies and cordial partners. It was only when Britain had no further real need of Malta, and therefore no further money to invest in it, as decolonization set in worldwide, that they lent an ear to the request for independence, accompanied as this was initially by a “defence and finance” agreement. It worked; although autonomy and dependence remained uncertain.

The integration plan with Britain, mooted by Mintoff’s administration in the mid-1950s, had fallen through after Suez, never to be revived. Constitutionally speaking, that would have been the closest rapprochement of Malta to Gibraltar, if not one closer, but it fell through, as did any such proposal for Gibraltar itself. More recent talks concerned the eventual repercussions, for good or ill, of another *genre* of integration, a wider one. Here, Britain is only one of the players, without its imperial swagger and sway as of old. In the European Union, referenda are customarily held; repeatedly if necessary; although none ever had such an almost absolute outcome as the Gibraltar one of 2002 throwing out any joint Anglo-Spanish patronage of The Rock. This dogged resistance persisted, to much the same extent, until still more recently.

As for the Maltese *Dichiarazione dei Diritti* of 1802, denouncing the transfer of Malta from Britain to a supposedly guaranteed neutrality by her, France and other European powers, under the “returned” Order of St John, that was two hundred years ago; and the world has changed, although not too much.

30. A. V. Laferla, *British Malta* (Valletta: publisher, 1946), Vol. 1, 3–4. Laferla, among others, also gives the text of article X of the Treaty of Amiens. Coincidentally, in the Treaty of Utrecht 1813, the article about Gibraltar is also the tenth.

Still, a message such as that chosen by Sir William Jackson and Francis Cantos for the title to their biography of Sir Josha Hassan, *From Fortress to Democracy*³¹, is one that could just as easily be used for Malta; not that readily for any other onetime outpost of empire.

31. First published in Britain by Gibraltar Books in 1995, it is subtitled "The Political Biography of Sir Joshua Hassan".