

The Road to Women's Suffrage and Beyond

Women's Enfranchisement and the Nation-Building Project in Malta

Carmen Sammut

A public lecture on the occasion of the issue of a €10 silver coin to celebrate the seventieth year since Maltese women obtained the constitutional right to vote

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Foreword

Although there is little doubt that Maltese women emerged from World War II with a stronger awareness of the intolerable gap between their potential and the harsh reality of their social condition, the road to 1947 began early in the first half of the 20th century and certainly did not end in 1947. As a matter of fact the journey has by no means ended; indeed it continues.

The struggle for universal suffrage in Malta, and specifically for the vote for women, cannot be understood separately from the country's social, cultural, economic and political development. The debates inside the National Assembly (1945-1946) reveal the sharp confrontation of views in favour and against the right to vote for women. Indeed, a very significant element in the National Assembly fought tooth and nail to prevent women's very presence in the National Assembly. Contrast this with Dr Paul Boffa's proposal to enfranchise all men and women over the age of 18. Finally, the National Assembly voted 145 for and 137 against for universal suffrage at age 21.

A motion by Josephine Burns de Bono and Hélène Buhagiar (who had to struggle to be allowed to participate in the National Assembly as representatives of the Women of Malta Association, the third woman being Mabel Strickland who was admitted as the representative of the *Times of Malta*) for women's right to stand for public office, was also passed. It is pertinent to recall that the Women of Malta Association was founded early in 1944. Within a few months the Association twice requested the National Congress for representation in the National Assembly. Twice it was turned down. The Women of Malta Association's request was finally accepted in 1945 by the National Assembly.

These achievements became law with the promulgation of the 1947 Constitution in September 1947. The first elections under the new constitution took place on 25-27 October of the same year. 54% of the 140,703 persons eligible to vote were women. Around 75% of the electorate turned out to vote. Of 76,745 registered female voters, 54,565 actually voted. Of the two women candidates, one – Agatha Barbara (1923-2002) – was elected for the Labour Party. She would successfully contest ten consecutive elections, be appointed cabinet minister five times, and would be the first Maltese woman to become president of the Republic in 1982.

With the issue of a €10 silver coin to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the achievement of Maltese women's right to vote, the Central Bank of Malta continues a tradition of issuing coins to commemorate important constitutional developments (see *First Elected Representatives 1849* issued 2011, *Majority Representation 1887* issued 2012, *Self-Government 1921* issued 2013, *Independence 1964* issued 2014, *Republic of Malta 1974* issued 2015).

Dr Carmen Sammut's study *The Road to Women's Suffrage and Beyond: Women's Enfranchisement and the Nation-Building Project in Malta* is a significant scholarly contribution to counter what she correctly calls "the prevalent collective amnesia about women's place in history".

Mario Vella
Governor, Central Bank of Malta

The Road to Women's Suffrage and Beyond: Women's Enfranchisement and the Nation-Building Project in Malta

Carmen Sammut

The Central Bank of Malta's tribute to the 70th anniversary of the introduction of universal suffrage is a symbolic yet compelling appreciation of women's formal and informal contribution to Malta's development. Universal suffrage opened the way for all women and many disenfranchised men, to exercise their right to vote and participate in elections for the first time in Malta's history. The trajectory of women's emancipation is very often omitted from the prevailing narratives that reinforce our sense of nationhood. This commemoration attempts to redress the prevalent collective amnesia about women's place in history.

Collective memory is a contested arena. We are well aware that at a national level events are commemorated at the cost of a myriad of alternatives. As Sontag underlined: "[C]ollective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating; that this is ... the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings" (Sontag, 2003, p. 67). As it happens, in Malta there are hardly any "pictures" that lock the events of 1947 into our minds.

Introduction: Suffragism, colonialism and the nation-building project

In this paper suffragism will be conceptualised within the boundaries of political and social history where women's enfranchisement was coeval with the other key political questions of the 20th century. Although women's enfranchisement through the MacMichael Constitution of 1947 coincided with the erosion of British global hegemony and Empire,¹ we may argue that women's liberation then was still construed within frameworks and exchanges between the metropole and the colonies (Fletcher et al., 2000).

These connections were dialectic in the sense that Malta was then experiencing the emergence of a new wave of militancy against British rule while many stakeholders still considered Britain as a model for advancement. Notions of self-rule and universal rights were interwoven with concepts of social welfare

¹ The self-government constitution was granted in the same year that India and Pakistan became independent.

in tune with the mood of the times. In fact social reform was the main item on the United Kingdom (UK) electoral agenda in May 1945 when the first ever Labour Prime Minister was elected. Clement Attlee led "a labour movement with a socialist policy that received the approval of the electorate" (cited by Kynaston, 2010, p. 75). Hence although Malta struggled for responsible government, it is not surprising that the egalitarian agenda became a pivotal goal in the nation-building project.

One cannot discuss political and economic development in Malta without due consideration to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The vocabulary associated with the struggle for women's rights, was deeply coloured by traditional gender relations but also by a discourse of maternity and morality that may be attributable to the ecclesiastical social and cultural hegemony.

The Church in Malta deemed women's liberation as part of a strategy to secularize the islands and linked it with the erosion of traditional family values. Throughout the long struggle towards self-government, two broad but distinct movements had emerged and they contributed to highly polarised debates on all matters. One movement struggled to retain the Roman Catholic Church as the traditional pillar of national identity and culture, whereas the other advocated a reformist agenda that eventually included universal suffrage and women's liberation among the key indicators of national progress. The Church in Malta deeply resented the latter's attempt to disturb tradition and the status quo. In the period under study it fiercely resisted both the notions of 'equality' and 'emancipation'.

As we will discuss later, it continued to obstruct the political rights of women even at a time when Pope Pius XII actively encouraged the Catholic women of France and Italy to participate in politics. Mabel Strickland's newspaper the *Times of Malta* (22nd October 1945) dedicated the whole front page to a Papal message broadcast by Vatican Radio on the historic day when French women first went to the polls: "Women, your hour has struck. Public life needs you It is your duty to enter public life and to contribute all your strength to its organisation," said Pope Pius. Still this message did not strike a chord with conservative members of the clergy in Malta. They became more and more out of tune with the signs of the times whenever they selectively quoted prior papal speeches and diverse Catholic publications in support of their resistance to change.

The link between accelerated democratisation and external conflict

It has been argued that during the 20th century international wars accelerated democratisation in those nations that experienced external conflict with a bearing on the rights of women (Hicks, 2013). This is attributed to a popular sentiment in favour of women's rights as a reward for their war effort. Men lost in battle also impacted on the sex ratio and so it was hypothesised that it had become twice as likely for women to extend their franchise in a post-war context. The Maltese experience seems to fit this theory.

During World War I, Maltese women were only indirectly involved in the conflict. As Malta played the role of the "nurse of the Mediterranean", it hosted as many as 80,000 wounded soldiers as well as many prisoners-of-war. Women contributed to their care. Nonetheless families suffered from severe food shortages and a soaring cost of living to an extent that there were concerns about women's health especially because of a rise in infant and maternal mortality (Savona Ventura, 1995).

After World War I, the misery of the working classes on bread-and-butter-issues compounded with the resentment of the upper classes over a stalemate in Malta's constitutional development. These tensions led to the riots of the *Sette Giugno* in 1919.

A National Assembly, which had convened in Malta earlier that year, comprised a wide spectrum of Maltese civil society, but it failed to reflect the developments that had taken place in London in the post-war period. In 1918 British women over the age of 30 years had acquired the right to vote through the *Representation of the People Act*. Under a separate provision, UK women also gained the right to contest elections.

The efforts of this first National Assembly, were limited to political and constitutional rights for "full political and administrative autonomy in affairs of local nature and interest" (Fenech, 2005, p. 23). The agenda was filtered through the perspectives of a select cluster of privileged delegates that included members of the clergy, the nobility and the constituted bodies representing professional classes, the commercial class, the working class, the press and cultural and political societies. None of the delegates were women and none of these politicians were sensitised to female suffrage.

G.A. Pirotta (2005) has published records of correspondence between British suffragettes and the Colonial Office in London, where the latter blamed women's political exclusion on the island squarely on these Maltese male politicians. Given its importance to the British Empire, Malta was not out of sight and out of mind of the suffragettes in London. After British women obtained the right to vote they promoted civil rights campaigns to advance the cause elsewhere in the Empire.

Imperial feminism is deemed to go back to campaigns for slave emancipation in the early 19th century and to later Victorian times when British feminists had pressed for the advancement of women and argued that suffrage and rights would ultimately benefit the Empire's interests. In the interwar period under study, imperial feminists had a "maternalist moment" since "the presence of women members of Parliament [in London] lent strength to the movement as did the growth of new organisations that provided opportunities for women to intervene in imperial concerns" (Ittmann, 2013, p. 39).

Within this setting, in January 1921, the leading British feminist Eva Hubback (1886-1949), a temporary economics lecturer at Cambridge and official of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, hereinafter NUSEC – in which capacity she drafted a whole series of legislative proposals – wrote to the Colonial Office to ask whether the British Government intended to present the draft of Malta's 1921 self-government Constitution to the UK Parliament for ratification. She added that her organisation was "anxious to have an amendment moved to the effect that women also should be enfranchised". Nonetheless, she was informed that the Constitution was not going to be discussed by Parliament because it was going to be granted by Letters Patent.² NUSEC fiercely protested the exclusion of Maltese women from the franchise, especially "in view of the fact that women's suffrage has now been granted in all the Dominions and that the Legislative Council in India have the right to grant the franchise to Indian women It appeared ... to be a most retrograde step that the women of Malta should not be enfranchised" (NUSEC cited by Pirotta, 2013, p. 18).

Education and Female Suffrage

In many contexts it was educated women who mobilised others to demand female suffrage. According to Jaquette (1997) "the American and British suffrage movements inspired women's emancipation efforts among the educated female

² A legal instrument where an order is published after being issued directly by the Monarch.

(and sometimes male) elite worldwide, and most contemporary feminist movements trace their roots to these stirrings at the turn of the 20th century" (p. 24). This was also the case in Malta, where educated women only took the lead from 1931 onwards. It is interesting to note that the two women at the forefront of suffragism were both exponents in journalism, who operated in a men's world, in a context where the partisan press actively exacerbated polarisation around the Language Question (Sammut, 2007). While these women were influential on the socio-cultural front, they never really ignited the momentum for a mass-based women's movement.³

Broadly, women's education in Malta then was not given much importance outside restricted elite circles and even here its breadth and scope were limited. We can safely deduct that elite women received an education mainly to improve their marriageability. In the UK, Harriet Taylor Mill⁴ had lamented this situation in *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851):

They say that women should be, not slaves nor servants, but companions; educated for that office.... But since uncultivated women are not suitable companions for cultivated men and a man who feels interest in things above and beyond the family circles wishes that his companion should sympathise with him in that interest, they there say, let women improve their understanding and taste, acquire general knowledge, cultivate poetry, art, even coquet with science, and some stretch their liberality so far as to say, inform themselves on politics; not as pursuits, but sufficiently to feel an interest in the subjects, and to be capable of holding a conversation on them with the husband, or at least of understanding and imbibing his wisdom (p. 304).

Such concerns about women's intellectual development found resonance in Malta through the philanthropic activism of Alfons Maria Galea. Cassar (1975) referred to Galea's appeal of 1907 "to women to endeavour to assert themselves not through their physical charms and elegance in dress, but through the cultivation of their intellectual and moral talents. It was only by these means that they would learn to look ahead, think in depth and gain their freedom" (p. 22).

³ Paradoxically, these female journalists' influence in the struggle for women's suffrage did not open the way for other women in journalism. Until the early 1990s news organisations only employed a handful of female journalists. When I started working in public broadcasting in the mid-1980s, there were only three full-time female reporters in the whole island.

⁴ Taylor Mill, British philosopher and woman's rights advocate. She influenced her husband John Stuart Mill to write the famous treatise on *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

The condition of working class women was direr. State-funded elementary education in Malta had been introduced by the French in 1798 but it was not made compulsory before 1946. As a result, during the inter-war years, many children were not attending school. Others did not complete their primary education because of poverty and also because they needed to work.

At the time when Malta obtained self-government in 1921 most girls did not study beyond primary level and girls (even more than boys) did not attend school regularly.

Table 1: Students attending educational institutions in 1921

	Males	Females
University	173	3
Secondary school (state)	309	193
Secondary school (private)	1,111	931
Elementary school (state) Average attendance	7,371 attending out of 8,896 on the roll	6,621 attending out of 8,095 on the roll
Elementary school (private) Average attendance	1,342 on the roll	1,107 on the roll

Source: *Bluebook* (1921).

The dearth of females at University level made it even less likely for women to emerge as leaders demanding significant reform. At the time of the *Sette Giugno* riots students had been very actively engaged politically and they even staged their own protest on 16th May 1919. Yet, it was only later that year, in October 1919, that for the first time ever, two women enrolled for a course at the University of Malta: Tessie Camilleri read English Literature, Philosophy and Latin Literature, while Blanche Huber took a course of Science and the Preparatory Course for Medicine and Surgery. They both graduated under Rector Themistocles Zammit who introduced a new statute in 1921⁵ which stated: “The University examinations, degrees, diplomas and certificates shall be open

⁵ The previous statute adopted in 1915 had first introduced a clause whereby sex shall not be a cause for disqualification, but there were objections to it (not related to gender) and students never supported this statute.

to all without distinction of sex." While previously none of the University's statutes specifically denied access to females, "one can presume that it simply was inconceivable that a woman should desire to enter or be accepted to follow academic courses"⁶ (Camilleri, 2006, p. 42). It is thus not surprising that Maltese women did not press for a role in the National Assembly of 1919.

While women's organisations were excluded from the National Assembly, the only public figure sensitised to the advancement of women's rights, was in exile and imprisoned in Egypt. Manwel Dimech was a social gadfly who deemed education to be an agent of social mobility and progress and who was attuned to the demands of the suffragette movement in the UK and the rest of the continent. Dimech saw the struggle for self-determination as intrinsically linked with women's liberation. "The right to vote is one of expressing one's right to self-determination and this is everyone's birth right" (Montebello and Galea, 2012, p. 18). In the year that Emily Pankhurst put wind in the sails of the suffragettes in Manchester in 1903, Dimech had already appealed for women's liberation in his publication *Il-Bandiera tal-Maltin* (The Flag of the Maltese): "Rise, rise, Maltese woman. Join in the struggle of fellow women in other countries" (1st October 1902, cited by Montebello, 2004, p. 273).

It is assumed that Dimech gained deeper familiarity with the European suffragette movement during a long trip to France and Italy around 1911. Upon his return he declared: "Women of Malta, law is oppressive. You are not granted the same rights as men. Rules were dictated by men, who put their own interest first. Law broadly ignores you but on those few occasions when you were given some legal attention, law was primarily enacted to subjugate you. You are entitled for equal rights." (*Bandiera tal-Maltin*, 30th September 1911 cited by Montebello, 2004, p. 274).

Dimech's theoretical idealism put his own wife Virginia and their children practically in dire straits to an extent that a female historian asked a very pertinent question: 'What did she see in him?' (Vella, 2013).⁷ While he exalted the

⁶ In the long history of the University of Malta, the first attempt to offer tertiary education to women was made in 1841, under rector Rev. Thaddeus O'Malley who was deemed to be a 'maverick' and tried to introduce 'radical' reforms. A group of female midwives who had actually started the course did not succeed to complete it because the cleric was forced to resign and his project was scrapped.

⁷ Manwel and Virginia married in 1890. Then Dimech, who was 11 years Virginia's senior, had turned 40 years of age and he had only been released from his second stint in prison three years earlier. While Dimech was prolific and worked very hard he had financial troubles that led to marital exasperations as revealed in a poem he dedicated to Virginia *Perche' Ingrata?* (Why are you so ungrateful), (Montebello, 2004, p. 240).

virtues of women's liberation in his theoretical writings, his wife was unable to meet the needs of her big family and her troubles were not frivolous. While he invested his energy in his political work and publications, the couple lost four of their children to various treatable conditions, with the last surviving son Attilo, dying while Dimech was in exile. Virginia was by then begging for assistance to an extent that in March 1916 she wrote the following appeal:

I Virginia Dimech the lawful wife of Professor Emanuel Dimech ... who is detained on suspicion as a prisoner of war ... I have three children namely Attilo, aged 12 years and Silvia aged 9 years and Evelina aged 8 years who are all dependant on my own exertions for support. And owing to the absence of my husband from home, for the last 17 months and having no one in the world except him alone, for our maintenance, our state of misery and want may be better considered than described (cited by Vella, 2012, p. 120).

From where did Dimech draw his inspiration? During this period, apart from Anglo-American influences, the European movements on the Left were influenced by the political philosophy of Friedrich Engels, who made gender equality a central tenet of socialist doctrine expounded in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). However, it does not seem that Dimech sympathised with these trends because "he deemed this philosophy to be driven by class envy, where the lower classes vie for the possessions of the rich classes and he felt that revolutionary ideas merely provided justifications to reach other ends" (Montebello, 2004, p. 263).

Still the Church had turned Dimech into its archenemy and supported his exile, which came after accusations that he was spying on behalf of Germany. The Church had not succeeded to suppress his activism with excommunication and condemnation of his publication and followers, but deportation sounded the death knell for Dimech's organisation. Dimech's own demise in 1921 coincided with the arrival of a self-government. His influence lingered among a small group of admirers and later *Dimechiani* formed part of "the radical dynamic section behind a network of the first trade unions and working class organisations which sprang up, mainly from the dockyard" (Chircop, 2012, p. 7).

One generation later he was still largely demonised by conservative authors to an extent that, a post-war politician, Herbert Ganado, described Dimech's philosophy as extremist and his language as inflammatory (*xewwiexi*). Ganado resented

Dimech's slamming of the Maltese traditional family, as basically religious and patriarchal and "where the man was the head of the family and the woman confined to her home and kitchen" (Ganado, 1977a, p. 212).

In this period upper and middle class women were not expected to work outside the home although most working class women worked to top-up the earnings of the male breadwinners. Widows like Virginia Dimech and single women who had no male support, often lived in dismal poverty because the earnings of working women were much lower than those of men, for the same quality and quantity of work.

A prelude to women's enfranchisement

With the arrival of the Amery-Milner Constitution,⁸ which granted the Maltese autonomy in internal affairs, there were sporadic calls for women's enfranchisement. In the inter-war period demands for the vote for women were either embedded within mounting pressures towards social welfare that were inspired by socialist ideals or in appeals that aimed to empower privileged women some who already enjoyed status, a degree of education, property and social capital but were not eligible to vote.

This transpires from an illuminating but rather dubious account (that will be discussed later) entitled "A Survey of the Woman's Movement in Malta," published in the Labour Party organ *The Dawn* (5th March 1947, p. 2), signed by Dom Degiorgio, attempting to give an overview of efforts for women's enfranchisement till then. Chircop aptly describes Duminku Degiorgio as one of the widely read early Labour "amateur researchers". Like his contemporary Labour historians he was not academically moulded but he put his heart into his work and can be deemed to have been "an 'organic intellectual' of the working class in the Gramscian sense" (Chircop, 2012, p. 14). These popular histories, published in the interwar period, provided an important alternative historical narrative that helped construct a working class identity (as opposed to the hegemonic narratives of pro-British exponents, the entitled elite and the Church) at a time when the Maltese national project was still unfolding.

In this specific article Dom Degiorgio referred to reforms within the Labour Party where, he claimed, individuals influenced by "imported literature"

⁸ The Constitution of 1921 introduced a diarchal system of government with a Senate and a Legislative Assembly. Control was divided between a Maltese government and the Imperial government, which retained control over many 'reserved matters'.

promoted “progressive measures” that included Widows Pensions and female suffrage. He wrote that a newspaper that advocated women's suffrage was *The Malta Labour Leader* where the vote for women was deemed to be part of a “socialist” project. Indirectly Degiorgio made an appeal for a socialist strand of feminism.

As soon as the Labour Party was founded in 1921 (it was first known as *Camera del Lavoro*) there were efforts by women to mobilise and give a voice to other women. A certain C. Grima had written in the party organ *Il Cotra* (6th December 1928, p. 2) appealing to women to support the Labour Party because of its support for Widows Pensions and other social measures.

Liza Fenech and Vincenza Flores were among the first activists in the party. Fenech published an appeal in *Il-Cotra* (22nd November 1928) claiming that the Labour Party had many female sympathisers and asked the party organ to “dedicate a column to female writers so that they are able to express their opinion as in the case of women activists abroad”. Vincenza Flores complained that many women were too fixated with fashion and domestic chores (“*fuq il-brodu u l-minestra*” – broth and vegetable soup) and appealed to them to employ their energy in meaningful ways following the model of UK women that had become Parliamentarians (*Il-Cotra*, 20th December 1928).

Around the same time ‘*Ċetta il-Bormliża*’ (Ċetta from Cospicua) wrote a piece entitled “*L-Aħmar Moda*” (Red is Fashionable) that was published in *Il-Ħmara* (24th July 1929) where she described female Labour activists who had joined men in sporting red handkerchiefs as symbols of their ideals. “Many socialists wore this in many a political demonstration, a habit which became fashionable even among some women” (cited by Chircop, p. 74).

From within elite circles, Degiorgio (1947) referred to the Anglo-Maltese politician Lord Gerald Strickland who advocated votes for educated women. Strickland, who had a British father and a Maltese mother, had lived and socialised with influential and empowered women. In 1918, just after he returned to Malta from Australia, he became a widower with five unmarried daughters to care for. It was his second wife Margaret Hulton, whom he married in 1926, who built the Hotel Phoenicia in Floriana and set up St Edward's College. Together with his daughter Mabel, she founded the newspaper group Allied Newspapers Ltd (Hornyold-Strickland, 2012). His position on women's enfranchisement was thus not surprising: “Women can talk and when it is the case that

they should talk and write and inspire, and criticise, the results are good, both for the present and for the future generation. The women of Malta have not got votes, they nevertheless have a duty to combine and organise" (Gerald Strickland, cited by Degiorgio, 1947, p. 2).

The desk-top suffragettes

Ten years after the granting of self-government a significant attempt in this direction was made by Lord Strickland's own daughter Mabel. Her effort was made at a time when he was relentlessly clashing with the ecclesiastical authorities. Mabel Strickland acted as the assistant Secretary of her father's Constitutional Party. She pleaded before a *Royal Commission on Maltese Affairs* proposing amendments to the Constitution of 1921 to "consider the equity of bringing the political status of the women of Malta more into line with that enjoyed by the women of English and other self-governing units of the British Commonwealth" (*Times of Malta*, 21st May 1931).

In spite of her role in her father's Constitutional Party, Mabel Strickland was not in a position to mobilise masses in favour of this reform. Although she was deemed to be a "political animal" (Hoe, 2015, p. 342), upon her father's death in 1940 she was not eligible to become his natural successor because of her sex. The party was instead inherited (and greatly weakened) by her cousin Roger Strickland, who became a reluctant leader in deference to the memory of his uncle. Mabel's biographer, Joan Alexander (cited by Hoe, 2015, p. 342) observed that Roger was concerned about the future of the Constitutional Party if he were to abandon politics. He had felt that after the war Maltese people would never tolerate "a mere woman" at the helm of the party even if female representation was allowed.

Mabel Strickland was born in Malta but raised in Australia. She moved mainly within Anglo-Maltese elite circles and she never acquired a command of the Maltese language. In her early life her relationship with Malta and the Maltese was rather ambivalent as we learn from her private correspondence: "Here is a narrow, backward country, rather, island – that in spite of itself or, rather, myself, I love with a strange passion" (cited by Aquilina, 2010, p. 118).

Given the cultural setting it was difficult for Mabel to leave an imprint especially because of the great influence of the Church. In fact in the 1930s her father's political ambitions and his political future were curtailed by turbulent

politico-religious clashes. In spite of this, in 1931 she managed to persuade 428 women to sign a petition, which she sent to a Royal Commission. The petition mirrored the points which Eva Hubback had raised ten years earlier in her correspondence with the Colonial Office. It stated:

We feel that the time has undoubtedly come for the recognition of the right of women in Malta to take part in the deliberations of the Parliament of the island, in view of their already active interest in public life, and we petition that their claims as citizens should receive full attention in the event of the Constitution being amended or placed on a permanent and improved basis.

We sincerely believe that women's influence and increased participation in the public life of Malta will be conducive to the better government of these islands and will strengthen the sentiments of heartfelt loyalty to Our Gracious Sovereign and the bonds that unite Malta to His Majesty's other Dominions (cited by Hoe, 2015, p. 339).

This first petition for the enfranchisement of women was ignored (Callus, 1992). The Royal Commission clearly did not want to get embroiled in local clashes. In an answer that was published a whole year later, the Commission remarked that given the then particular prevailing condition, the petition did not seem to have the support of any of the political parties and hence there was no evidence that the extension of the franchise would be acceptable.⁹ Cremona (1962) quotes the Commission as replying: "We are not aware of any Dominion or Colony in which women have been first and specially brought into a legislature by instruction ..." Moreover, the Commission added that "if any desire is evinced in that direction [i.e. the direction of women's franchise] the movement should come from Malta itself and an alteration should not be imposed from outside" (cited by Hoe, 2015, p. 340).

In spite of Mabel Strickland's connections with Britain, there is no evidence that her plea was connected with the British women's struggle or with women's movements elsewhere. Moreover, her demand for women's enfranchisement stopped short of universal suffrage for all adult citizens. Maltese women did not then constitute what Castells (1997) refers to as 'strong trenches of

⁹ It is important to note that this same Royal Commission also refused a proposal made by the Labour Party demanding the end of plural voting (Cremona, 1962).

resistance'. It had already transpired that Malta would never have a mass-based feminist movement, hence Callus' rather pessimistic view of women's activism and their drive towards suffrage, on the grounds that it was only a few educated women who were the main drivers behind reforms (1992). The suffragette campaign in Malta never took to the street; it was a struggle conducted mainly from behind the desk, through contributions to the press and driven by inter-personal networks.

Women's suffrage reappeared on the national agenda in the post-war period, when the demand was backed by a new and more influential movement, the General Workers' Union (hereinafter, GWU) that was founded in 1943 and that soon teamed up with the Labour Party to form the Labour Front. In 1931, when Mabel first wrote to the Royal Commission, little did she suspect that her fate was already intertwined with that of the woman who later succeeded to open the way for the vote for women, Josephine Burns de Bono.

In 1931 Strickland House had employed Hugh Burns as editor of the *Times of Malta*, which was then still published on a weekly basis. Burns was the brother of Josephine Burns de Bono, who is often referred to as 'an Irish journalist' when in actual fact she was half Maltese and had lived most of her life on the islands.¹⁰ In 1903 her mother Laura Agius had married an Irishman while living in London, but she was soon widowed and moved back to Malta, where Josephine spent her teenage years. Hoe (2015) writes that in the 1920s Josephine Burns still spent some time working as a journalist in England where she may have become acquainted with the Fabian Society and other socialist circles.

In 1931 – the year her brother took up employment with the *Times of Malta* – Josephine Burns married a Maltese. When the newspaper became a daily in 1935, Hugh Burns expected to be appointed editor, only to be bitterly disappointed when the job was given to Mabel, the daughter of the proprietor. His own employment was terminated after a series of clashes. Hugh left the *Times of Malta* rather acrimoniously and joined the competing publication *The Daily Malta Chronicle*. The relationship between the two families became strained but this did not stop Josephine from writing in the *Times of Malta*. It is not known whether Josephine and Mabel, who were both advocating suffrage, had any influence on each other.

¹⁰ She is still described as an 'Irish journalist' on the official website of her own son, the renowned Edward Debono, online: <https://www.edwdebono.com/about> [Accessed 15th October 2017].

Hoe (2015) claims that Josephine had met Mabel Strickland towards the end of her school years at the Sacred Heart Convent in Sliema but it is not clear whether in later years they ever agreed to collaborate on women's issues. Although the relationship between their two families was understandably frosty, Aquilina notes that "Josephine knew Mabel well and kept contact with her newspaper editors until she died" (2010, p. 298).

It was Josephine Burns de Bono who led the second drive towards universal suffrage, finding a strong pillar in the founder of GWU, Reggie Miller. Schiavone and Scerri (1997) even suggest that she was one of the founding members of the GWU, but this author did not find evidence to support this claim.

World War II and the slow retreat of patriarchal politics

World War II spurred considerable changes for women mainly because Malta became directly involved in the global conflict. During the war, men were conscripted and women took their place even in those areas that were previously male domains, such as the Dockyard.

By the end of 1938 there was already a campaign to recruit women as Air Raid Precaution (ARP) wardens. To counter the cultural resistance that would have shackled women's participation in these efforts, it was suggested that unless women joined up, there was a likelihood that female casualties would have to be assisted by men. In 1939 the Woman Auxiliary Reserve was launched to help co-ordinate war work done by women (Pirota, 2005).

Cusens (2014) also describes a shrewd government strategy whereby the Church was persuaded to assist in rallying thousands of women to join a Passive Defence Civilian Force. "Women provided the social, administrative, operational and logistical platforms for the country's civil and military administrations ... The island was being run on women" (p. iii). Cusens further described how the extended female force also included "rural women working the fields to keep produce going, the running of communal feeding and child-care schemes, the holding of round-the-clock prayer vigils, food and laundry logistical services for the 30,000 strong Garrison and the population as a whole, as well as offering succour to the homeless" (p. ii-iii). The war also empowered civil society where hundreds of women-led relief committees supported the effort at a local, regional and in some cases even at a national level.

Mabel Strickland emerged as an influential figure when the *Times of Malta* became the only newspaper that, in spite of the scarcity of newsprint, continued to be published throughout the war. Her nephew wrote: "She worked tirelessly throughout the war years, ably assisted by her staff. Between them they managed to ensure that the *Times of Malta* appeared every morning to keep the Maltese informed of what was happening during the war. Mabel was singularly brave even then and rarely retreated to the air raid shelters. However, as luck would have it, on 7th April 1942, she was persuaded to go down into the shelters. That very night, her office was bombed and seriously damaged. Undaunted, she was back at work, as normal, the following day leading her workers by fine example" (Hornyold-Strickland, 2012, n.p.).

It was International Women's Day of 1943 when Maltese women made it clear they were now very ready to challenge the status quo. On that day the role of Maltese women received international recognition in a rally that was held in London on March 8th. The organisers requested the Governor to invite Maltese women's organisations to send their message for the occasion, but instead, the message was penned by the Lieutenant Governor's Office. Some Maltese women took exception to this and on the 7th March a delegation of women presented their own version to the Governor to be transmitted to London, which stated: "victory dawns, then only shall we know that our women's liberty and ideals are safe ..." (cited by Pirota, 2005, p. 20). Heading this new movement was Josephine Burns de Bono.

The *Women of Malta Association* entered the political scene in the late January 1944 in a meeting for women that approved the following resolutions:

It is resolved to form an association to be called Women of Malta - *Nisa ta' Malta*.

The object of the association is to enlist sympathy in securing for women in Malta equal political rights with men, that is, universal suffrage at twenty-one years of age.

It is proposed that women should not only have the right of voting, but also that of election to whatever constituent assembly may be formed for Self-Government of Malta.

A Committee has been elected to form a responsible body of educated women who are capable of presenting the case for women's suffrage in Malta.

The second necessity is to nominate candidates who would present the women of Malta through the association at the forthcoming National Congress which is to discuss the form of a new Constitution for Malta.

(*Times of Malta*, 1st February 1944, p. 3)

Burns de Bono was appointed President of the Women of Malta Association whereas H el ene Buhagiar became Secretary General. H el ene Buhagiar was older than Josephine and they belonged to different generations. Indeed, since 1916 Buhagiar had been the driving force of the Malta Art Association, where she invested most of her time and energy, as its honorary secretary and treasurer. Art was her passion and although she was not an exhibiting artist, she was artistically talented. While Hoe (2015) claimed that Buhagiar did not seem to be particularly well-educated, she had attended classes by Ramiro Cali, Robert Caruana Dingli and Giuseppe Cali and she was probably given private tuition by Edward Caruana Dingli.¹¹ It is no wonder that Herbert Ganado (1977b) later described her admiringly as "one of the most cultured women in Malta" (p. 194).

H el ene Buhagiar's family had adequate means and contacts. Her father Nicola had become manager of the Malta Railways just after its takeover by government, even if by then the days of the train were numbered. When Buhagiar joined the political fray in her later life, her battle cry was that "since women pay taxes like men, they should also enjoy the same voting rights" (Hoe, 2015, p. 194). She later joined a party that opposed taxes for all.

Using her maiden name, Josephine Burns wrote an article entitled "The Story of Women's Suffrage" for the *Times of Malta* a few days after the foundation of the Women of Malta Association. Strangely the article does not mention the Association but it is known that at the time this had about 80 members (Hoe,

¹¹ The *Times of Malta* (16th July 1947) reported that it was H el ene Buhagiar, who was then both secretary to the Women of Malta Association and the Malta Arts Association, who had been instrumental in convincing the Malta-born artist Professor Antonio Sciortino to donate plaster and terracotta models to the people of Malta. In the opening ceremony of an exhibition of these works at the Palace Armoury, Josephine Burns de Bono paid tribute to H el ene Buhagiar for her "inspiration, devotion and self-sacrifice ... [she] had initiated the project and taken full responsibility for it throughout" (p. 7). This is one other great contribution by H el ene Buhagiar to her motherland.

2015). Burns wrote: "The right of women to vote and to stand as Parliamentary candidates was legally recognised in England and America as a result of the excellence of women's work during the Great War of 1914-1918. To-day after nearly four and a half years of war, women in Malta are becoming conscious that they have earned the same civic recognition" (*Times of Malta*, 9th February 1944, p. 3).

Her message found the support of Mabel Strickland, the newspaper's editor, who herself contributed another article entitled "Transition in Malta." This article also failed to acknowledge the existence of the Association, but it tackled the same arguments that were raised by Burns de Bono. Mabel wrote: "The war record of the women of Malta corresponds with that which won franchise for the women in the UK after the war of 1914-1918 ... Malta's men and women, have to face the post-war period and the women have invaded the labour market ... [m]any are asking, 'When the evil of war is over, must the Maltese woman go back into a life of looker-on, a burden to the male members of the family, instead of enjoying the right of planning life and living it?' ... Malta has reached a transition stage. The clock cannot go back" (*Times of Malta*, 12th February 1944, p. 7).

But some individuals did want to turn the clock back and Burns de Bono used her mighty pen to fight her adversaries with passion. One author who seemed to have managed to get under her skin was a certain William E. Chetcuti who wrote profusely in various newspapers. In an article published in *The Bulletin* (22nd April 1944) he argued that the enfranchisement of women would spell the ruin of the family:

Whom will the children find when they return back home after school or work? Not the father who, naturally and of necessity, will still be at work; they will then also miss their mother who may be taking part in some heated debate in an all-night sitting of the House, or be lounging in some stuffy political club or going round soliciting votes. Does not this spell ruin for the family? And after all, is not the state composed of families? (p. 3).

In another article Chetcuti played the moral card:

The honest Maltese workmen, as the principal breadwinner, always asked for a decent living wage to support himself, to keep his wife

at home, and to educate his children ... For this scope he works hard and does not mind working overtime if necessary. What this type of workmen does not want is moral and physical hindrance in his path of duty; family quarrels and family misadventures, so common nowadays when many strangers and dangerous strangers too are amongst us (*The Torch*, 16th August 1944).

Chetcuti's vague final statement seems to suggest that women are 'strangers' in the labour market. He was writing at a time when in Paris the feminist author Simone De Beauvoir was about to start writing *The Second Sex* (published in 1949) where she examined women's 'otherness' and observed that in patriarchal cultures a woman was not only the 'other' and a stranger to men, but also to herself.

Burns de Bono did not take this 'othering' lightly. She wrote an impassioned letter to the editor in reply to Chetcuti. The letter, entitled "Female Labour and Sex Hostility" (*The Torch*, 26th August 1945), stated that there are "hundreds of working women, as in other countries, who work because it is economically necessary for them to do so. The low value of money and the high cost of living made it necessary for these women to contribute to the family budget. They work hard and with dignity and efficiency and do not either harbour hostility towards men or exploit the sex for preferential treatment" (p. 7). She stressed the point that it was not right for female workers to relinquish their economic rights, and their financial freedom, to confine themselves to domestic life.

Her positivity was in tune with the initial optimism that followed World War II. In spite of the devastation, people longed for amusement and celebrations to an extent that once the air raids stopped in 1943, football grounds immediately came alive, and village feasts and cultural programmes resumed (Ganado, 1977b). The population was confident that due to their great war-time sacrifices in the defence of Empire, Malta would be recognised and rewarded with new constitutional freedoms and the islands' reconstruction would be supported financially by Britain.

Amid this optimism it was the elected members of the Council of Government who had petitioned the Secretary of State for the Colonies to restore responsible government to Malta. Guarantees were received that autonomy would be granted after public consultation on a new Constitution. As a result, after the war a National Congress was convened and a National Assembly convoked

to prepare a draft for a responsible government Constitution that was to be presented to Constitutional Commissioner Harold Mac Michael in 1946. The complex context in which the political debate on female suffrage reemerged was aptly synthesised by Pirotta (1979):

On 8th December 1943, the Elected Members of the Council of Government sent circulars to all the Constituted Bodies recognised by Government calling upon them to send two delegates each to a Congress which would take steps to convene a National Assembly whose purpose would be to draft a new Constitution for Malta ... The Congress held its first meeting on 10th February 1944 at De La Salle Palace, Valletta. A Committee ... was then elected in order 'to study and submit ... the best means of calling a National Assembly which will be truly representative of the whole country and which will draft a new Constitution for Responsible Government.' It was decided to invite all Constituted Bodies to send delegates to the National Assembly and to invite any organisations seeking representation to apply to have their case considered (p. 307).

It must be stated that the Council of Government was then still composed of members appointed on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, hence was no longer deemed to represent public sentiment in the post-war scenario. The Council appointed in 1939 had ten seats reserved for elected members: six went to the Constitutionals, three to the Nationalists and one was won by Labour (Pirotta, 2006). It is thus not surprising that, in spite of the talks on constitutional reform, Labour Leader Dr Paul Boffa called for an election, which took place in November 1945.

The Constitutional Party and the Nationalists attempted to delay an election to gain time to organise themselves. One of the arguments was that if elections were to take place in 1945 not all the potential electorate would vote, especially women. In a Council of Government meeting Acting Lieutenant Governor E.P. Bell refuted this argument and said that everyone had to take this law exactly as he found it.

Once a date had been set, these two parties avoided electoral humiliation by boycotting the 1945 election, on the grounds that it was superfluous since the National Assembly was already preparing for self-government. The Labour Party, supported by GWU, was the only party to contest the election and it won

nine out of ten seats. According to Micallef Stafrace: "The Labour manifesto preceding the November 1945 elections showed clearly that the Labour Party was insisting on a constitutional advancement that could only be successful if coupled with a solid economic foundation on which to build self-government" (1998, p. 22).

It was clear then that the war had brought a seismic political change. The Nationalists were in a state of disarray with their leader Enrico Mizzi sounding retrograde and tainted by his pronounced Italianate sympathies. The Constitutional Party had declined with the demise of Gerald Strickland in 1940, who was succeeded by a half-hearted nephew. The Labour Party, which was more in tune with the times, emerged as a major new force, especially after it formed the Labour Front with the General Workers' Union. The Union's General Secretary Reggie Miller and Labour Leader Dr Paul Boffa aimed to synergise the strength and resources of the two organisations in order to achieve common ends. In the Assembly the numerous representatives of band clubs and other societies further strengthened the Labour Front's position within the Assembly that convened to draft the Constitution because they included many mutual sympathisers or activists (Pirota, 1979).

Pirota notes that in spite of the participation of civil society and small parties within the Assembly there were two distinct factions. On one side, there was the workers' movement, whose reformist political agenda referred to the safeguarding of rights and the eradication of exploitation. On the other, there were representatives of "the moneyed, capitalist and privileged classes warmly jealous of their interests ... Both eyed each other with so much mistrust ..." (1979, p. 304).

The National Assembly and the path to women's enfranchisement

The National Assembly's first meeting took place on 20th January 1945, in the Hall of St. Michael and St. George in the Palace, Valletta. The two top positions were shared by exponents belonging to the two main factions: As President, the Assembly appointed Professor Count Luigi Preziosi, a respected eye specialist identified with the conservative grouping. The post of Secretary was clinched by Reggie Miller from the Labour Front, who skilfully steered the course towards universal suffrage.

The Assembly was composed of 388 representatives hailing from parties, civil society, the professions and the press. The 30 representatives of the press,

included some from insignificant parochial publications. Mabel Strickland was nominated on behalf of the *Times of Malta*. This did not come as a surprise because of her war-time efforts to boost public morale through her newspapers, which never missed a single issue in spite of the harsh working conditions.

Yet, in the second sitting of the Assembly a delegate challenged the presence of "a woman in the Assembly as editor of the *Times of Malta*" (Aquilina, 2010, p. 289). The objector felt that this constituted a precedent and might be construed as meaning that women had the right to vote in general elections. Although this man's views on women were ubiquitous in 1940s Malta, his motion to bar Mabel Strickland from the Assembly (on the grounds that she was a woman!) was doomed because the man found no one to second it. Mabel was initially offended but she later turned this incident into an anecdote and which she enjoyed recounting in interviews she gave in her later years.

The Labour Front was ready to push for universal suffrage. At the helm of the GWU, Miller seemed aware of trends that were slowly catching up in Western Europe, where equality had emerging as a new theme on the political and the trade union agendas. In Britain, an Equal Pay Campaign Committee had been established in 1943 specifically to fight for equal pay rights.

It must be noted however, that UK trade unions that were in close collaboration with the British Labour Party "had never jettisoned their deeply engrained patriarchal assumptions about women's place even during the war when women were so central. The post-war reconstruction showed not only how fragile the slight gains made actually were, but how little support there was for maintaining any of them from the labour movement leadership ... [the prevalent notion was] that the whole of civil society was based around family units with a male breadwinner at the head of each and hence that the role of married women in social production was secondary to their domestic responsibilities" (Davis, 2012, n.p.).

Likewise, in Malta, while the Labour Front advocated female suffrage, the core Labour and union agendas in the post-war period, centred on male-breadwinners' demands. Although the war had to a degree loosened job segregation, it immediately transpired that deeply engrained prejudices about women's role were still very strong. Initially some members of the Labour Front did not even conceive women's suffrage as an important element in the national project. Others felt it was not yet the right time to take up this cause.

In 1944, the prevailing opinion within the GWU was that when the soldiers [i.e. conscripted men] returned, women had to be the first to be discharged. Moreover, the union feared that since women were paid less than men, their presence in labour market threatened work conditions and undermined union demands to improve labour conditions. This apprehension was not unfounded. There are many who contend that the rapid increase in the number of women in paid employment in the post WWII era was related to shifts in both the demand for, and supply of women's labour, which had wider consequences and impacted the position of the traditional male breadwinners (Pettit and Hook, 2005). Hence when the war ended, women were actively encouraged to return to the domestic sphere. In times of looming unemployment this effort was made in tandem with efforts to reinstate and secure the position of the male proletariat. Many women were reluctant to accept this. Some women could not afford not to work.

As experienced elsewhere in Europe, some male trade union members vociferously expressed their resentment towards female workers. While some arguments were based on questions of morality and culture, the most significant anxieties revolved around the impact of female labour on their own work prospects and conditions of work. Thus, during the Annual Conference of the GWU held in May 1944, when the union was discussing a proposal to emend membership rules, a certain Mr Cassano moved a motion to exclude all female workers. His motivation mirrored important concerns of those times, where many feared that women constituted a threat to men in the job market. According to GWU minutes of the 1944 General Conference, union officials blocked a motion to deny women the right to unionise.

The mover spoke quoting from a local paper on the risk of encroachments by females in industrial areas hitherto reserved for male labour Various speakers pointed out that the total exclusion was unfair as certain trades were peculiar to women and these were certainly entitled to trade union protection The General Secretary [Reggie Miller] said the motion before them was not whether women should be employed or not, but whether those who were rightfully or wrongly employed should benefit from trade unionism to the same extent as male workers. He deprecated the idea of a union which was fighting tooth and nail against all sorts of discrimination should itself admit in its organisation the principle of discrimination, this time by sex. The union would no longer be General if it excluded any class or section of bona-fide workers and the measure if adopted would make it difficult

if not impossible to link with English Unions which did not admit sex exclusions (*Annual General Conference Minutes*, 25th May 1944).

Reggie Miller was sympathetic with women's emancipation. The minutes show that he was influenced by the Western European trade unions with whom he had established links since the early days of the GWU (Micallef Stafrace, 1998). Angela Callus (1992) who interviewed Josephine Burns de Bono in 1988, cited her as saying that it was Reggie Miller who had advised her to register the Women of Malta Association "as a women's trade union so that it would be entitled to send two representatives in the National Assembly" (p. 34). Miller, was not only Secretary General of the GWU and editor of its weekly bi-lingual newspaper *The Torch*, he was also Secretary General of the National Assembly. Thus, he was instrumental in the struggle for women's suffrage, and it was through his advice that the Women of Malta Association was quickly set up specifically to demand the right to female suffrage. On her part Josephine Burns de Bono fitted within Miller's strategies because she did not divorce the situation of women from broader social and political processes.

The initial post-war optimism soon dissipated and the Maltese were bitterly disappointed. In a strongly worded article entitled "The Malta Mess" that appeared in the *World Review*, which was written while Josephine Burns de Bono was at the helm of the Association, she audaciously questioned the sincerity of the Empire's World War II avowal that it stood for liberty and democracy. The article appeared at a time when food prices had soared and employment prospects were dire. This coincided with the drafting of the responsible government Constitution:

What Malta did in the war is history; what Malta has become since the war is a tragedy. As I have seen a thousand times a great pall of dust settle over the island after a bomb attack, so now a great pall of darkness is settling over this stricken island ... Malta is one of the keystones of the new Europe: a cure here will do much to cure the whole of Southern Europe. A failure here (and we have a complete failure at present) will show to the outer world the weakness of the Imperial system under the strain of the aftermath of war (reprinted in *The Bulletin*, 13th April 1946, p. 6).

Josephine Burns de Bono, assisted by H el ene Buhagiar, launched appeals at a national and an international level related to Malta's post-war problems, such

as the resolution on the "fair and proper distribution of goods" in order to ensure that this distribution system weakened the black market economy that had thrived during war-time (*The Bulletin*, 27th May 1944, p. 3), the quality of rationed food and the state of the milk supply for children (*Times of Malta*, 2nd November 1945).

While Burns de Bono worked to influence the direction of the Labour Front by building bridges with the GWU and Labour officials, Mable Strickland was busy burning bridges with them. A harsh critic of the Labour front, Mabel remained loyal to the women's cause and had no sympathy with the ambivalence and the impasse faced by trade unionists in the face of anxieties of jobless male workers.

In November 1944 the GWU refuted accusations (that emanated from Strickland's *Times of Malta*) that prompted female employees at the dockyards to turn against their union because they claimed that the union had supported the termination of their employment so that they would be replaced by men. The union's rebuttal in *The Torch* was oxymoronic: It refuted the claim, but confirmed that union officials were in fact in favour of securing employment for male breadwinners at the cost of female jobs.

It is not true that any of the union leaders declared that the union wants to terminate women's jobs in the immediate future. We reiterated that in times of job scarcity ... and in the context of the returned conscripted soldiers who need to reintegrate into civilian life, women should be the first to go if there are redundancies. Here are the reasons why we have taken this position.

Women are paid less than men. While women like to earn money, we must keep collective good at heart. Inferior female pay will undermine male wages. Women must be foolish if they do not understand that their employment undermines the whole country, possibly the future of their own husbands and offspring (anon, *The Torch*, 11th November 1944, *In-Nisa u l-Unjon: Ħarsa l-Bogħod mill-Imnieher*, p. 4).

In spite of some members' resentments and opposition to female workers, just before Christmas of 1944, the GWU convened its delegates to agree on its programme for the National Assembly. A motion to declare the Catholic religion as the official religion was 'approved with great acclamation'; the use of the

Maltese language as the official language in Parliament was 'approved by acclamation,' whereas the notion of one-person-one-vote, which opened the way for female suffrage was simply, but effectively, 'approved'. In the substantial list of union representatives to attend the first meeting of the Assembly, which was accepted in the spirit of 'great expectation and discipline,' there were no women (*The Torch*, 13th January 1945).

The admission of women into the Assembly stirred a heated debate and ample opposition. Still, Burns de Bono managed to find support from GWU officials who were delegates of the National Assembly. Reggie Miller saved the day via an amendment to the Women of Malta Association application, which originally stated that "it is the opinion of this Assembly that the admission of the delegates of this association will mean the acceptance of the principle of equal rights for women in the political life of the Island, including the right to vote in Parliamentary elections" (*Times of Malta*, 17th February 1945). Then it appeared that such a motion would have been defeated because, as discussed later, the Church and other conservative elements opposed the concept of 'equal rights'.

Thus Reggie Miller made a tactical stitch in time by presenting an amendment that was more palatable to the male delegates, separating the acceptance of the Women of Malta Association from the principle of equal rights. The amendment stated "It is the opinion of the Assembly that the admission of the delegates of this Association will not necessarily mean the acceptance of the principle of equal rights for women in the political life of the island including the right to vote in Parliamentary elections, but it is the intention of this Assembly that the question of the rights for women remains open until the time for the drafting of the Constitution" (*Times of Malta*, 16th February 1945, p. 3).

During the third meeting of the Assembly, on Friday 2nd March 1945, two Labour Front delegates Ġużè Cassar and Dr Turu Colombo, moved a motion in support of the Association's application. It seems that the meeting was not well-attended and the Labour Front realised that it could win the vote if it made a bold move. It was here that J. Attard Bezzina made "an eloquent speech" and moved another amendment that "it is the opinion of this Assembly that the admission of the delegates of this Association will mean the acceptance of the principle of equal rights for women in the political life of the island including the right to vote in parliamentary elections" (*Times of Malta*, 3rd March 1945, p. 2). This was reinforced with a speech by the Labour leader Paul Boffa who counter-argued with his opponents that "women differed from men only by

sex. They pay taxes just as well. They were allowed to vote in quite a large number of countries, including Catholic countries such as Italy and Ireland. It was not true that Catholic doctrine was against women's franchise." (*Times of Malta*, 3rd March 1945, p. 2).

On this day the Association was admitted to the Assembly but the biggest gain was the agreement in the principle on the notion of equal rights. Both Burns de Bono and Buhagiar were allowed to participate on behalf of the Association, where they joined Mabel Strickland who already was a member representing *Times of Malta*. In fact Mabel had supported the application of the Women of Malta Association stating that "a nation without its women was only half a nation and women should take an active and intelligent interest in their country's affairs" (*Times of Malta*, 3rd March 1945, p. 2).

As an opinion leader Mabel's influence was not limited to the Maltese islands but she often coloured the way Maltese affairs were interpreted overseas.¹² As argued by Kaul (2015), Mabel's motivations were two-pronged: on the one hand her English language newspapers positioned Malta (albeit from her own perspective) on an international stage as decolonisation gathered pace. On the other hand, she strengthened her personal clout within the domestic public sphere.

The Association's admission to the Assembly was formally approved in the fourth sitting, held on 16th of March 1945. The following day, one of the most prolific opponents of female suffrage in the press, William E. Chetcuti, lamented in *The Bulletin* (17th March 1945) that it "... would seem that by a bare majority of only 10 votes, in the absence of about 160 members and with the aid of the open vote, our small band of budding women politicians have with the gallant half of several vote hunters contrived to achieve what they call their emancipation" (p. 3). His article was entitled: "Women Minding Men's Business".

At this point the Nationalist Party did not feature significantly in discussions on suffrage. Then, the acting leader Dr George Borg Olivier was trying hard to keep the party afloat while the actual leader Dr Enrico Mizzi was still in Uganda, where he had been deported in 1942 together with another 48 internees. These were arrested in Spring 1940 for their Italian sympathies and they were

¹² Mabel Strickland's adversaries were particularly concerned about the way she influenced the way the British interpreted Maltese affairs. In the post war, the Colonial Office in London deemed the *Times of Malta* as "the only decently produced newspaper in Malta" (Morris, W.A. Colonial Office, cited by Sammut, 2012, p. 167), probably because linguistically and culturally this was one of the few newspapers that the Colonial Office was able to comprehend.

deported in 1942, just 11 days prior to Italy's declaration of war. Internment and deportation had been actively supported by the Constitutional Party (i.e. the Strickland family). Pirotta notes that Mabel's newspapers, *Times of Malta* and *Il-Berqa*, inflamed their readers (including the British) against Enrico Mizzi by employing such terms as "traitors," "Quislings," "disloyals" and "fascists" (1989, p. 95).

Mizzi, along with others, was repatriated on 8th March 1945, a few days after the vote in the Assembly that approved in principle the application of the *Women of Malta Association*. Upon his return he wrote in *The Bulletin*¹³ stating that the *Women of Malta Association's* request for representation in the National Assembly was "a legitimate request which I would have approved of, had I been present at the sitting. But I was still interned abroad and therefore, I claim no merits or otherwise for what happened at that sitting" (*The Bulletin*, 15th September 1945, p. 3).

However, Mizzi objected to the fact that the admission of this Society in the Assembly "gave rise ipso facto to the acknowledgement of the right of all women of Malta to have the same political rights as men. This resolution was proposed and approved without notice at the sitting of 2nd March. Naturally I bow to the decision but the fact is that this principle of equality of political right was approved by 135 votes against 111, and as the number of those present at the sitting was 271, it is obvious that 35 of them abstained from voting" (p. 3). Mizzi was right to observe that the principle had been approved by the skin of its teeth. He referred to this narrow vote (and the number of absent delegates) in order to question the legitimacy of the decision.

Hoe (2015) pertinently depicts a picture of the three women in an Assembly comprising hundreds of Maltese men: "The team of three women must have made quite an impression when they first appeared in the Assembly ... Mabel was nearly six feet tall, always imposing, intimidating to many. Josephine's exceptional height for a woman came from her Irish forebears ... As for H el ene she has been described by another delegate [Herbert Ganado, in his book *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*] as perhaps the tallest woman in Malta" (p. 343). The delegates made a strong impression with their speeches. One delegate wrote in *The Torch* (8th June 1945): "Mrs Josephine Burns de Bono, wife of Professor Ġu zi Debono, delivered her maiden speech in the National Assembly. While English is her

¹³ Since at that time the Nationalist Party did not have its own official party organ, Mizzi resorted to articles that were published mainly in *The Bulletin* (Ganado, 1977).

strongest language she spoke clearly in the Maltese language ... Mrs Burns de Bono is an intelligent woman ... she has Malta's interests at heart ... and she will have an important role in Maltese society" (p. 3).

At the tenth sitting of the Assembly held on the 20th July 1945, Paul Boffa moved a motion proposing: 'One person, one vote' for all men and women above 18 years of age. Pirotta (1987) aptly observed that this put the other parties in quandary not merely on matters of principle but also politically, since the Labour Party stood to gain from the extension of the working class electorate. There were three segments to Boffa's motion. Part one was set to abolish plural voting for the Lower House. Part two aimed to introduce the right to vote for men over 18 years of age, which was emended following objections from J, Olivieri Munro, Editor of *The Sunday Times of Malta* who gathered enough backing to push the voting age up to 21. The third part of the motion concerned female suffrage and it was approved after a long discussions. Women's right to stand for elections was approved by the Assembly in the 18th sitting on the 16th November 1945.

It must be noted at this stage that notwithstanding the decision in the Assembly, the Nationalist Party had tried to postpone women's enfranchisement a number of times. A memorandum it sent to the Constitutional Commissioner Harold MacMichael stated that it was not "advisable to impose on the large female masses an onus and responsibility which the majority, would not, perhaps, be prepared to assume ... [they] therefore recommended a national referendum on this important question" (cited by Pirotta, 1987, p. 70).

Other attempts were made earlier in 1945 when the Council of Government, chaired by the Governor, discussed the amendment in the electoral law to include females in the Electoral Register. During this discussion, "Mr O. Sammut stated that women's franchise in Malta ... 'has been asked for by a few cranks'" (*Times of Malta*, 17th January 1945). Mr Sammut stated he agreed with a protest received from the Nationalist Party and objected to a vote for women before this had been approved by a Maltese Legislature after an election. This motion, which was defeated by the Labour majority in the third reading of the bill, was "aimed to postpone, perhaps indefinitely, the enfranchisement of women" (*Times of Malta*, 28th January 1947). Another important amendment to the electoral law affected by this Bill was the right of married women to vote without the consent or intervention of her husband (*Times of Malta*, 15th January 1945).

Similar attempts to delay women's suffrage came from influential Church circles but these failed to halt the momentum for women's imminent political emancipation. *Lehen is-Sewwa* (5th February 1944) had clearly stated that "a decision of such importance should not even be included in the Constitution but the decision should be left in the hands of the new elected Parliament" (p. 2).

Opposition to Women's Suffrage: the influence of the Church

On New Year's Day 1944 big crowds cheered the new Archbishop of Malta Michael Gonzi on the occasion of his triumphant entry into Mdina Cathedral. He left his Palace in Valletta in a horse-drawn carriage fully adorned for the occasion. "So great was the enthusiasm of the crowd that it took over an hour for the bishop's carriage to be drawn the short distance that separates the chapel of St Sebastian from the Dominican Church" (Doublet, 2015, p. 36). The newly installed Archbishop addressed the crowd from a balcony and received the Metropolitan chapter in the throne room. Pope Pius XII had just elevated the Maltese diocese to the rank of Archdiocese.

This was a great day for Gonzi, who had earned the respect of the British because as Bishop of Gozo he had persuaded Gozitan farmers to put their hoarded grain on the market to bring down the price of bread in the most difficult phase of the Axis onslaught on Malta when supplies were running critically low.¹⁴ This was an occasion of great joy for the population that had just started recovering from the destruction of the war. But not much had changed in the position of the Maltese Church vis-à-vis women. In fact during 1944 and 1947 it offered the toughest opposition to the suffrage effort.

Opposition was not merely through its influence on delegates to the Assembly but also from clerics within the community who had direct access to people from the pulpit and were then in a position to sway public opinion. The newspaper of the Catholic Action Movement, *Lehen is-Sewwa* (Voice of Truth) reinforced the position of the Church and served to keep the clergy on message. After the war, the newspaper had come under the direction of Monsignor Salvino Bartoli Galea who embarked on a 30 year stint as its editor (Fenech, 1978). An examination of *Lehen is-Sewwa's* coverage of the debates of the Assembly, the relevant commentaries and the letters to the editor, reveal that the Church in Malta intensely resented the notion of "equal rights" for women and "women's emancipation".¹⁵

¹⁴ Two years later Gonzi was knighted and earned the title of "Sir" in the New Year Honours of 1946.

¹⁵ It does not transpire there was any local awareness then of discussions underway under the auspices of the United Nations in New York, Geneva and later in Paris on the philosophy, law, cultural differences and practical politics of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (finalised in 1948), where one of the fundamental rights placed women on an equal footing with men.

This is evident in a front page article in the newspaper, written in the form of a dialogue between two men. The article tried to explain the apparent dissonance between the positions taken by the local and the positions of the Vatican. In Malta the Church led an 'informal' crusade against emancipation, whereas the Pope had actually supported female suffrage (*Lehen is-Sewwa*, 21st February 1945).

The Church itself has not taken a formal decision on this matter. At times Popes permitted votes for women and privately stated that votes for women are not a bad thing ... however some women in Malta also want to become members of Parliament so that they have equal rights with men Equal rights mean the right to do all the things that men do – to interfere in everything, and the right to work in the places where men work ... God created women to take care of the house, the family and children. This is the law of nature and the law of God (p. 1).

So while Mabel Strickland gave front page priority to a message by Pope Pius XII who encouraged Catholic women in France and Italy to participate in politics (*Times of Malta*, 22nd October 1945), *Lehen is-Sewwa* found theological justifications to refute women's suffrage. A number of articles published between 1943 and 1947 all deemed enfranchisement as a great peril. For instance on 29th May 1943, the newspaper lambasted "The Suffragette Movement" and the idea that "until women take their proper place side by side with men on equal basis and learn cooperation and citizenship, Malta can never progress" (p. 2). To refute the notion of equality it referred to Leo XIII encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891):

[W]ork which is quite suitable for a strong man cannot rightly be required from a woman or a child ... Women ... are not suited for certain occupations; a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of children and the well-being of the family.

On the 10th March 1945, the front page of the *Lehen is-Sewwa* reported the debate in the Assembly on the application by the Women of Malta Association to appoint delegates. Then the Labour Party leader Dr Paul Boffa had made a speech that was described as "outstanding" by the supporters of women's suffrage but *Lehen is-Sewwa* was not impressed. In its coverage of his speech it lambasted

him for daring to claim that Pope Benedict XV had supported the vote for women when it was enacted in the UK in 1918. The newspaper declared that "Pope Benedict was merely in favour of female suffrage but the Church still fiercely contested the notion of women's emancipation ... Boffa failed to substantiate his claim that the Church favours equal rights in political life" (p. 1).

In the same article the newspaper claimed that Pope Pius XI had in fact condemned women's emancipation in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930) that had reaffirmed Catholic teachings on marriage. It quotes parts of a pamphlet published by the *Catholic Truth Society* that summarised the relevant segments of this encyclical:

1. The modern 'emancipation of women' tries to abolish that honourable and trusting obedience which the wife owes to the husband. It seeks to free the woman from those important duties which properly belong to a wife as companion and mother.
2. The so-called emancipation is a crime; for it lowers the dignity of a woman as wife and mother and destroys family life. The husband suffers the loss of his wife, the children of their mothers, and the home loses its ever watchful guardian.
3. If the woman descends from the queenly throne in the Kingdom of the home to which the teaching of the Gospel has raised her, she will be reduced to the level of slavery as in pagan times and become once more the mere instrument of men.
4. Husband and wife are equal in dignity of soul and in the rights and obligations of the marriage contract; but in other things there must be some inequality for the sake of family life and right order in the home (cited by *Lehen is-Sewwa*, 10th March 1945, p. 1).

Similarly, a columnist using the pen-name "Felix" (*Lehen is-Sewwa*, 17th February 1945), quoted St Paul in validating his objections to the vote for women, adding "a woman's nature is to be of comfort for her husband, to nurture her family and offspring (spiritually and physically) and to raise her family in a healthy way. She should not interfere in the affairs of men ... she should never abandon her natural office to assume a role that is incompatible with her sex."

A few days later (24th February 1945) the newspaper reinforced its message in an article entitled "*Lehen in-Nisa fil-Pubbliku*" [Women's Voice in Public], citing

the 400 year old teachings of St Thomas d'Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, where it was suggested that women are intellectually inferior. The newspaper says that nothing had changed in four centuries because "the size of a woman's brain is still smaller than that of a man" and thus it concluded that women are not suited to lead the nation.

There was a point where the Church also resorted to the economic argument. A front page article (published 11th February 1944) predicted that young people were worse hit by unemployment and lamented that there would be "disastrous consequences" if vacancies that may be filled by unemployed [male] youth, were to be occupied by "*xebbiet u nisa*" (young women and adult women). It alleged there was a conspiracy in the Council of Government to remain silent about this 'problem'.

The proponents of women's suffrage had a gargantuan task in the face of this powerful opposition from such an important cultural force that impacted people's values and intimate behaviours. Delegate Ġuzè Ellul Mercer wrote: "One would also expect active opposition from Bishops where female suffrage exists. I am moreover positive that our beloved Archbishop would not have hesitated to make a pronouncement on this important issue as the allegedly uncatholic principles of women's suffrage were enunciated in Malta ... To deprive a woman of man's privileges in a country where she is equally exposed with him to all the penalties of law, is to treat her as a chattel or a slave" (Ellul Mercer, J. "Women minus Man's Privileges equal slaves", *The Bulletin*, 10th March 1945, p. 3).

When the Archbishop did assert his stance in a speech that was aimed at 'married women and mothers' he cleverly expressed "the intense love of a loving father" who needed to warn and counsel his children. He almost dismissed woman's power in politics and instead celebrated the power of a mother's virtue. He described mothers as the "head of the family ... the wife is the queen of the home ... that exerts her influence and exercises her mission to safeguard her own children from the decay that was experienced in those countries that have turned their back on religion ... A man is morally shaped by his wife ... The purpose of marriage is offspring ... Do not be scared by the number of children that you bear ... God will send you offspring and God will help you provide for them. Big families are the ultimate homage to the mother (*Lehen is-Sewwa*, 24th November 1945, p. 1).

When women's suffrage finally arrived with the MacMichael Constitution, the Church turned its attention to guiding women on how to exercise their newly acquired right. *Lehen is-Sewwa* of the 11th January 1947 expressed relief that the electoral law contemplated that women were free to exercise their right without the consent or presence of their husband. In October 1947, on the eve of the election, the newspaper published a series of articles signed by the pen-name 'Baruk' that appealed to the new voters to exercise their right because "the vote was a social and a moral obligation" (1st October 1947). The articles guided voters on how to ensure that they only elected good deputies with sound Catholic values.

The MacMichael Constitution

Sir Harold MacMichael arrived in Malta on the 4th May 1946. Given his prior experience he must have been glad to be posted here. MacMichael was a seasoned Cambridge-educated colonial administrator who had cut his teeth in Khartoum and as Governor of Tanganyika (modern day Tanzania). Just before World War II broke out he was posted as High Commissioner of the British Mandate of Palestine. These were troubled years when thousands of Jewish refugees were escaping Europe and trying their luck to enter their Biblical 'promised land' in Palestine.

One British decision backfired badly to an extent that to date MacMichael is still blamed by the Israelis for the death of at least 768 Jewish refugees aboard *MV Struma*.¹⁶ During a Knesset commemoration, the former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had declared, that "the leadership of the British Mandate displayed ... obtuseness and insensitivity by locking the gates to Israel to Jewish refugees who sought a haven in the Land of Israel. Thus were rejected the requests of the passengers of the ship *Struma* who escaped from Europe ... Throughout the war, nothing was done to stop the annihilation of the Jewish people" (Israel Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2005).¹⁷

Such was the rage against Harold MacMichael that during his six years in Palestine there were at least seven attempts to assassinate him. His last narrow escape occurred on his very last day in Palestine on 8th August 1944. After this dreadful stint in Palestine, arriving in war-torn but loyal Malta must have been

¹⁶ The sinking of the *Struma* is deemed to be the "largest naval civilian disaster of the war" (Franz and Collins, 2013, p. 255).

¹⁷ Sharon, Ariel (26th January 2005). "PM Sharon's Speech at Special Knesset Session Marking the Struggle Against Anti-Semitism". Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved 28th March 2013.

a relief, and even the stormy Assembly sessions on the drafting of the Constitution, must have pleasantly contrasted his tough, and possibly bitter, war-time mission in the Middle East.

Two days after his arrival MacMichael addressed the population on cable radio (then known as *Rediffusion* because the service was provided by that company) where he declared that he wanted to visit all corners of the Maltese islands to meet as many people as possible in order to gain deeper knowledge of the island and its people. He also acknowledged that his main challenge as Constitutional Commissioner was to reconcile Maltese aspirations for self-government with the imperial interests of Britain. Four days after his arrival he addressed the 263 (out of 421) delegates that were present for the meeting of the Assembly at the Palace in Valletta. There he outlined his terms of reference and explained that the autonomy that was about to be granted to Malta was a 'responsible government in the same sphere as between 1921 and 1933. He later went on to hold another twelve meetings with the Assembly (Ganado, 1977b).

Although the three female members of the Assembly were invited to these meetings, when on 5th October 1945 the Assembly elected delegates to actually draft the Constitution, none of the women were included. Since the women did not constitute a strong group, none of them were considered to participate in the Committee that prepared the first draft ("The National Assembly: Yesterday's meeting", *Times of Malta*, 6th October 1945).

It was on the 17th July 1947 that the Chairman of the Assembly, Sir Luigi Preziosi, presented MacMichael with a draft Constitution, the result of two long years of intense and heated debates. Later that year MacMichael published his report where he stated that "certain changes from the order of 1921-1933 were proposed but they commanded general assent and were not of a kind to which His Majesty's government need raise any objections. The most important of these was the inclusion of the principle of female suffrage on a basis of equality between the sexes in all respects" (MacMichael 1947, p. 20).

Universal suffrage and the vote for women in particular, were among the most important reforms that were to change the political scene and open the way for the development of democratic practice in Malta. G.A. Pirota (2006) added that the draft Constitution presented to MacMichael mirrored closely the self-government constitution of 1921 with substantial departures, namely that power was given to a Legislative Assembly and Senate abolished. "Under the

new Constitution ... the normal length of life of the Legislative Assembly was to be four years rather than three ... the number of members [increased] from thirty-two to forty" (p. 105).

The Election of 1947

The campaign for the first responsible government under the new constitution took place throughout summer of 1947. For the first time ever the parties needed to appeal to a wider electoral base that included the previously unfranchised males and all females over the age of 21. A total of 140,000 electors (45.6% males and 54.4% females) were entitled to go to the polls to elect 40 members to sit in the Legislative Assembly. According to Pirota 79,502 persons were voting for the first time and most of these were women (2016, 41). Ganado (1977b) revealed his intense apprehension about this:

In Malta women are numerically stronger and so theoretically our country came into the hands of women. At that time Maltese women were not politically mature, and most of them were ignorant and inexperienced in politics. Democracy is a wonderful thing, but democracy does not necessarily guarantee a good government. Women will eventually acquire the necessary political credentials. And although women are more malleable and emotional than men, our women have a strong sense of duty towards the family. This was one of the comforting aspects in women's enfranchisement (p. 271).

The election of 1947 required a nation-wide exercise to compile an electoral register. 79,502 persons were voting for the first time (Pirota, 2016). Preparations were already underway to compile an electoral list that comprised women. On 24th January 1947 instructions were issued to the police to start registering female voters. Applications forms were drawn up in respect of all females, aged 21 years and over, that were registered for rations. Among other duties, police officers were expected to carry out house-to-house visits for the purpose of filling in particulars that were not already available.

There were eight electoral divisions (districts) and Malta retained proportional representation, which was described as allowing "the fairest representation of different sections of opinion while providing complete freedom of choice for the individual elector" (Proportional Representation, *Times of Malta*, 25th October 1947). The article added that the "... the system first obtained principal

support through the advocacy of John Stuart Mill in the 19th century ... based on the ground that democracy must be especially careful that minorities get their appropriate representation" (p. 5).

When a general election was announced for the 25th, 26th and 27th October 1947, there were five parties contesting: the Democratic Action Party, the Gozo Party, the Jones Party, the Malta Labour Party and Partit Nazzjonalista.

Five Parties, Two Women

When nominations for the General Election were opened on the 6th, 7th, and 8th October 1947, three women were conspicuous by their absence because their name did not make it to the ballot paper.

Mabel Strickland was not on the ballot list. In the post-war period the Constitutional Party was a shadow of its former self. After Gerald Strickland's death the party had degenerated and it was not in a position to contest the election of 1947. Pirotta found that Strickland had actually tried hard when an election appeared inevitable but was "unable to find a leader prepared to be little more than a mouthpiece" (1987, p. 45). In February 1949, the party's Executive Committee announced that the main objective for which it was formed had been achieved and so the Constitutional Party was unceremoniously dissolved (Pirotta, 2016). Mabel Strickland did reappear on the political stage when she established the Progressive Constitutional Party in 1953.

Josephine Burns de Bono did not come forward to contest the election. On 23rd September 1947, merely a month before the election, she announced her resignation from the Women of Malta Association, having served as its president for four years. Her letter of resignation was published in the *Times of Malta* on the following day:

... It has been a revelation to work with you, and our association for a noble ideal, the opening of the gates of public life to Maltese women, has been marked by signal success under the will of Heaven ... Through the cooperation of our friends in every walk of life, and through the support of the Labour Party and the GWU in the Assembly. We were privileged to see our long campaign in the press and in the Assembly crowned with victory, a victory doubly dear as the final voice had, as Sir Harold MacMichael observes, no dissentient note from an Assembly wholly converted to the great Cause ... I believe

that the Association has achieved the objects laid down in its original charter, and that the country can be best served by the mutual cooperation of men and women in all spheres of public life (*Times of Malta*, 23rd September 1947).

Burns de Bono felt that her mission was accomplished and left the political scene. She was fully aware of the value of her achievement and in her later years, while being interviewed by historian Dominic Fenech around 1980, she asserted: “*You are writing history; I have made history!*” (personal communication, November 2017).

The Association expressed its pride in the fact that two members from the Association “are fighting the cause of women and equal rights with men in the coming electoral campaign” (24th September 1947). These were H el ene Buhagiar (who was campaigning with DAP) and Mrs Pat Vella Gregory, another member of the Association. Mrs Pat Vella Gregory appeared in numerous meetings on the Labour platform and she may have considered contesting. Her speeches appeared in newspapers reports but her name never actually made it to the ballot list.

There were five parties that contested the 1947 election but there surely was no stampede by women to run for Parliamentary seats. Yet, all parties needed to canvass desperately to clinch the female vote. The ballot lists merely featured only two female candidates, of which one, H el ene Buhagiar, was a familiar name. The other one was a young new candidate contesting with the Labour Party. The other parties did not field any female candidates.

The Labour Platform

The Labour woman contestant came from a background that was completely alien to the elite membership of the Association. Agatha Barbara, a young teacher, with solid work-class roots from Zabbar, entered the political arena with the Labour Party after gaining sympathy within her own community because of voluntary work. The *Times of Malta* (12th August 1947) published a report of a Labour Party meeting in Paola, that was illustrated by a picture of Agatha Barbara during a party activity and the caption indicated that Miss Barbara was “speaking into the microphone ... while Dr Paul Boffa looks on. Miss Barbara is the first woman to address a public meeting since the enfranchisement of women in Malta” (p. 9). She campaigned in the working class districts of the inner harbour areas with immediate success.

Barbara launched her political career with that Paola meeting, where she acknowledged that she was terrified. She immediately felt that her speech was a great success and she later said that it "brought me support from all classes. Initially some women were scandalised when they first saw me speak at par with those men, but things suddenly changed. Women truly understood my message and I was invited to speak in all corners of the island. They wanted me to explain the significance of their vote and how to vote", she wrote retrospectively in *The Dawn* (27th November 1947, p. 5). Showing people how to vote, especially in the case of voters who were barely literate, was a challenge for all parties but especially for the Labour Party. At that time candidates appeared on the ballot paper in alphabetical order as one whole list. Since candidates did not appear in different party lists there was fear that uneducated constituents would give their vote to the wrong party or that they would invalidate their vote by mistake.

In her meetings and early contributions in the press Barbara never divorced the plight of women from that of the working class. Although there are no records that she was sympathetic with the struggles of the international feminist movement, Barbara was in line with socialist feminist perspectives that deem gender to be deeply embedded in the condition of the working class and its political demands.

In her first meeting she appealed for unity among the working classes and with women to use their vote well. "The housewife knew all about the necessities of life and should sacrifice some of her precious time for their attainment" (*Times of Malta*, 12th August 1947, p. 9). In a meeting in Senglea she urged women to propagate Labour's ideals because Maltese women were now at par with other European women. By the end of August 1947 Barbara was being victimised to an extent that she lost her job and the Party Leader came to her defence in a meeting held in Zejtun. She also addressed the crowd where she declared the universal franchise was the fruit of Labour's lone fight in the National Assembly (*Times of Malta*, 25th August 1947, p. 7).

In her view, the country was facing a struggle that required courage and so in another meeting in Cospicua she referred to the Great Siege of 1565 when women had fought alongside their men folk. She said that likewise "[women] should now grasp their new weapon and fight with the Labour Party for better conditions of life. The housewife was greatly affected by the rises in food prices, and it was up to her to play her part and elect the party which had always

worked for the betterment of all, especially of the poorer classes (*Times of Malta*, 30th September 1947, p. 8).¹⁸

It is not surprising that Barbara had earned the support of Salvu Astarita, who designed her electoral poster for the 1947 campaign, (Ebejer, 2002). Astarita was one of the closest friends and collaborators of Manwel Dimech and he was the last person to see him off before he was exiled in great secrecy by the British in September 1914 (Montebello, 2004). It is no coincidence that the poster of the first female Parliamentarian was designed by the same individual who had designed the logo of Dimech's *Xirka tal-Imdawwlin* [Committee of the Enlightened] 36 years earlier.

This campaign prompted a long successful career in politics that is still unmatched by any other female politician in Maltese history. Barbara's speeches reflected the Labour electoral programme that has been laboriously composed by subcommittees of the party Executive Committee, where the party had to outline its vision and mission for the post-war era. This electoral programme laid out Labour's ambition to construct a welfare state that included an old age pension and national health services. It also planned to move the country away from the fortress economy model and to diversify areas of economic opportunity.

During the 1947 campaign, the Labour Party secured the continued support of the GWU. Their collaboration in the National Assembly had already yielded results and the two had very similar aims, even if they had different functions. On the eve of the election the Labour party started to publish its organ *The Dawn* in the Maltese language whereas GWU expounded its ideas in *The Torch*. Both sides of the Labour Front were also connected through the significant number of activists who militated simultaneously within the two organisations.

Democratic Action Party

Hélène Buhagiar, from Sliema, campaigned mainly in her comfort zone which was the outer harbour area. She contested with the Democratic Action Party,

¹⁸ Pirotta (2016) wrote that just before the 1947 election the price of subsidised essential foodstuffs rose in price by an average of 30.4% per item. Further increases seemed imminent following the British Government's decision not to make further contributions towards food subsidies as from April 1947 onwards. Within two years, the price of bread had doubled (p. 41). This led to demands for wage increases that opened the way for the possibility of industrial unrest and GWU organised a National Day of Protest in 4th January 1946 that was supported by the Nationalist Party.

led by Professor J. Hyzler, a party that had gained ground because of the vacuum left by the Constitutionals and because of the state of the Nationalist Party at that time.

Both the Labour and Nationalist parties were anxious about DAP. Enrico Mizzi described it as "a mixed dish harbouring ex-Nationalists ... and ex Constitutionals...as well as others who were... neither goose nor gander ... the common basis of their action is their fear of certain social and taxation reforms expounded by the Labour Party which might reduce or endanger their wealth" (cited by Pirota, 2016 p. 45). In fact this party was composed of traditional entitled elite circles that included landowners and esteemed professionals who wanted to preserve their standing. They aimed to protect their interest by opposing social and economic reform and particularly the introduction of any taxation (direct or indirect) and any form of nationalisation.

Its electoral programme reflected the rise of new international tensions between the former Allies that led to the Cold War. It promised to jealously guard the Roman Catholic Religion against "the exotic and materialistic infiltrations which have done so much harm in other countries ... We pledge to fight with all the strength at our disposal the infiltration of Communism within these islands" (Democratic Action Party, 1947). In fact the party had a strong anti-Communist agenda and at times it spread the perception that Malta was in imminent danger of a takeover. Pirota (1987) claimed that the DAP, which published its organs *In-Nazzjon* and *The Nation* to advance its views, made efforts to project itself as the voice of moderation and tried to appeal to all classes. H el ene Buhagiar was of course instrumental because of her appeal to female voters.

The *Times of Malta* (23rd September 1947, p. 8) reported a DAP meeting in Qis-Sana where H el ene Buhagiar was heard stating that as one of the founders of the *Women of Malta Association* she had been one of the main protagonists in the struggle for women's suffrage. Since this had been achieved, she deemed it her duty to join DAP in order to be in a position to continue working on behalf of women-folk of the islands. From a woman's point of view she promised to devote all her attention to housing and food supplies. She also dreamed of national unity where parties cooperate so that the best brains in Malta give their input to solve difficulties, in an effort that would resemble a 'National Government.'

H el ene Buhagiar's party promised to defend female workers via new laws that would be enacted "to regulate the employment of women and children in industry" (*Democratic Action Party*, 1947, p. 6). She delivered a similar message

in a political broadcast on behalf of her party where she emphasised the importance of women's votes and for greater interest on the part of women in matters of the state (*Times of Malta*, 21st October 1947).

The Nationalist Party

The Nationalist Party published an Electoral Appeal on the 26th July 1917 that was addressed to the "men and women of Malta" (*Partit Nazzjonalista*, 1947). This served as the basis of the electoral programme that was later approved in a Congress that convened on the 21st September. In this Congress Dr Enrico Mizzi was confirmed party leader. First written in the Italian language (and translated into English and Maltese), the Appeal revived old questions on Language promising to reintroduce Italian as a compulsory subject at University, the Lyceum and secondary schools. It also reaffirmed its faith in the Catholic religion (*Times of Malta*, 27th September 1947). Pirotta (2016) wrote that:

Opponents depicted Mizzi and the PN as non grata to the British, claiming that to vote for them was to endanger the Constitution since Mizzi would not be allowed to take office. In July 1947, the PN issued a weekly newspaper, *Patria!* but still relied for space on *The Bulletin*, a widely read independent evening paper, to propagate its views (p. 45).

By September 1947, Mizzi felt confident enough to convene the party's first post-war Congress in preparation for the imminent election.

There were no women on the PN party list and efforts to research the role of women within this party in the interwar and post-war period proved futile possibly because at that time women's suffrage was not significant on the PN agenda. Under Mizzi's stewardship the party was rather recalcitrant when it came to enfranchisement.

It was in the era that followed Enrico Mizzi's death in 1950, that the Nationalist Party first realised that it had to promote and encourage female participation in the political process. In the Nationalist organ *Malta Tagħna*, this shift was marked by an article outlining the role of Nationalist women in politics that was published in 1956. The article (*Malta Tagħna*, 29th December 1956) stated that women's activism was necessary for the party to succeed in elections. Still it stated that this activism did not necessarily mean that women needed to address mass meetings from platforms because their primary responsibility was

still within the home: "taking care of the house and preparing food for the family" (cited by Cremona, 2013, p. 15).¹⁹

Two Gozo-based Parties

Two parties that contested the election emanated from Gozo and their appeal to women was indirect.

Henry Jones, president of a farmers' co-operative in Gozo, appealed to Gozitan farming families, where women were very much involved, from tilling the fields to animal husbandry. Pirotta (2016) described Jones as 'a maverick politician' who had first tried to make inroads with the existing parties but later resorted to forming his own party and contesting elections without success. His electoral message revolved around a promise to fight for farmers' rights, improve facilities for fishermen, building new schools, the introduction of electricity to all parts of Gozo, free hospitalisation, and the perennial promise, 'better roads'.

Gozo saw the birth of a second party in the election of 1947, the Gozo Party, which was led by Dr Francesco Masini. He fielded seven candidates and promised to strengthen agriculture and farming, to ensure the services of a veterinary, to build large water reservoirs and promote lace-making industries. This party also pledged to build schools and improve medical services. There were fears that if the Gozo Party were to elect five MP's, in the event of a hung Parliament, it would have exerted undue pressures that impinged on the future policies of islands, but in the election it only managed to obtain three seats.

Anxieties about the female vote

In the election campaign of 1947 political parties, and observers, were anxious about where the female vote was going. The campaign was extremely tense and, in the absence of modern-day polls, they were only able to guess how the post-suffrage political scenario was going to unfold. Parties campaigned in various localities and women had to be addressed as a target group by both female and male candidates.

¹⁹ The big change within the PN occurred in the early 1980s under the leadership of Dr Edward Fenech Adami, when strong female voices emerged the party media, first in regular articles that were penned by Angela Callus under the penname 'Anna Maria Sammut'. Later a number of female party journalists embarked on an innovative supplement that was distributed with *In-Nazzjon* entitled *L-Opinjoni l-Ohra* (The Other Opinion) that departed from the traditional themes of house care and beauty. This happened in a context of PN renewal that occurred 40 years after universal suffrage.

At 75.42% the turnout for the 1947 election was very high, which shows that people wanted to vote and they knew how to exercise their newly acquired right, as illustrated in Table 2. Farrugia (2012) noted that out of a total of 76,745 women registered to vote, 54,565 women actually voted. These constituted 54.5% of the electorate.

Table 2: Election Results 1947

Party	Votes (N)	Party (%)	Seats (N)
Labour Party	63,145	59.9	24
Nationalist Party	19,041	18.0	7
Democratic Action Party	14,010	13.3	4
Gozo Party	5,491	5.2	3
Jones Party	3,664	3.5	2
Independents	143	0.1	0
Invalid/blank votes	647	-	-
Total	106,141	100	40
Registered voters/turnout	140,703	75.4	-

Source: Nohlen and Stöver, 2010, p. 1302.

The result tendered the biggest electoral victory ever for the Labour Party with a 59.9% of the votes. Labour also elected its female candidate Agatha Barbara who wrote history when she immediately succeeded to win a seat with her 2,715 first count votes.

The first female Parliamentarian

“I was the first to take the path of politics and I am grateful to God for he enlightened me and gave me the strength to carry the burden that I have assumed upon me”, wrote Barbara one month after she won her Parliamentary seat (*The Torch*, 27th November 1947, p. 5). Indeed, being the first woman in the Legislative Assembly weighed on this young woman and she immediately realised

that it had completely changed her life prospects. Women had obtained suffrage and the right to participate in politics but social and cultural norms still set strict parameters for women in political life and she was bearing the brunt of all this on her own without much support, without any role models.

In Ebejer's endorsed biography of Agatha Barbara, which was published in the year of her demise in 2002, Barbara opened up about her private challenges after she entered the political scene. While in recent years some feminist authors have rightly objected to the continuous probing of the private life of female politicians (they argue that men are merely evaluated on the basis of their public performance), feminist authors like Carol Hanisch (1969) have long observed that 'the personal is political' and so the 'private is political' because there are deep connections between personal experience and larger social and political structures. In this case, Barbara immediately realised that her seat came at a great personal cost. The social, cultural and structural disincentives that she faced may have contributed to the dearth of women that have managed to embark on a political career and to maintain it in the long run, as discussed later.

In Ebejer's book, Agatha Barbara talked about her mother's anxieties about her daughter's political involvement. Before submitting her candidature, her mother continuously cautioned her on what she was about to do, but she was already decided: "They [her parents] did not dampen my ambition and if they did I would have still run for election" (p. 36). After the election she soon realised that she had to make drastic decisions in personal life:

I had to choose between politics and marriage ... I had to forget about family and matrimony...

I used to love dancing. I had lots of friends I used to go dancing with. I had befriended many officers during wartime and I used to go dancing with them. Glenn Miller music still makes me feel nostalgic. But the moment I became a Parliamentarian I had to forget about all this.

As the only woman I had to be extremely careful because I was judged by the way I behaved. I did not want anyone to gossip or spread rumour. My colleagues were all family men. I then abandoned my friends ... that was my sacrifice. I believe this was the reason why I aged early.

Barbara was elected at 24 years of age. While the seat cost her a lot at a personal level, the life of a Parliamentarian afforded her one privilege: the right for equal pay with men (Ebejer, 2002, p. 39). Other Maltese women had to wait another 27 years before a clause was introduced in the Republican Constitution of 1974 where the state shall aim "at ensuring that women workers enjoy equal rights and the same wages for the same work as men" (Chapter II, 14).

When Paul Boffa's Labour cabinet was formed Agatha Barbara was not among his ministers. *The Bulletin* (6th November 1947) published an article entitled "We are Missing Agatha Barbara" which remarked that given her great personal commitment, perseverance and hard work Barbara deserved to become Minister, at least in recognition of women's important role in getting the Labour Party elected. She did eventually become the first Maltese cabinet minister in 1955. After 35 years as a parliamentarian Agatha Barbara was appointed as the first woman president on 15th February, 1982.

A reflexive caveat

In writing about the involvement of women in politics in the 20th century, one must acknowledge limits especially since all the protagonists are gone and one can only rely on newspaper reports, minutes and previous literature as sources. Yet, each newspaper had its own agenda that reflected the interests of its owners (mainly political, social and/or religious). In other instances commentators made serious mistakes, some of which were repeated by later authors who did not check the original source.

Paul Cassar's 'Historical Vignette' (1977) on Women's suffrage, mentions early appeals for women's suffrage that also appear in Susanna Hoe's 2015 account, particularly the newspaper contributions of Rosaria Fenech and Carmela Grima. Rosaria Fenech's appeal on women's right to vote (*Il-Ħmar*, 28th November 1928) is actually written by a Rosario Fenech, a man. This was a significant proposal to the Labour Party Executive to "make efforts to obtain votes for women, at least for literate women over the age of 24 years" (p. 2) that inspired women like Liza Fenech to have their say publicly. Nonetheless, Hoe (2015) seems to rely on Cassar's version and in an entry that is not referenced, she further adds that Rosaria (née Borg) was a mother of 11 children, five of them daughters" (p. 336). Moreover, Both Cassar and Hoe make reference to a certain Carmela Grima who also wrote about the role of women in *Il-Cotra* but

the letter, published on 6th December 1928 (p. 2) is merely signed by C. Grima. In this case the text clearly shows that this author was a woman but we cannot confirm her first name.

But the most misleading – albeit highly enticing article – was in fact that written by Dominic Degiorgio, who sent this author following a scent that did not lead anywhere. Degiorgio's article (*The Dawn*, 1947, p. 2), which was published on the eve of the vote on women's franchise in March 1947, was probably aimed to tease his political opponents and to provide an alternative narrative for his own political agenda. His article refers to previous appeals coming from privileged classes in favour of women's suffrage. It suggests that while the contemporary Nationalists resented the vote for women, the very first known representation in Maltese history in favour of enfranchisement was in fact "made during Self-Government at a Legislative Assembly which was convened for the 20th May 1924." Mr Giuseppe Micallef, Minister for Justice and member of the Sixth District in the Nationalist government, rose to move the first reading and the Bill to amend the Malta Electoral Act. The amendment contained a provision to make compulsory the voting and extend the "Franchise to Women". Supposedly the Bill "... was read a first time and ordered to be printed" and Degiorgio, sounding very authoritative and assured, added that it also aimed "to deprive the many illiterates from recording their votes in an election and register these votes on behalf of the many educated and unfortunately women citizens who are not enfranchised". Degiorgio's article is riddled with inaccuracies (in 1924 the Minister for Justice was Dr Alfredo Caruana Gatto and there were no sittings on 20th May 1924 because Malta was then on the eve of an election that was held on the 9th and 10th of June of 1924). Laborious attempts to find such a motion on other dates, in other years (even under other names) proved futile to us as well as to other previous researchers.

Pirotta's (1979) reference to the formation of the National Council of Women (instead of the Women of Malta Association) is a rather noticeable mistake, in an otherwise flawless article on the period leading to the MacMichael Constitution. The Council of Women, which exists to date, was only set up in the year when Malta obtained its sovereignty from Britain in 1964. This elite group of women were worlds apart from the bra-burning feminists of the 1960s but they had social welfare at heart and their aims differed from those of the Association.

Conclusion

The case of women's enfranchisement in Malta is an illustration of a struggle that became intertwined with the efforts to achieve sovereignty and the subsequent social, political and economic advancement of the nation. It was an effort that gathered moment under colonial-rule and continued in the post-colonial years. Some feminist scholars map out the histories of women's movements with reference to 'three waves of feminism' (Kroløkke and Scott Sørensen, 2006).²⁰ This account from a Mediterranean island-state seems to support critiques that the 'three waves' are a 'First World-ism' (Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2010) since they assume that the advancement of women occurred in a rather unilinear social and cultural evolution. This was definitely not the case in the Maltese islands.²¹

As G. A. Pirotta (2005) observed, the decision to grant the vote to women did in some ways help to re-define the political landscape but the process has been far too slow and seventy years after the MacMichael Constitution, we can argue that the dearth of female representation amounts to a serious democratic deficit. In 2017 the percentage of female Parliamentarians is almost the same as that of the election of 1950. The Inter-Parliamentary Union Index (2017) ranks Malta in the 148th place out of 193 countries. Across the years Malta slipped down this index; while other countries advanced, the participation rate in Malta remained frozen in time.²²

Cutajar (2009) observed that there were few occasions when women in Malta challenged the main structures and that until recently citizenship was deemed to be gender neutral. With exceptions, women were often rendered politically invisible. Moreover, for many decades, in spite of a handful high profile women, political parties had male-centred decision-making organs. A situation evolved where Maltese women were not contesting elections in good numbers and so they were not being elected even when they were as active as men at a grassroots level (Bestler, 1998). Within party structures positive measures were

²⁰ The first wave (1830's - early 1900's) includes women's struggles for suffrage and property rights. The second wave (1960's - 1980's) broadened debates on cultural productions, workplace and family roles, sexuality, and reproductive and health rights. The third wave (1990's - present) tends to focus on the micro politics of gender equality.

²¹ For instance, international observers are often bemused that in 2016 and 2017 Malta ranked first on *ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Index* among 49 Council of Europe Member States where LGBTIQ legislation and policy are concerned but nuanced debates on sexual and reproductive health rights never really took off.

²² The Inter-Parliamentary Union Index of 2007 show Malta in the 97th place. In ten years Malta slipped 51 places.

introduced in the late 1990s, and especially when parties experienced degrees of Europeanisation after European Union membership in 2004. Gender balance in politics was desired but still representation in Parliament remained stuck more or less at around 10%.²³

Some argue that the status quo is self-inflicted: “Why don't women vote for women?”, “Why aren't there more women who come forward as candidates?” Indeed, in the 2017 general election, parties in Malta still struggled up to the last minute to encourage female candidates to run for elections. Yet, it was evident that the incumbents of patriarchal party structures were not trying hard enough to lead the change and many tend to consider women as a homogeneous group.

The elections for the European Parliament are a good illustration of how change is possible. In spite of a strong female candidature, until 2008 none of the Maltese members of the European Parliament (hereinafter, MEPs) were female. When some of the male MEP incumbents returned to Malta to engage at the top level of domestic politics, women were first elected through bye-elections. This shattered the glass ceiling to an extent that in the subsequent European elections of 2014, four out of six Maltese MEPs that were elected were women.

In domestic politics Malta is far from achieving the required critical mass of 30% that is deemed essential to register regular and unassisted advancement (Waylen, 2007), let alone gender-balanced representation in Parliament, where both sexes need to have a minimum of 40% representation. Malta has made national and international commitments in this regard and these include Goal 5 of the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted by world leaders in September 2015, which pledges to “ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. History (or rather “Herstory”) shows that we need to shake the tree and change may only happen by means of temporary positive measures, a topic that is now on the national political agenda.²⁴

The dearth of female representation in the public sphere has been reinforced by the invisibility of women in the narratives that are transmitted through national

²³ The Labour Party first introduced a quota of 30% and PN introduced ‘Separate Lists’ (which is another form of quota) in the noughties. Both aimed to encourage a gender balance in their Executive Committees.

²⁴ A study of general public perception (NCPE, 2015) shows that in spite of initial resistance the general public now favours of the introduction of gender quotas in political parties but resents the introduction of electoral quotas. This suggests that change necessitates principled political leadership from the very top.

commemorations, rituals, monuments, texts and the images that people are exposed to. Collective memory is mirrored in discourse, literature and the media that shape our perceptions of past events, which we did not directly experience. Hence, we often end up adopting the interpretations that may have suited previous generations but that do not necessarily satisfy the needs and aspirations of the contemporary and future generations. We need to construct new symbols that are relevant for a fast-changing society. The Central Bank of Malta's commemorative coin contributes to the celebration of the role of women and their continuing challenges in Malta's political and constitutional trajectory.

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The Road to Women's Suffrage and Beyond



Hélène Buhagiar (1888-1975)
National Archives of Malta



Josephine Burns de Bono (1908-1996)
National Archives of Malta



Reggie Miller (1898-1970)
Il-Berqa, 30th January 1945



Dr Paul Boffa (1890-1962)

TIMES OF MALTA, MONDAY OCTOBER 27, 1947



Men and women waiting patiently to register their vote outside a polling station.

HEAVY DEMANDS ON WATER SUPPLY

"WAR BRAHMIN" RECALLED TO SERVICE

The cholera epidemic in Egypt preventing the embarkation of water at Port Said has brought about a heavy demand on the island's water supply, as troopships and civilian passenger vessels outward bound are now watering at Malta.

It is considered that the importation of water by the tanker "War Brahmin", recently routed to Gibraltar, is again necessary.

£60 LOTTERY

A grand public lottery for £60 (first prize £40, second

Malta General Elections Sixty-Six per cent of Electorate Have Voted

Two-thirds of the registered electorate of Malta and Gozo had gone to the polls by yesterday evening. Polling commenced under leaden skies on Saturday morning with queues in some districts waiting for the polling booths to open.

The response of the women voters to the call to register their vote has been a strong one and the indications are that at least as many women voters have exercised the franchise as men. This is the first time in history that the women of Malta and Gozo have been entitled to the vote.

The rate of voting has been steady and continuous, with steady voting at Sliema, Gudja, Dingli and Safi.

Times of Malta, 27th October 1947

TIMES OF MALTA, TUESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1947

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Miss Agatha Barbara speaking into the microphone

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Agatha Barbara (1923-2002) addressing a meeting at Paola
Times of Malta, 12th August 1947

The Road to Women's Suffrage and Beyond

Registered No. ELECTORAL REGISTRY
91A, Old Theatre Street,
Valletta.



Instructions to the Police Officers entrusted
with the filling in and collection of application-forms
for the registration of female electors.

Application-forms (Forms No.1B) have been drawn up in respect of every female, aged 21 years and over, registered for rations in each area. Such forms have only been completed in regard to name and address.

2. The Police Officers detailed for the filling in and collection of application-forms will be expected to carry out a house-to-house visit for the purpose of filling in all the other particulars shown on the form, viz: father's name and surname, name of husband (in the case of married women or widows), date and place of birth and parish.
3. Provided the persons concerned are British subjects of the age of 21 years and upwards, they should be asked, if present, to fill in and hand over to the Police the registration-form. In the case of illiterates the Police could fill in the form on their behalf.
4. If a person refuses to fill in the form herself, or if she happens to be absent from home, the Police Officer might fill in the form himself after obtaining all the necessary particulars. In such cases, the Police Officer will sign his name and rank in lieu of applicant's signature.
5. Should any of the premises visited be no longer occupied by the persons shown on the application-forms, steps should be taken for the registration of the female members of the new tenants provided such members have attained the age of 21 years. For this purpose a supply of blank Forms No.1 B is being forwarded to you herewith. In regard to the outgoing tenants, the Officer i/c of the District Rationing Office should be approached with a view to obtaining the new address of the persons *concerned*.
6. Full particulars should be obtained, but if the date of birth is doubtful, the age of applicant may be shown instead.
7. In order to save time the application-forms may be filled with an indelible pencil.
8. At the end of each day, all the application-forms, duly completed, are to be forwarded to me, at the above address, in one batch.

24th January, 1947.

Electoral Registrar.

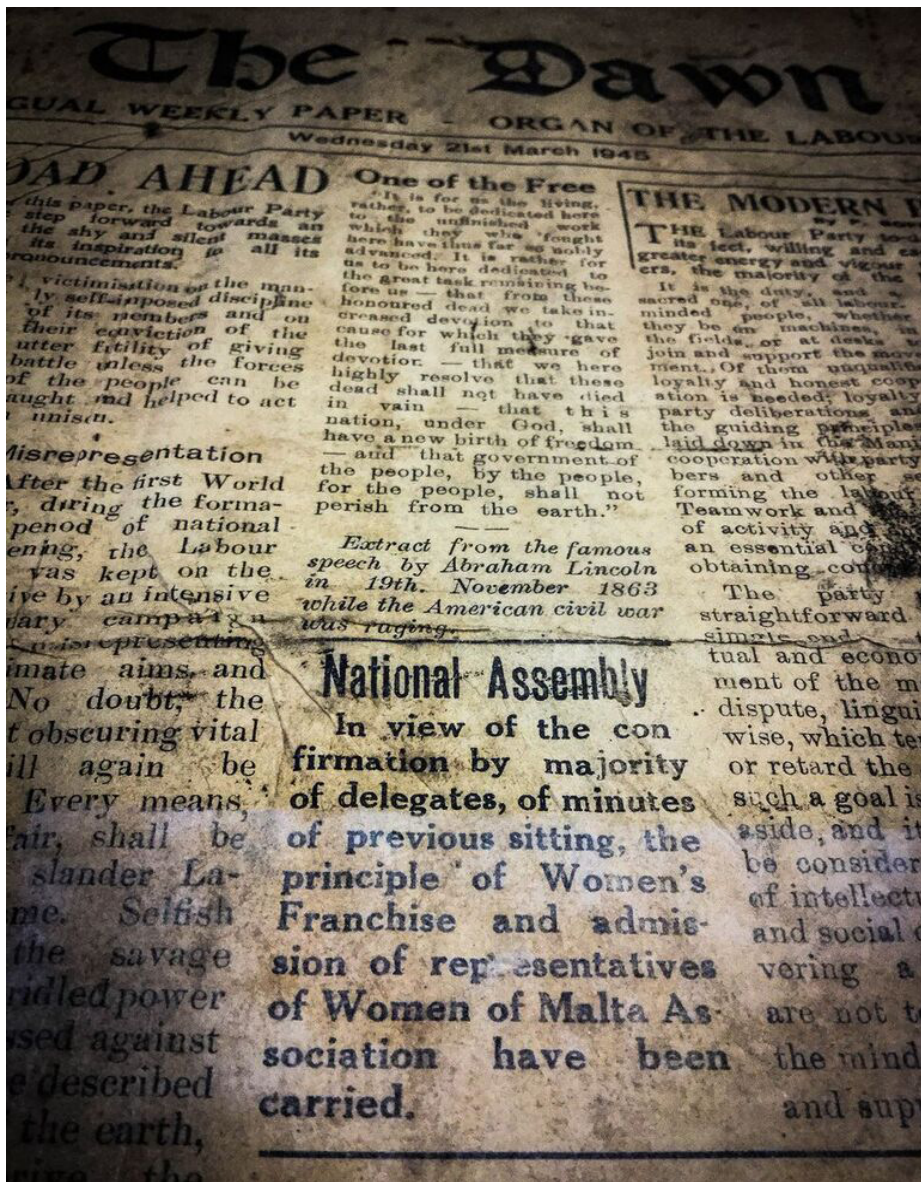
Instructions to Police i.e. regarding the registration of females - 24th January 1947
National Archives of Malta ELO 43/1947

The Road to Women's Suffrage and Beyond

STATEMENT showing, by Districts, the number of registered electors in each Electoral Division.

DISTRICT	Number of registered electors			DISTRICT	Number of registered electors		
	Males	Females	Total		Males	Females	Total
FIRST ELECTORAL DIVISION				SECOND ELECTORAL DIVISION			
Section 1.				Section 1.			
I. Valletta (Parish of St. Dominic's (North) (Parish of St. Dominic's (South) (Parish of St. Paul's	1255 1227 1251	1885 1516 1538	3140 2743 2789	I. Għalva II. Għalva III. Għalva (Parish of the Sacred Heart (Parish of St. Gregory's (Parish of Stella Maris	1313 1058 1209 1145 1540 1031	2006 1891 2655 1524 2181 1990	3321 2349 4474 2679 3721 2621
II. Floriana III. Marsa IV. Pietà'	930 2085 670	1262 2316 740	2182 4401 1410	Totals, Section 1.			7896 11269 19165
Totals, Section 1.				7368 9457 16825			
Section 2.				Section 2.			
I. Comiouna II. Kalkara III. Fgola IV. Senglea V. Tarxien VI. Vittoriosa VII. Zabbar	1157 451 2678 552 1420 667 2217	1375 519 3052 575 1628 878 2464	2532 970 5730 1225 3044 1943 4661	I. Hamrun II. Luqa III. Għalva (Parish of St. George's (Parish of St. Sebastian's IV. Sta. Venera	3140 982 1672 1244 959	4179 1222 1902 1820 1379	7319 2284 3574 2764 2338
Totals, Section 2.				8977 10162 18199			
Section 3.				Section 3.			
I. Mtarabba II. Għaxaq III. Għadja IV. Kirkop V. Marsaxlokk VI. Marsaxlokk VII. Mgħbba VIII. Grendi IX. Għaf X. Żebbuġ XI. Żurrieq	806 505 355 215 286 239 442 507 130 2639 1305	1076 617 402 243 357 276 485 555 169 3227 1411	1071 1122 759 456 623 565 927 1062 307 5746 2716	I. Birkirkara II. Għarrparr III. Mellieħa IV. Mgħarr V. Santa VI. Maxxar VII. St. Paul's Bay	3188 458 982 424 1764 957 659	4159 479 1094 494 1033 1142 797	7347 937 2076 918 2807 2099 1456
Totals, Section 3.				8424 10116 18540			
Section 4.				Section 4.			
I. Mdina II. Aħmad III. Belman IV. Dliġli V. Liġa VI. Rabat VII. Sliemni VIII. Żebbuġ	134 459 568 345 525 2558 1113 1631	839 539 775 434 694 3320 1138 2003	373 998 1283 779 1250 5878 2301 3834	I. Victoria II. Għajnsielem III. Għarb IV. Għasri V. Kermem VI. Madar VII. Qala VIII. San Lawrence IX. Sanct X. Xagħra XI. Xewkija XII. Żebbuġ	1399 385 322 119 284 877 404 132 353 982 641 285	1380 339 483 125 401 1049 572 173 360 928 753 240	2779 724 805 269 685 2026 976 305 713 1690 1394 525
Totals, Section 4.				6193 6898 13091			
RECAPITULATION							
FIRST ELECTORAL DIVISION				SECOND ELECTORAL DIVISION			
Section 1.	7368	9457	16825	Section 1.	7896	11269	19165
Section 2.	9122	10583	19725	Section 2.	8977	10162	18199
Section 3.	7622	8998	16220	Section 3.	8424	10116	18540
Section 4.	7484	9192	16676	Section 4.	6193	6898	13091
Totals	31616	37830	69446	Totals	30610	36365	66975

Report from Electoral Registrar to Government in connection
with compilation of the 1947 register - 30th June 1947
National Archives of Malta ELO 29/1947



The Dawn, 21st March 1945

**SAVE
YOUR PETROL
USE
FIAT**



"Melrose-Driver"
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HITLER'S ATTEMPT TO BLUFF STALIN "A Cold-blooded Blackmailer"

(Reuter's Service) LONDON, October 25. HITLER'S GREAT BLUFF TO COVER HIS PLANS FOR THE INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION ON JUNE 22, 1941 IS TOLD IN DETAIL IN THE LAST VOLUME OF CAPTURED NAZI DOCUMENTS — "FUERHER CONFERENCE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS, 1941" — ISSUED BY THE BRITISH ADMIRALTY YESTERDAY.

The documents show that the economic treaty signed between Germany and the Soviet Union five months before the attack was merely a part of the elaborate cloak of Hitler's real plans. At the same time great effort was made to disguise the preparations for the East Front assault as a move directed against Britain. The Nazis explained the troop movements towards the east as a manoeuvre to cover up the pretended intention of striking at Britain.

STAFFORD CRIPPS NOT DECEIVED

The records show that as early as January 8, Hitler said of Generalissimo Joseph Stalin: "He must be regarded as a cold-blooded blackmailer. He would, if expedient, negotiate any written treaty at any time."

The documents show that then British Ambassador Sir Stafford Cripps, foretold on April 24, 1941 the exact — and correct — date of the German attack. The documents also show that Hitler considered a possible French ruse as the greatest danger to his plans. It was decided that "if France

£165,000,000 FOR COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT

(Reuter's Service) LONDON, October 25. DETAILS of the Government's £165,000,000 plan for increasing resources outside the United Kingdom through two new corporations are given in the Overseas Review published yesterday.

The Bill provides for the establishment of a Colonial Development Corporation. Corporation with power to borrow up to £100,000,000 plus £10,000,000 as temporary borrowings. Its object will be to develop resources and trade, and expand the production of foodstuffs and raw materials in colonial territories.

The other body will be known as the Overseas Food Corporation. It will be able to borrow up to £50,000,000 for temporary borrowings. It will aim at producing foodstuffs and agricultural products outside the United Kingdom.

The first duty will be to take over the project for large scale production of ground nuts, already started by the Ministry of Food, in East Africa.

SIR ARTHUR POWER TO BE C.-IN-C. MED.

(Reuter's Service) LONDON, October 25. THE Admiralty announces the appointment of Admiral Sir Arthur J. Power as Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station in succession to Admiral Sir Algernon U. Willis. The appointment takes effect from May, 1948.

Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Troubridge becomes First Commander (A1) and Second in Command of the Mediterranean Station in succession to Vice Admiral Sir Cecil H.J. Harcourt, who has been appointed a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty and Chief of Naval Personnel.

RAISED SIEGE OF MALTA Admiral Sir Arthur Power will be remembered as the commander of the force which escorted four heavily laden merchant ships from Alexandria to arrive in the Grand Harbour on the night of November 19, 1942, thus raising the siege of Malta. This force suffered no loss or damage although "struck by enemy bombers and torpedo-carrying planes. It destroyed seven enemy aircraft.

"LIVERPOOL" TO REFIT

A message from Portsmouth says that the cruiser "Liverpool" of the Home Fleet is being refitted at Chatham from Malta on Monday. It is expected that this ship will be mobilized but after paying off will stay in dockyard for refit.

Women Vote for First Time YESTERDAY'S POLLING IN MALTA ELECTIONS

GREY skies and strong winds yesterday greeted the first day of polling on the reinstatement of responsible government in Malta. Nevertheless, early risers were waiting at the polling stations when these opened at 8 a.m. Women who are voting for the first time in Maltese history, rose to the occasion and, in some stations, even outnumbered the men, though in general men were more numerous.

VOTING QUIET AND CONTINUOUS

All over Malta and Gozo voting was quiet and continuous and no incident was recorded. Priests and members of Religious Orders were numerous at the polls.

In Valetta, the most frequented stations were those of Kingsway and Old Mill Street where there were always queues of men and women. Other stations were less frequented, one of them being visited by only about 150 from 8 to 10.45 a.m.

Floriana polling was a quiet affair, though a small proportion of men and women voters had a continuous flow, but by far the most frequented was the one at the Police Station in Prince of Wales Road. There polling was noted in the industrial areas of Pawla, Zetun and Solticars, where women voted in great numbers.

LARGE NUMBERS IN MOSTA AND GOZO

At Mosta there was a record crowd. At about 3.30 p.m. there were two queues of men and women, of 50 persons each, which were being continually increased by newcomers.

Sigew, Zabar, Tarxien and Marsa marked moderate regular voting while in Gozo, where voters went to the polls in great numbers, it was estimated that at least in one polling station of Victoria, women were more frequent than men a general estimate of the difference in numbers between men and women voters is that men had a very slight majority over women.

The Electoral Officer denied a report current last evening that a ballot box in the St. Julian's area had been opened.

MALTA'S ELECTIONS HAVE YOU VOTED? IF NOT, DO SO TODAY!

LABOUR LOSS AT BATTERSEA

(Reuter's Service) LONDON, October 25. LABOUR lost the ward of Battersea in the Conservative and held North Battersea, a division of the London County Council, in a by-election.

CANADIAN FOOD LINK STRIKE THREATENED

(Reuter's Service) OTTAWA, October 25. CANADA'S Atlantic and Pacific ports supply links for food threatened with a shipping strike by seamen in Vancouver, Montreal, Halifax and St. John — members of the Canadian Seaman's Union — emergency meetings yesterday to give the Union leaders authority to call for a strike vote.

Negotiations with the shipowners — represented by the Shipping Federation of Canada — for a new contract calling for wage increases and shorter working hours, ended on Thursday in disagreement. Scores of ships are affected by the Union's order that no vessels of Canadian registry shall leave port until the negotiations are complete.

800TH ANNIVERSARY

(Reuter's Service) LISBON, Oct. 25. PORTUGUESE troops 10,000 strong, paraded in Lisbon today in a final commemoration celebration of the 800th anniversary of the recapture of Lisbon from the Moors. The parade was watched by the President, by members of the Government and the U. S. Admiral Richard Conolly.

GREECE AND CHOLERA

(Reuter's Service) ATHENS, October 25. SEA and air communication between Greece and cholera-stricken Egypt will be suspended for a month from November 1. It was officially announced here today.

A sum of money has been voted to reorganize a quarantine station outside Piræus, where 85 passengers and aircrew members from Egypt are under observation for a five day period.

GOLD AND BLACKMARKET

(Reuter's Service) WASHINGTON, October 25. NEW regulations designed to keep gold out of the world's blackmarket were announced today by the United States Treasury Department. From November 24 only semi-processed gold can be exported for use abroad, inasmuch as it is to be processed and returned to the United States.

Europe's Need for Food and Fuel

(Reuter's Service) WASHINGTON, October 25. PRESIDENT Truman warned the United States last night that domestic production and world peace were gravely endangered unless Congress acted quickly to avert inflation at home and hunger and cold in other lands.

In a broadcast to the American nation Mr. Truman said the critical situation facing France and Italy was one of the main reasons for his action in calling a special session of Congress. If the economies of these countries collapse, and people succumb to totalitarian pressures, there will be no opportunity for them or us to look forward to their recovery, so essential to world peace.

Mr. Truman said France's needs at \$27,000,000 between the end of the year and March 1, 1948. "Italy will not be able to get through the first of this year," he said. "Italy now has \$142,000,000 to

Europe's Need for Food and Fuel

carry her until the end of the year and an additional sum of \$143,000,000 to get through the rest of quarter of 1948.

Mr. Truman named food and fuel as the two crucial items which Western Europe needed, and could not pay for, from the United States. "We will see that this country Europeans this winter will be on short rations," he said. Mr. Truman's so urgent re-ward support of the voluntary food conservation programs, because "dollars imported by Congress cannot feed hungry people. If there is no food for the dollars, to buy."

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Men and women in almost equal numbers recorded their vote yesterday. This is an early morning queue at a Maltese polling station.

Biography

Dr Carmen Sammut is Pro-Rector for Student and Staff Affairs and Outreach at the University of Malta. She teaches in the Department of International Relations (Faculty of Arts) and in the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, where her lecturing profile includes Gender in International Relations.

Dr Sammut holds a PhD in Media and Communications from Goldsmiths College, University of London. She obtained her Masters in Communication Studies (cum laude), a Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and a BA Degree in Journalism and Contemporary Mediterranean Studies from the University of Malta.



She currently chairs a number of academic entities including the Institute for European Studies and the International Foundation School. Dr Sammut sits on the Board of Governors of the Valletta 2018 Foundation and is also Governor for Malta on the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

Dr Sammut is a long-experienced broadcaster and regularly appears as an analyst to discuss current events. She started her career as a journalist with the national broadcasting station in the early 1980s, where she mainly engaged with the writing and production of foreign news and current affairs programmes. Dr Sammut served on the Media Ethics Commission of the Institute of Journalists and chaired a sub-committee that drafted a revised Code of Ethics that is currently under discussion.

