BREAKING THE MOULD

Women and Men
in non-traditional occupations
in the Maltese Labour Market

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for the
Employment and Training Corporation
Malta

2006

Published by Agenda Academic

Agenda, Miller House, Tarxien Road, Airport Way, Luqa, Malta.
Tel: (+356) 2166 4488 E-mail: info@millermalta.com

Produced by Media Centre Publications

Printed at Media Centre, Blata l-Bajda, Malta

First published in 2006

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ISBN xxxxxx

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About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

> Odysseus, Nestor, and Ajax were sent to fetch Achilles from Scyros, where he was rumoured to be hidden disguised as a girl. They might never have detected Achilles, had not Odysseus laid a pile of gifts – for the most part jewels, girdles, embroidered dresses and such – in the hall, and asked the court ladies to take their choice. Then Odysseus ordered a sudden trumpet-blast and clash of arms to sound outside the palace and, sure enough, one of the girls stripped herself to the waist and seized the shield and spear which had been included in the gifts. It was Achilles.
> (Extract from Greek myth, *The First Gathering at Aulis*)

On 9 July 2005, Queen Elizabeth II unveiled a memorial in Whitehall to commemorate the role of women during World War II. The seven-metre-high bronze monument by John Mills depicts seventeen sets of women's working clothes hung on pegs, just as if they had been left there by women as they returned home when the job was done. It is estimated that up to seven million women took an active part in the War – driving lorries, tending to the wounded in hospitals, working on farms, and so forth. Most of these were drafted specially as part of the 'war effort', taking over jobs that during peacetime were occupied almost exclusively by men. The iconography is to my mind very significant in that it represents women commuting between their traditional occupations and their wartime roles, thus emphasizing their flexibility and their ability to rise to the occasion.

During World War II itself, images of 'Rosie the Riveter' or of Princess Elizabeth working in an automobile factory proved instrumental as a catalyst in the war effort (see Camilleri 1997). The reason why these images were so powerful and effective in mobilising labour is that they

were subversive – rather like Lady Macbeth summoning evil spirits to 'unsex her' and fill her 'from the crown to the toe top' with 'the direst cruelty', or Judith decapitating Holofernes.[1] In the case of Rosie and Princess Elizabeth, what was being subverted was a gender role (and a hereditary role in the latter case), a set of cultural meanings that associate a particular occupation with a particular gender.

The two main facets of the relation between gender and occupation are, first, the extent of participation of each gender in the labour market in general, and second, the gendering of labour that results in patterns of participation which tend to link particular genders to particular occupations.

In most industrialized countries of the North (also known as 'the First World', 'the developed world', 'the West', 'the core', etc.), women are now about as likely as men to work in the paid labour force. In these countries women represent, in fact, around 45% of the workforce (currently 46% in Britain); in Malta the figure is below this average and currently stands at around 32%[2]. In the countries of the OECD, from 1983 to 1992, the average annual growth rate for economically active women was 2.1%, more than twice the rate for men which was 0.8%. Female inroads into the workforce were most noticeable in such countries as Spain and the Netherlands, where women had been less active in the labour force at the beginning of the 1980s. In Central and Eastern Europe, despite the recession and reforms undertaken as part of the transition to a market economy, women's participation in active working life has not fallen faster than that of men. Data from the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus indicate that the share of women in salaried employment has not declined since the beginning of the 1990s. In China, the labour force

[1] In the case of Judith and Holofernes the subversive element has made this narrative one of the most popular subjects for artists and their audiences. It has attracted the likes of the Gentileschi father and daughter, Donatello, Caravaggio and, more recently, the digital artist Holger Maass.

[2] Out of a labour force of 159 138, 50 040 were women. Source: Labour Force Survey, NSO, October-December 2004. However, given the various informal paid occupations that Maltese women are involved in (a large number work as seamstresses, domestics, private tutors, etc.), this is probably an underestimate. Participation *rates* for women (ratio of total labour supply to working-age population, that is) have gone up steadily in the last 40 years, from 18.5% in 1960 to 31.7% in 1998 (Camilleri 2001: 11).

participation rates for women of the 15 to 64 age group have remained high over the last two decades, at around 70%. In the countries of the South, according to ILO provisional estimates of the economically active population, women's labour force participation rate was at 44% in 1994. (It is crucial to note that these numbers do not take full account of the fact that, in the developing countries of the South, many economically active women in both rural and urban areas work in informal sectors.) The Latin American region ranks among those with the lowest rates of female participation - about 30% for the 15 to 64 age group - although the participation of women is increasing and, in certain countries and for certain age groups, may equal that of men. The lowest levels of female participation are recorded in the Arab countries; in some countries such as Dubai, however, there is currently a trend to the opposite effect.[3] Globally, it is estimated that the rate of participation of women in the labour force currently stands at around 45%.[4] One should add at this point that these statistics are based on a very particular definition of occupation, namely paid work outside the home. This definition has been fundamentally criticized by the feminist sociologist Oakley (1974) amongst others, who argued that it excludes women's work in the form of housework, motherhood, child rearing, etc. This gives, in her view, a wrong understanding of female 'participation'.

Whatever one's definition of labour, the chequered picture outlined above does not, of course, tell us anything about gender differences in salaries, prestige, access to jobs, and many other important factors. There is a vast literature and masses of statistical data dealing with these discrepancies but they are quite beyond the scope of the present work. One factor that *is* relevant, however, is the degree of 'occupational segregation' that patterns labour markets worldwide. Despite a growing equality in terms of participation, women and men only infrequently work together, performing the same tasks and functions in the same occupations; many occupations, in fact, are associated with women *or* men. This applies not least to the industrialized countries, in spite of the relative equality of

[3] At present only 15% of Dubai's workforce is female, although this includes expatriate workers, many of whom are male.

[4] Source of statistical data: ILO (2005).

participation in the labour force. In the US, for example, around three quarters of all workers would have to change their occupation in order to equalize the number of men and women in the labour market. Statistics published in 1989 show that 95.6% of all marines, 96% of all engineers, 99% of all airline pilots, and 99% of all auto mechanics, were men, while 97.3% of all nurses, 99% of all secretaries, 98% of kindergarten and pre-school teachers, and 95% of domestic workers, were women; many other occupations were significantly if less dramatically gendered (Williams 1989 – see also Part V). In Britain, more than four-fifths of skilled tradespersons and process, plant, and machine operatives are men; in administrative and secretarial occupations, as well as in personal service jobs, more than four-fifths of workers are women. Women hold the majority of jobs in the education, health, and social work sectors, whilst men hold most of the jobs in transport, communication, storage, and construction.[5] In Sweden, which actually enjoys the highest rate of women's paid labour force participation in the world, occupational segregation by gender is even more extreme (Williams 1993). Clearly, a high proportion of women in employment does not necessarily mean that there will be less segregation; occupational segregation is, in fact, a feature of labour markets that is not reducible to other dimensions of gender inequality in the sexual division of labour (Walby & Olsen 2002).

It is important to seek to make sense of occupational segregation not least because it is one of the primary causes of the wage gap between men and women. Predominantly female occupations tend to command lower earnings than those that are predominantly male (Walby 1988, Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 1996). In Britain, the average hourly earnings for women working full-time are 18% lower than for men working full-time, and for women working part-time hourly earnings are 40% lower. The largest pay gap is 44% in the insurance, banking, and pension provision sector.[6] In Canada, it is estimated that women in non-traditional occupations can earn 20 to 30% more than in jobs traditionally held by

[5] Source: 'Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain', Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005.

[6] Source: 'Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain', Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005.

women (Hughes 1995). Occupational gender segregation was identified as one of the key factors behind gender pay gaps in European labour markets.[7] In 2004, the average gross annual salary for Maltese employees was Lm5100; for women it was Lm4570 while for men it was Lm5358, meaning that men on average earn Lm788 more than women.[8] As we shall see, there is an important link between the wage gap and occupational segregation (notably 'vertical' segregation), a link which really is one of the root causes for concern.

Given the importance of occupational segregation it is not surprising that a number of academics have made it the focus of their research. One approach is to look at the exception – women and men in non-traditional occupations, that is – in order to understand the rule. (This approach has a long history in the Western intellectual tradition, Freud's studies of neuroses being by far the best known example.) Accordingly, there is a sizeable literature dealing with these gender-bending men and women.

There are various definitions of 'non-traditional' or 'atypical' occupations. The US Department of Labor defines as non-traditional those occupations or fields of work for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25% of the individuals employed in each such occupation or field of work. Hughes (1990) notes two further definitions. The first approach defines an occupation as non-traditional if one gender comprises less than 50% of workers in that occupation. The second, more sophisticated method, considers the distribution of the genders within each occupation in relation to their distribution in the total labour force. An occupation is non-traditional for the gender whose representation in that particular occupations falls below its representation in the labour force.

Until quite recently most studies tended to concentrate on what kept women out of traditionally-male occupations. This is partly because men in non-traditional occupations were relatively rare (certainly much less common than their female counterparts) and, more importantly, because

[7] Source: 'Gender pay gaps in European labour markets', Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Paper, 2003.

[8] Source: Figures rounded from Labour Force Survey, 2004.

the study of gender itself started as an attempt to recover the 'lost histories' and experiences of women (Bradley 1993). So much so, that such topics were generally subsumed under the heading 'women's studies'. Since the early 1990s, however, a number of studies have appeared which seek to redress the balance by looking at men in non-traditional occupations. According to Williams (1993), the editor of 'one of the first attempts to systematically examine (sic) these questions', men's experiences are crucial in the sense that men are actually less likely than women to aspire to and work in traditionally-female jobs. Scholars now realise that, although there are some important differences, there is much that is similar between men's and women's experiences in non-traditional occupations. In the present work I seek to keep a balance by looking at both sides.

This study analyzes the meanings that gender labour in the context of the Maltese economy, by looking at men and women in non-traditional occupations. My data seek to shed light on the following issues:

- The process of entering the particular field: initial motivation, types of other fields that were considered, and reason/s for final choice;
- Initial job expectations and how these changed, if at all;
- Interaction with State apparatus (laws, Public Service, etc.);
- Experience of work, particularly at the daily nuanced level – interaction with colleagues, clients, etc.;
- Ease of delegating / giving orders;
- Overflow of working life into family and social circles;
- The ways in and extent to which the occupational choice is contested by family, third parties, clients, colleagues, etc., and the ways in which it is negotiated;
- Integration into a particular occupational community (where applicable);
- Career development;
- Advice to young aspirants to their field;
- Suggestions for the formulation of social policies and legislation.

It is hoped that the findings of this work, apart from their intrinsic anthropological interest, will serve to inform policy-making aimed at making the workplace a fairer and more balanced place.

I
RESEARCH DESIGN

The present research is rooted in qualitative methodology as commonly used by social anthropologists. Two words are crucial here: 'in-depth' and 'holistic'. The first represents the qualitative tradition of studying a large number of variables among a relatively small pool of respondents. My concern, therefore, was not the 'spread' of a (small) number of variables over the Maltese population as a whole - as is done in a survey for instance. The second term refers to a concern with *cultural meanings* (see for instance Geertz 1973) and their various interlinkages in society. For instance, a sound analysis of occupational segregation depends on a proper understanding of associated cultural realities such as the traditional division of roles within the family, nuances of everyday discourse and rhetoric that foster faults along gender lines, religious ethics, and State policies that interact with the individual's own beliefs and values. In order to understand these multiple layers of meaning, methods are required that look at the fine grain of people's occupational experiences.

Sampling strategy

This study is very particular in that it does not target a specific community or sub-group; rather, it brings together people who, albeit generally classifiable as doing jobs that are traditionally considered 'inappropriate', in reality follow a diverse range of agendas and occupations. There can therefore be no single sampling frame that encompasses all of them. In these cases one has to resort to a combination of sampling strategies – an approach that is sometimes described as 'mixed' sampling.

Due to a lack of sampling frames, random (i.e. mathematical) sampling was not possible. I should add the rider that, in some cases, such as that of male primary school teachers and nurses, definite sampling frames *do* exist in the form of accurate staff lists. Union lists of members could

also have been used in this respect. In these cases, and as far as possible within the constraints of the Data Protection Act, it would in principle have been possible to random sample for a few occupations. However, given the overall small size of the sample, the number of informants for any particular single occupation was not more than five. The important properties of mathematical randomness, that are so desirable because they tend to produce a representative pool of respondents (the probability of whose properties occurring can be measured), only work when the sample is of a certain *absolute* size. For example, for a population of 6000 teaching staff in the Department of Education, a sample of at least 200 would be needed to produce statistically-representative results; random sampling to select five teachers would only introduce a serious element of bias. Given these circumstances, and also that in any case random sampling is used primarily when researchers inquire quantitatively about the spread of variables, it was decided to use non-random techniques. I should also point out at this stage that non-random sampling strategies are particularly useful to study informal labour, in which case staff lists are simply not available as sampling frames.

The main type of sampling used was purposive quota sampling. Informants were hand picked in a non-random way, paying attention to quotas that represent social realities (the non-random equivalent to stratified sampling, that is). The sample was also stratified according to age, in order to take into account the experiences of workers who entered particular fields some time ago.

I also used snowball sampling, which is practical when studying occupations that do not as a rule keep lists of workers but that are effectively networked. For example, an interview with the chairperson of a shipping company led me to two shipping teleclerks, who in turn recommended a port worker. I have on other occasions used snowball sampling very effectively in a number of research contexts (the study of dockyard workers in Malta, for instance, and research with hunters and trappers) and the present research was no different. The essential consideration when snowball sampling is to start different 'snowballs'

in order to avoid interviewing a pool of like-minded networked people; attention was paid to this potential shortcoming.

The sample

My sample (n=47) comprised a number of men in 'women's jobs', and vice-versa. I used statistical criteria as well as common knowledge to decide which jobs were 'women's' and 'men's'. For example, a look at the staff list of the Department of Education revealed that the Primary sector is completely dominated by women; and it is common knowledge that IT is dominated by men. I also interviewed a number of students following courses at MCAST; in this case, student lists were used to identify the subjects that are strongly segregated. In compliance with the Data Protection Act, interviews with nurses and teachers were arranged through their Departments.

OCCUPATION	MALES	FEMALES
Kindergarten assistant	4	
Hairdresser	2	
Facilitator	4	
Primary school teacher	5	
Technical officer		1
IT manager		2
Nurse	2	
Air traffic controller		1
Teleclerk		2
Academic		3
Business managing director		3
Bus driver		1
Haulier		1
Naval Officer		1

TABLE 1.1 Showing sample composition of informants in self-/employment

COURSE	MALES	FEMALES
Hairdressing	3	
Building & Construction		6
Sea Cadets		3
Banking & Finance	2	
Secretarial	1	

TABLE I.2 Showing sample composition of Informants at MCAST

My sample was made up as indicated in Tables I.1 and I.2. I should add that, apart from these more or less formally-arranged interviews, I made it a point of engaging a diverse set of people on the subject whenever I could. Including these conversations, the sample goes up to (n≈100).

Methods

My research was mainly based on a number of field interviews. Potential respondents were contacted personally, through intermediaries or by telephone. Only one refused to take part in the study. (It is not uncommon to have such a high response rate when using the sampling strategies described above.) As far as possible I sought to establish a rapport with my respondents, since one of the basic tenets of qualitative research is that data should be produced within a relation of trust, in and of a process of interaction between researcher and researched; it is only within this relation that data of good quality are produced. I can say with confidence that this relation of trust was present throughout this set of interviews. Most interviews were conducted at the informant's workplace, and/or in situations in which they felt 'at home'. For example I interviewed the bus driver on her bus, the port worker at the Marsa wharf, the nurses at their wards, the teachers in their staff rooms, and so forth. In one case I spent half a day observing gender relations at a hairdressing salon.

All my informants were very forthcoming with their responses, and many took an interest in what my research was all about. In three cases I actually received text messages a couple of weeks after the interview to ask if my project was progressing. At times an excellent rapport developed between myself as the interviewer and the respondent, which made it desirable for a number of informants to be interviewed more than once – what are

known in anthropological circles as 'key informants'. The data produced in and of such interactions are typically high in validity. In this research, this was applicable in three cases.

Qualitative research of this type does not require a standardised questionnaire. On the contrary, I sought to ask questions flexibly and informally, according to the particular circumstances of each interview. The strength of this approach is its responsiveness – the generous degree of freedom given to informants means that they are able to bring up and discuss the issues that matter most *to them*. In order to stay focused, however, I made use of an Interview Key, essentially an aide-memoire consisting of a set of points on a laminated sheet that I referred to during interviews. The Interview Key followed the sequence of research questions raised by this study (see page 6). Data produced in this way tend eventually to converge on a number of themes that eventually constitute the vertebrae of the analysis and write-up. A number of basic 'biodata' questions were asked in order to be able to frame data within a context; these included age, social and educational background, and employment profile.

Interviews were recorded using a portable IC recorder and downloaded on a home computer as high-quality digital audio files. They were then transcribed. Informants were asked beforehand whether they accepted to be recorded, and there never were any problems. In all cases, recordings were supplemented by detailed field notes. I should add that in the present work all quotes are presented in English; however, in the case of words and phrases that are particularly revealing, the original Maltese version is presented in round brackets.

Apart from interviews, the research made use of sources of information such as newspaper articles, television programmes, observations of the physical working environment, etc. Interviews are excellent as a means of capturing discourse but discourse only makes sense within a broader social context.

Ethical considerations

In research of this type many things are at stake; these include the interests of the informants, the professional integrity of the fieldworker, the reputation of the ETC as a research institution, and the practice of social science in Malta in general. It was therefore essential to maintain rigorous ethical standards. Professional codes of ethics as published by the American Anthropological Association, the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the British Sociological Association were scrupulously followed. In this respect the two main guiding principles were informed consent and confidentiality. Informants were briefed about the research *before* being interviewed and any questions they had (mostly related to use of data and affiliation of researcher) were answered. Regarding confidentiality, I was always careful not to leak information between interviews; further, in the following account the identity of informants will be protected when dealing with sensitive and/or potentially controversial data. As required by the Data Protection Act, recordings and transcripts will not be made accessible to ETC or to third parties.

II
THE MYTH OF HOMOGENOUS, EMPTY LABOUR

Understanding Occupational Segregation and Concentration

It is within the conceptual framework of occupational segregation that the 'crossing over' of men and women to non-traditional occupations ought to be understood. Occupational segregation is defined as "the tendency for men and women to be employed in different occupations from each other across the entire spectrum of occupations under analysis" (Siltanen et al., 1995: 4-5).[1] A related concept is that of 'concentration', which refers to "the set composition of the workforce in an occupation or set of occupations" (ibid.). Occupational segregation is therefore a quality of labour markets while concentration is a quality of particular occupations – segregation refers to the *separation* of the two sexes *across* occupations, concentration refers to the *representation* of one sex *within* occupations.

For example, looking at the labour statistics for Malta today (see Figure II.1) we discern a marked degree of occupational segregation; looking at a specific occupation, such as construction, we find a marked degree of concentration, men in this case being highly represented.

Hakim (1979) and a number of subsequent authors have drawn a further distinction between 'horizontal' segregation, which defines men and women's different rates of participation according to occupation, and 'vertical' segregation, which refers to the relative achievement of men and women within a particular occupation and entry into higher occupational strata. Women are often said to occupy 'dead end' jobs,

[1] Several authors have attempted to construct indices of dissimilarity. Goldin (1990: 75), for instance, gives the following measure: Dissimilarity $\mathbf{D} = |fx - mx|/2$, where f and m represent the percentage of all female and male workers respectively in occupation x. The index ranges from 0 to 100; it is 0 when men and women are identically distributed and 100 when segregation is at its most extreme and there is no overlap in occupations.

FIGURE II.1 FULL-TIME EMPLOYED PERSONS BY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND GENDER, JANUARY-MARCH 2004 (Source: Labour Force Survey)

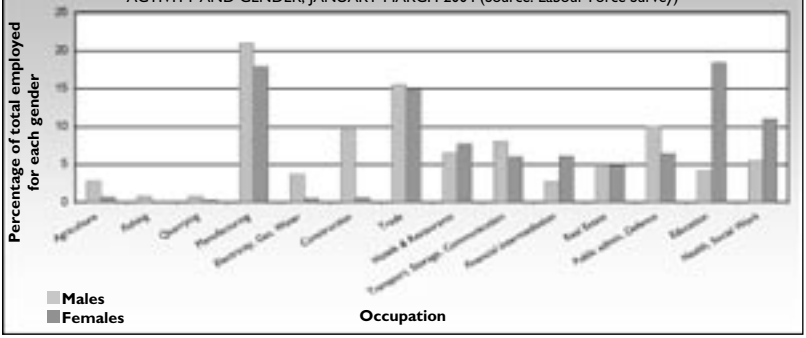
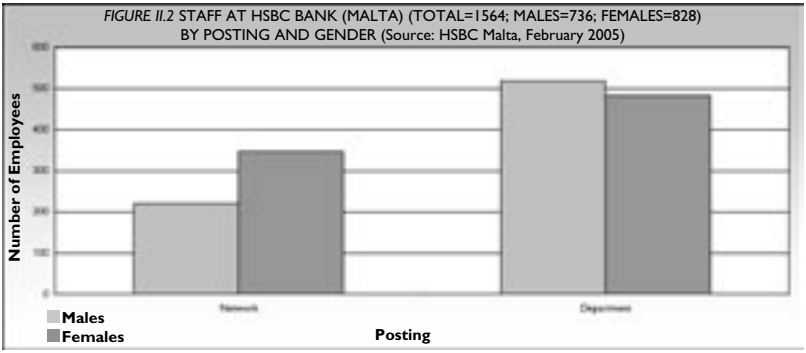


FIGURE II.2 STAFF AT HSBC BANK (MALTA) (TOTAL=1564; MALES=736; FEMALES=828) BY POSTING AND GENDER (Source: HSBC Malta, February 2005)



or to encounter a 'glass ceiling' - a phrase coined in 1984 to mean an invisible barrier to women being promoted beyond middle management - at some point in their careers.

HSBC (Malta), for example, currently employs 828 (53%) women and 736 (47%) men, meaning that the sexes are equally represented without any significant degree of concentration. A closer look (see Figure II.2) however, reveals important internal differences in that men tend to occupy (higher ranking, better paid) Departmental jobs while women are prevalent in (lower ranking, less better paid) Network ones.[2] In Britain

[2] Source: Data kindly provided by the Human Resources Department, HSBC Bank Malta p.l.c., on 3 January 2005.

today, women hold less than 10% of the top positions in FTSE100 companies, the police, the judiciary, and trade unions.[3]

The glass ceiling works in different ways. As one businesswoman told me:

> I found it very hard at one point to start my own business, simply because the bank manager did not want to give me a loan. He told me it would be a high risk loan since I would eventually get married, have children, and wind down the business. I got my overdraft when I got married and my husband signed for me.

Equally, the glass ceiling is only one facet of a complex phenomenon. Current research in Britain[4], for instance, focuses on 'glass cliffs', namely the practice of 'parachuting' women into precarious positions within companies where there is a high risk of failure. Data from a sample of businesses indicate that breaking the glass ceiling can have a number of situational connotations; given a choice between a male and a female candidate, for example, companies were much more likely to choose the latter when a company was doing badly. This phenomenon was not confined to any one profession or social group, but could be found right across the occupational spectrum. I quote these examples to make the more general point that work is gendered and hierarchised both across and within occupations, and often in very complex ways. It is also important to realise that vertical segregation *may* intersect with the lack of female participation in the labour market. As one of my informants told me,

> Money was initially not much of an issue and I worked for the pleasure of it. As I studied and obtained qualifications, however, things changed in that I became potentially a higher earner. It's one thing to work for pocket money and quite another to have the incentive of a good salary.

Before going on to discuss occupational segregation proper, it is worth remembering that the notion of paid employment *itself* intersects with

[3] Source: BBCNews, 26 October 2004.

[4] See Alex Haslam's research at the University of Exeter on (www.ex.ac.uk/~tpostmes/loginm).

understandings of gender. The separation between domestic labour and paid employment outside the home overlaps very neatly with a female: male dichotomy. In Malta men are typically seen as working '*biex jaqilgħu il-ħobza ta' kuljum*' (to earn their daily bread) while women work '*għall-kapriċċi*'(to finance lavish lifestyles). So much so, that a popular local representation of a healthy economy is of one in which women do not have to work. A recent debate which occupied the public sphere for several months concerned precisely this issue. The party in government argued that women work unnecessarily 'in order to be able to afford air conditioning' (i.e. the economy is healthy), while the opposition held that women have to work because of the high cost of living (i.e. the economy is fumbling). Both, of course, shared the assumption that in an ideal economy women do not have to work – unless forced to do so by rising property prices or electricity bills. Women do not simply go to work but go *out* to work ('*joħorġu jaħdmu*'), the linguistic nuance emphasizing the physical act of leaving the home and by implication abandoning their primary role as home makers. Television and radio discussions about work tend to be dominated by men – unless of course the subject is women '*li joħorgu jaħdmu*', in which case working women (and, typically, priests – implying that the choice is a moral one) are invited. '*Għaqal*' ('diligence', a highly desirable quality) is traditionally defined in terms of homeliness and home economics for women, and in terms of the disposition to indulge in paid labour outside the home for men. In general, women's paid labour is seen as superfluous and not taken seriously enough. Even when it *is* seen as necessary, there is still the idea among many (including a number of my informants), that women who work '*għall-bżonn*' (out of need) do just that. In one way or another, women's work tends to be devalued.

This distinction between men's and women's work has a rich if rather depressing history in the Western tradition and has been produced and reproduced by bedfellows as unlikely as the Justinian Code, the Catholic Church[5] and Rousseau. The last in particular was influential because he

[5] For a fascinating study of gender roles and the Catholic Church in early modern Malta, see Cassar 2002. In contemporary Malta, the involvement of the Church in the public discussion of gender roles is profound. (An analysis of pastoral letters alone would occupy one for quite some time.) Not all women take kindly to this involvement. As one informant put it, "I walked out of church once during a sexist sermon, and I'll never go to church again."

made a 'rational' argument (which tends to survive the decline of religion), based on the 'natural' inequality of men and women, for the separation of the sexes in the social, political, and economic spheres. This separation was subsequently implicit in the development of modern industrial capitalism (Chadwick 1996), and is so deeply rooted that even in situations where the rates of participation in the labour force are relatively equal, differences persist with respect to the gendering of the meaning of labour. Much more has been said about this topic and one is directed to more specialised sources such as Camilleri (1997, 2001).

One can discern two main theoretical strands that seek to understand occupational segregation. The first holds that because women and men are socialized differently, they are suited to different types of work. Thus women, whose upbringing emphasizes nurturing and expressive attributes, tend to predominate in occupations that embody these attributes – care work, for example, and teaching. Men on the other hand, whose upbringing revolves around the themes of transformation of the physical world and 'can-do', tend to concentrate in jobs that require technical proficiency and decision-making abilities – IT, construction, and management. This essentially culturalist understanding has a long history in academia (see for instance Parsons & Bales 1955); one variation on the theme holds that the lower status of women in the larger social context is transferred to the workplace, devaluing jobs with a concentration of women and resulting in lower salaries and prestige (Reid 1998).

PLATE II.1 The early stages of socialization often involve play; in this case the young girl is already a caring 'mother' (Photo by author).

To introduce a local flavour, one could use the example of the effort that goes into the organisation of village feasts. This work is strictly gendered, the men hammering away at their '*armar*' (street decorations) in warehouses and eventually in the streets, while the women – significantly and disparagingly known as '*helpers*' ('helpers') – work equally hard but invisibly to sew, clean, and repair the bunting that the men later put up. It is hardly surprising that these deep-rooted patterns of socialisation leave their mark on the paid employment sector.

Of course, the gendered attributes of particular occupations very often feed into and intersect with family roles. The archetypal example is perhaps a father in the army, who is seen as desirable in the sense that his children are likely to grow up 'in a strict and disciplined environment'. Being disciplined is a crucial attribute in the military but it is also considered to be a desirable fatherly attribute. Likewise, being nurturing and caring are essential qualities of nurses but also of mothers.

The second theoretical thrust emphasizes the imbalance of power, arguing that patriarchal power rather than socialization has tended to push women down into occupations that are low in prestige and pay; put bluntly, white men, a dominant group, devise ways of monopolizing higher-skilled and more lucrative occupations (Eisenstein 1979). This explains: The concentration of men in heavy industry and craft production; the crowding of women in repetitive semi-skilled or unskilled factory work; the dominance of men in the traditional professions and the clustering of women in the semi-professions such as nursing and school teaching; the growth of women's employment in low-paid service work in the post-War period, especially in clerical work and catering; and men's near-monopoly of top managerial positions in most areas of the economy (Bradley 1993). In a nutshell, weak groups such as immigrants, minorities, and women (especially the last – the first two are usually statistically marginal), are pushed by dominant groups such as white educated men into low-paid, low-prestige occupations.

There are two qualifications to be made at this stage. First, there has been considerable debate as to the manner and extent to which 'free choice'

– agency, that is – by either employers or workers is involved (Walby & Olsen 2002). Whether one believes that workers are socialized or historically pressured into certain occupations, the question is to what extent, if at all, do individuals choose. I do not think this is a very fruitful debate, especially since post-Structuralist social science has shown fairly convincingly that structure and agency can and generally do coincide. A simple device such as Bourdieu's 'habitus' immediately dispels the question of free choice.

More usefully, Williams (1993) has argued that both of these theories suffer from a key deficiency, namely the tendency to assume the 'neutral job', as it were. Essentially, the phenomena of occupational segregation and concentration challenge the economistic view that the labour market consists of a series of neutral 'slots', as it were, which are then occupied by men and women according to a rational calculation involving relative eligibility, benefits, and other decision-making (innate? social? cultural? patriarchal?) processes. In fact it is not just workers, but *jobs themselves* that are gendered and culturally loaded – even before they become available. Homogenous, 'empty' labour is a myth. Inbuilt in every occupation is a set of attributes and characteristics which also tend to gender it. For example, patience and a caring attitude towards children is a desirable characteristic for a kindergarten assistant and this means that the occupation is therefore associated with women. It follows that a worker who displays appropriate gendered characteristics can successfully take on an occupation even if his/her own individual gender does not match that traditionally associated with that occupation. This also means that gendered jobs are perpetuated as such because gender is embedded in organizational assumptions and practices (cf. Skuratowicz & Hunter 2004). Clearly, very few occupations are exclusively male or female – most incorporate elements of both, in a skewed way.

In order more fully to illustrate this point on the gendering and prestige implications *of jobs themselves*, I shall use the example of the construction sector in Malta. Sant Cassia's ethnographic vignette (2002) is worth quoting at length:

> The social origin of the *kuntrattur* is the stone mason (*bennej*), an important figure of local culture. Builders have relatively short working lives ... They work with heavy materials and are physically tough ... A typical image of a contractor is usually of a tough, foul mouthed character ... A *kuntrattur* may also have had experience in his youth working with explosives, either making the massive fireworks for the festas Boissevain studied, or in quarries. This gives him dangerous skills, and bombs are not unknown visiting cards in Malta ... The classical image of the *kuntrattur* is that of a stocky man with bulging muscles, wearing dusty work clothes, and driving a Mercedes ...

This image is not, as it may seem, a caricature. If it were, it would be easy for someone who looks (and acts) different - say, a woman - to overcome the stereotype and do the job. The point that Sant Cassia is making is that the structural and cultural position of the contractor/builder actually *requires* him to adopt this image of popular authoritarianism in order to be able to 'play' the system. The 'system' being in this case the Planning Authority and its 'weak with the strong' officers, 'flexible' politicians, the support of an impressionable public, and such. Jobs in construction are therefore not just implicitly male, but male according to a historically-produced set of (male-) gendered characteristics.[6]

A set of cultural meanings, that is, that include a measure of prestige and a lucrative income. It is well known that in Malta construction is one of the most vigorous and historically-rooted industries. At least since the time of the Hospitaller Knights, prestige and power have often been expressed in terms of building. Contemporary politicians, for example, very often express power and governance through metaphors and images of building ('*nibnu futur aħjar*', '*nibnu fis-soď*', etc.). Buildings, therefore, are culturally prestigious, and they are designed, built, and restored almost exclusively

[6] It is tempting to place such images within a cliched Mediterranean 'I too have a moustache' machismo (see for instance Horden & Purcell 2000), but similar data from other contexts undermine the regional association.

by men. This is what Karl Polanyi meant when he proposed that the economy (of which the labour market is one aspect) is always embedded in social and cultural meanings (see for instance Polanyi 1957).

The idea that prestige and gendering are inbuilt in occupations is supported by even a cursory look at language. It is not uncommon in Malta for low-prestige workers to reply '*biċċa ...*' (e.g. '*biċċa kennies*' ≈ 'a sweeper of sorts') when asked what they do. In a sleight of tongue that effectively devalues their labour, adult women who work in shops are commonly called 'sales *girls*' and those who work in factories 'factory *girls*'. There are many more examples of such techniques, most of which are historically rooted.[7] Of course, they may also be used situationally as 'weapons of the weak' – low-prestige workers, for instance, are more likely to call themselves '*biċċa ...*' when seeking to set themselves up as clients of politically/socially/economically powerful patrons. Being '*il-ħaddiem iż-żgħir*' - a 'petty worker', construed in Malta as belonging to the underprivileged, but simultaneously powerful in various ways, menial working class - is not entirely a bleak prospect. In any case, this and many other examples require that one of the questions we should ask when seeking to understand the gendering and status of a particular occupation is: What does society value?

De-essentializing the gendering of work

The answer to this question must be a historically-informed one. It is in fact interesting to note that occupations can and do change gender and prestige. A sound understanding of occupational segregation views the gendering of labour, and its transgression, as a process that is embedded in political, cultural, and economic shifts. Although a very few occupations (hunting for food, for instance) display a remarkable spatio-temporal continuity of gendering, no occupation is 'timelessly' or 'essentially' male or female – no matter how deep-rooted the tradition may seem. The

[7] Visitors to India are often surprised at the number and variety of 'boys' – tea boys, laundry boys, etc. – that line up to offer their services. Most of these 'boys' are actually adult men. In this case, the devaluation of labour has been transposed from a colonial context to the stark hierarchies of the contemporary developing world.

construction industry in Malta, for example, was not always as male-dominated as it is today. As recently as the 1950s, women commonly worked as '*ballâta*', pounding small pieces of stone and pottery shards into a waterproof compound ('*deffun*') that was used for roofing. One of my informants told me how his mother, who was from Mosta, used to recruit women friends and acquaintances in the village to work as *ballâta*. They left their homes before dawn and walked to construction sites in various parts of the island, where they sat around talking and pounding compound. It was no doubt back-breaking work and, because it did not involve any particular skills, it was very badly paid. The point is, however, that we should not assume that 'it has always been so' – that construction, that is, has always been exclusively a male domain. For an anthropologist it comes as no surprise that tradition is not always that traditional (see Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992), but within the context of this work the fact cannot be overemphasized.

The historical nature of the gendering of occupations should not lead us to think that these processes are always *longue duree*. Skuratowicz & Hunter's study (2004) is interesting in this respect. They followed the restructuring of a major US bank and examined the proportion of men and women in bank branch positions before and after organizational changes. The insights in the ways in which new positions were constructed, portrayed to bank employees, perceived by those who would apply for the jobs, and filled, show us how, amongst other things, the gendering of jobs and consequent segregation can happen in a short span of time. In their case, four interactive factors were identified which explained the rapid emergence of a set of jobs with newly-established gender alignments. First, as the bank management clarified the strategic goals of the company and began to design new jobs to meet those goals, they built gendered assumptions into the new jobs. Second, employees responded to these cues by making choices about which jobs were appropriate. Third, management made job assignments that were consistent with both their gendered assumptions and with employees' choices. And fourth, gendered associations with the new positions became clearer as both employees and managers continued to draw on shared gender norms in establishing these new jobs during the period immediately following restructuring.

This shifting nature of occupational segregation has been extensively theorised. Writing about men entering women's occupations, Bradley (1993) proposes a typology of three characteristic patterns of entry. 'Takeover' is the process whereby an occupation that is traditionally considered to be female is completely taken over by men, to the extent that women become excluded from it and it becomes a male or at least a gender-neutral occupation. 'Invasion' is less drastic, and occurs when men move into a female occupation in significant numbers albeit not driving women out completely; in this case the occupation continues to be perceived as female but less significantly so. This second process is somewhat complex and is accompanied by techniques of demarcation whereby men and women monopolize different specialities; thus, within the same occupation, different roles are gendered differently. Usually, but not inevitably, men monopolize the higher-status (and better-paid) positions at the top of the hierarchy. The third process, which Bradley calls 'infiltration', happens when individual men enter a female occupation due to personal inclinations and/or lack of alternative employment opportunities. These individuals remain a tiny minority within a female occupation and may have to cope with threats to their masculinity. Interestingly, in situations of infiltration men will sometimes exploit their masculine attributes to maximize their career chances while working alongside women.

Importantly, men and women who engage in non-traditional occupations do not necessarily challenge the gendering process. On the contrary, they very often end up reproducing this very process. This happens in three ways. First, I was surprised to find that a number of my informants – notably women in 'tough' men's jobs – still thought that they were not doing the 'right' job: "We're happy with what we do but, in truth, it's not a woman's job", I was told by two female technicians. Second, they sometimes draw upon their 'traditional' gendered attributes to justify their non-traditional occupations in innovative and enterprising ways. Consider the following two excerpts from interviews; the first with a male Primary schoolteacher, the second with a female company director:

> It's better to have a mixed staff which includes male teachers. After all at home that's what children experience. We need father figures

> as much as we need mother figures. As a male teacher I represent authority, and children need that. I have to say, however, that in time you feel the need to downplay that authority.

> As a woman, ambition makes you a bitch. In my case it's silly: let me tell you, the most important things in my life are my daughter and my family ... Women make excellent leaders. A woman will do it differently – she's conscious of men's egos and, unless she wants to lose her staff, she plays along with them ... I can also bond with clients in a way that men can't. I ask them how their children are doing, what they bought their wives for Christmas...

Somewhat paradoxically, these workers are using their gender to give them an advantage in a non-traditional occupation. Of course, in so doing they contribute to the reproduction of gendered attributes – just as people who say that more women in politics would make the world more 'caring' do, for instance.

Third, there is always a sense of one's 'true nature' that is put on hold, as it were, for the duration of one's working day – rather like the schoolteacher who downplays his ('natural', male) authority. 'Put on hold' is not quite sufficient here, because one of the most fascinating aspects of women and men in non-traditional occupations is precisely the articulation and negotiation of gender and gendered characteristics. Consider the following two quotes from magazine interviews with a female land surveyor and police inspector respectively[8]:

> Few of the men engrossed in their work turn to look at the person in the yellow hard hat, striding purposefully out of the site office. It is only when she gets inside her car that her mop of unruly curls emerges.

> Right now, Alexandra's mind is focused on the coming weeks: she has an important family wedding and when she gets home

[8] 'Manpower' by Vanessa Macdonald. *Pink* magazine, Issue 6, April 2005.

> much, much later that evening, she pulls out a gorgeous red evening dress, encrusted with sequins, and sits down to sew the hem and add the finishing touches. Without her hat on, she can pull her hair out of its pony-tail, and let it hang loose over her shoulders. After all, there is a time to look tough, and a time to look like a woman.

These two excerpts capture very beautifully this process of negotiation of gender. The mass of curls spilling out of the hat, and the gesture of undoing the pony-tail, are essentially images of women who will be women *in spite of* their job. Rather like Achilles at Skyros, they will readily act in ways typical of the opposite sex; their 'true', 'natural' (gendered) selves, however, are never far behind.

Back to invasion and takeover, these processes are often perceived to affect the prestige of a particular occupation. This is especially true when women invade or take over male-dominated occupations. Goldin (1990) notes that this process is often accompanied by male workers' fears that women in the industry, certainly in the occupation, would lead to a degrading of its status and/or prestige. Recently, for example, Professor Carol Black, the president of the Royal College of Physicians and a high-profile British medic, warned that the medical profession's traditional influence and power could be damaged by the number of women entering the field. Her comments as reported[9] are revealing and worth quoting at length:

> We are feminising medicine. It has been a profession dominated by white males. What are we going to have to do to ensure it retains its influence? Years ago, teaching was a male-dominated profession – and look what happened to teaching. I don't think they feel they are a powerful profession any more. Look at nursing, too ... In Russia, medicine is an almost entirely female profession. They are paid less and they are almost ignored by government. They have lost influence as a body that had competency, skills

[9] BBCNews, 2 August 2004.

> and a professional ethic. They have become just another part of the workforce. It is a case of downgrading professionalism.

In her take on the glass ceiling, Professor Black added that the problem was that although more women are entering the field, most of them eventually fail to reach high levels of specialization and to participate in top-level decision making. This effectively undermines the profession, unless of course women doctors are provided with the facilities (such as childcare and flexible hours) to be able to combine family and top-level professionalism. The point is that the perceived link between invasion/takeover and prestige is not just a product of male paranoia, and that there are very real issues to be considered.

Bradley (op.cit.) also links invasion and takeover to periods of technological innovation. In pre-Industrial Europe, for example, activities such as baking, brewing, spinning, and dairy production were all seen as predominantly female occupations. With the advent of technological advances and large populations of consumers, however, which enabled and in fact required products to be made on an industrial scale, the new large-scale economic opportunities thus created were monopolized by men. Consequently, what were 'traditionally' female occupations are now (equally 'traditionally') male.

The link between occupational segregation and industrial capitalism is an interesting if debatable idea. On the one hand there is no doubt that the sexual division of labour is not restricted to capitalist economies. The anthropological literature is replete with examples of hunter-gatherer, horticultural, and peasant societies that practice advanced forms of this division. Among the Andaman Islanders, for example, that are possibly the people farthest removed from the capitalist world economy, we find that men do most of the hunting and fishing, while women weave, prepare food, and catch small fish on the inshore reefs (Cipriani 1966). One should note that the rise of industrial capitalism coincided with that of the modern nation state and its systematic methods of categorizing and enumerating populations. The new political apparatus was in a much better position to identify and measure occupational segregation. One

suspects that societies with complex modes of production are simply more disposed and better equipped to *measure* segregation.

On the other hand there are good indications that industrial capitalism *did* in fact foster occupational segregation through systematizing and organising it on a large scale. Around 1900, for instance, at a time of intense industrial capitalism in the US, most operatives were employed in highly segregated industries (Goldin 1990). The large, located, rigidly-structured working populations that are a hallmark of this mode of production, logically make excellent breeding grounds for segregation. They are certainly more conducive to it than the 'flexible accumulation' type of capitalism associated with the contemporary services economies of the North. The data would seem to corroborate this link – in the US and other developed countries, occupational segregation seems to have decreased slightly, but not insignificantly, in recent decades. In 1968 Gross showed that, across a range of 300 occupations in the US, occupational segregation was at the same level in 1960 as it was in 1900; since then, however, most authors have described a decline in segregation, roughly since the 1970s (Goldin 1990 – see also Part V).

The timing effectively coincides with that of the rise of flexible accumulation (which took off notably after the oil crisis of 1973 – see for instance Cohen & Kennedy 2000) and the possible correlation is well worth exploring. Tentatively, one notes that in contemporary Export Processing Zones (EPZs), occupational segregation occurs at very high levels; in Southeast Asian EPZs, for instance, women represent up to 80% of the labour force (ILO). Significantly, the organization of labour in EPZs resembles that of the high noon of US and European industrial capitalism. Of course it should also be kept in mind that in the US the 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of equal opportunities and civil rights legislation (see Dex 1985) and that this was probably another reason behind the shift.

There are other interesting facets to Bradley's typology. For one thing, it only makes sense as an analytical device. In practice the transgression of occupational gender roles by men and women takes place along

a continuum. One should also point out that the re-gendering of occupations described by Bradley often coincided with a spatial shift. Occupations that were previously considered to belong to the (female) domestic sphere, and were largely carried out inside the home, were now relocated to (male) public and specialised sites of production. Baking is actually a good example of this shift. Old women from rural areas of Malta remember well how they used to prepare dough at home and then take the mixture to the baker.[10] In this case, what used to be until quite recently a mixed-gender occupation (women prepared the dough at home, men fired the ovens at the bakery) has become a primarily male one which takes place outside the domestic circle. I would also add that sometimes the domestic aspect of these activities is retained by women as a sort of pastime – as in home baking, for instance, or spinning. One notes that the process of gendering occupations is a complex one indeed.

Adding to this complexity is the fact that it is often inextricable from other processes. Three ethnographic examples from Malta will serve to illustrate its nuanced nature in the local context. The first is nursing. In Malta, nursing is broadly female-gendered (70% of nurses are women) and has been thus for a long time. Psychiatric nurses working at Mt. Carmel hospital, however, have a history of being men. The reason, as explained to me by a retired psychiatric nurse, is that until recently brute force was deemed necessary in order to control mentally ill patients. In this case the occupation, although officially still described as 'nursing', was more akin to that of a gaoler, and was therefore 'male'. The second example is hairdressing. There is a very big difference between a barber (*barbier*, *parrukkier*) and a hairdresser. Barbers and hairdressers perform essentially the same task, that of cutting hair. However the types of masculinity associated with barbers and hairdressers respectively are very different. Barbers come from a tradition of cutting men's hair, shaving, and general grooming, and their masculinity is fairly straightforward and streamlined, so to speak, with that of the majority. Hairdressers generally cater for both men and women ('unisex') and their job involves re-styling

[10] In fact a bakery (literally, a place where one bakes) in Malta is known as a '*forn*', which actually means 'oven'.

in line with fashion trends. They are associated with an effeminate and somewhat ambiguous masculinity, and in fact are popularly perceived to be mostly homosexual. The last example concerns tailors, who also come in two shapes: the old-style male tailor who toils alone sewing seams and zippers, and the dress-maker or dress-designer, who also sews and who may also be male, but who caters for a more demanding (mostly) female clientele who expect him to give them advice on fashion trends, 'in' colours, etc. Again, there is a difference in the gendering of the job: tailors are considered 'normal' men, while dressmakers are considered limp-wristed and, again, mostly homosexual.[11]

What is interesting in these last two examples is that the occupations associated with an ambiguous masculinity enjoy a much higher prestige than the two exclusively male occupations. The popular image of a hair stylist or dress designer is of someone who works in glitzy surroundings and lives the fast life; barbering and tailoring, on the other hand, are considered somewhat modest occupations. One of the reasons for this difference is that in this case gender intersects with another consideration, namely that hairstylists and dress designers possess a knowledge of global fashion trends, which is a very prestigious knowledge indeed. This shows how gender is often one of several intertwined variables attached to an occupation. This is what I meant when I suggested that labour is culturally loaded.

[11] Well-known male dressmakers and hairstylists have become household names in Malta, and many of them are perceived to be or are openly gay.

III
OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN MALTA

Based on various statistical sources as well as my own data and observations I shall now proceed to describe aspects of occupational segregation in Malta. Recent Labour Force Survey statistics for Malta show an expected degree of gender segregation:

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	MALES	%	FEMALES	%
Agriculture	2784	92	252	8
Fishing	831	100	0	0
Quarrying	789	89	99	11
Manufacturing	20760	76	6496	24
Electricity, gas & water supply	3658	95	173	5
Construction	9514	98	207	2
Wholesale, retail & repair trade	15393	74	5422	26
Hotels & restaurants	6463	70	2799	30
Transport, storage & communication	7906	78	2191	22
Financial intermediation	2645	54	2239	46
Real estate & renting	4593	72	1792	28
Public admin, defence, security	9875	81	2344	19
Education	4192	39	6680	61
Health & social work	5483	58	4001	42
Community & other service	4150	74	1428	26

TABLE III.1 Showing the number of men and women employed on a full-time basis in a number of occupational fields. (Source: Adapted from LFS, National Statistics Office, January-March 2004)

Given the relatively low rate of female participation in the workforce (women make up 32% of the workforce), it is not surprising that most areas of the labour market – all but one, in fact - are dominated by men. The economic activities that display the strongest concentrations of men (>85%) are agriculture, fishing, quarrying, electricity/gas/water

supply, and construction. The areas which represent low degrees of male concentration (<60%) are finance and health/social work. Education is the only female-dominated activity.

There are two important points to be made about these data. First, they indicate that a significant number of people occupy non-traditional jobs. Second, these data are often very misleading in that they mask occupational segregation *within* each economic activity. For example, 11% of workers in quarrying are women, but an extensive informal inquiry as part of the present research did not find a single woman employed in cutting, dressing, and/or transporting stone - those 11% are actually employed in clerical tasks. Engineering is not specifically mentioned in the LFS statistics, but it is another male-dominated occupation. At present 82% of warranted engineers (people with a University degree in engineering, that is) are men.[1] I can say with confidence that the data presented in the table are only a very small indication of the segregation of labour in Maltese workplaces. I shall now look at some examples of this trend.

Let us first consider post-secondary and higher Education, a phase during which many occupational decisions are taken. Statistics reveal that it is crucial to look beyond the outermost boundaries of individual institutions/workplaces. At University, for example, that boundary was broken in 1922 with the graduation of the first female student[2]; at the graduation speech Professor Temi Zammit extolled the importance of female participation in the tertiary sector. This enlightened attitude seems to have paid off and the twentieth-century history of the University of Malta can be read, as Camilleri puts it, as that of the 'rise and rise of the female graduate'. The process peaked in October 2001 when the number of female students surpassed that of male students (Camilleri 2003). And yet, a count of students following particular courses at

[1] Source: Data kindly provided by Chamber of Engineers, Malta, on 22 February 2005.

[2] Tessie M. Camilleri, who studied English and Latin Literature and Philosophy, and graduated B.Litt. on 2 May 1922. The University Statute of 1915 clearly stated that "the University examinations, degrees, diplomas and certificates shall be open to all without distinction of sex" (Camilleri 2003).

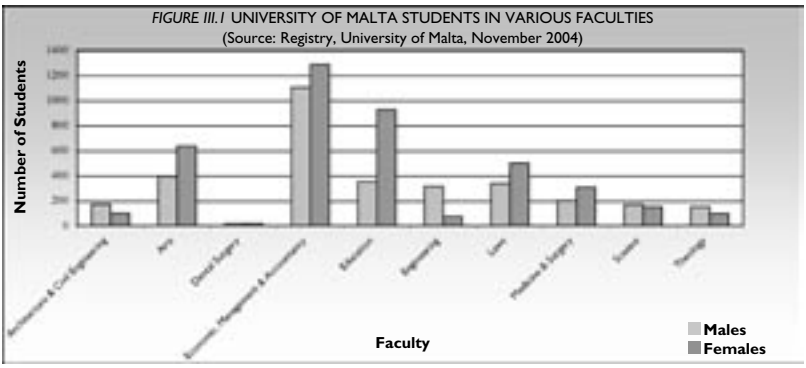


FIGURE III.1 UNIVERSITY OF MALTA STUDENTS IN VARIOUS FACULTIES
(Source: Registry, University of Malta, November 2004)

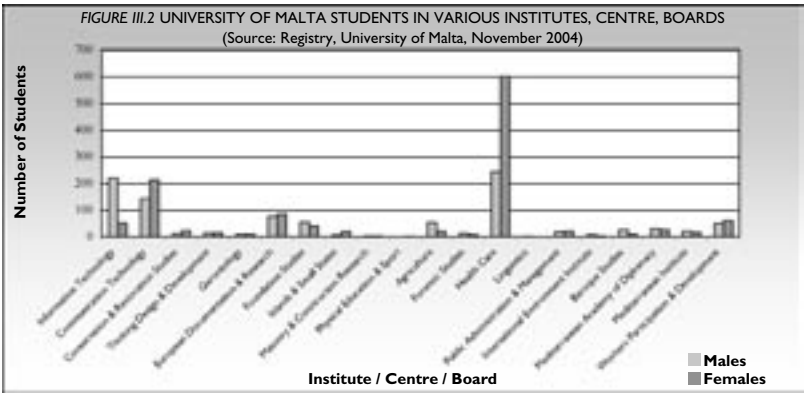


FIGURE III.2 UNIVERSITY OF MALTA STUDENTS IN VARIOUS INSTITUTES, CENTRE, BOARDS
(Source: Registry, University of Malta, November 2004)

University *today* (see Figures III.1 and III.2) reveals a striking degree of segregation and concentration. Courses in Information Technology and Engineering, for instance, represent a high concentration of males, while the opposite is true of the various courses in Education and Health Care, Communications, and the Humanities.

Again, we note a degree of historical continuity. Engineering has always been a male stronghold at University, the first female graduating in the field in 1973. Eight women graduated as Pharmacists as early as 1952 (ibid.), and the course is still today perceived as female-friendly at least, no doubt due to the fact that working in a pharmacy or as a medical representative is seen as easily accommodated within a woman's life. On the other hand the Law course was traditionally a male domain (only

three women lawyers graduated between 1949 and 1976) but today welcomes more female than male students. It is worth adding at this stage that these trends are hardly a local idiosyncrasy. In Britain, for example, women outnumber men in almost all areas of Higher (University) Education, exceptions being Computer Science with 80% male students and Engineering & Technology with 85% male students. Predictably, the most female dominated subjects are Education and subjects allied to Medicine such as Nursing and Physiotherapy, where 81% of students are women. Interestingly the process of segregation seems to take off at Advanced/Higher level; already at this level, for instance, English Literature and Social Studies each had 70% of entries from girls, while 76% of Physics entries were by boys.[3]

FIGURE III.3 LOGARITHMIC GRAPH OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION
(Source: Registry, University of Malta, November 2004)

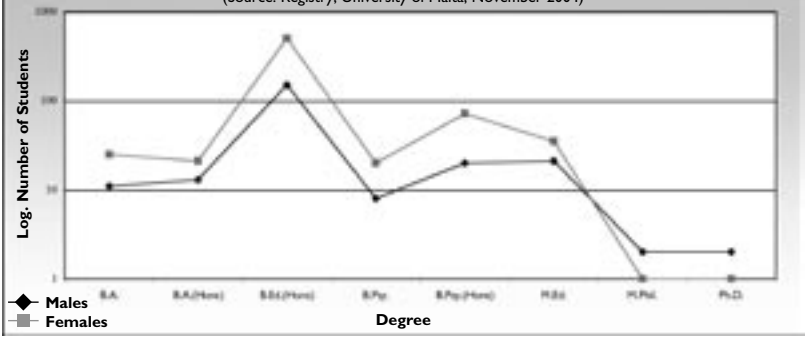
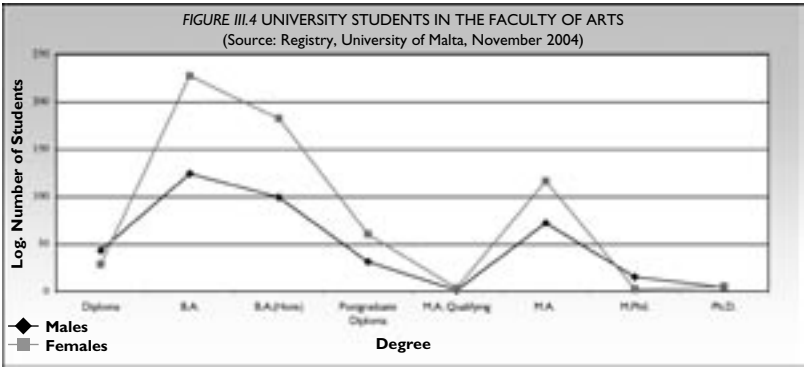


FIGURE III.4 UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS
(Source: Registry, University of Malta, November 2004)

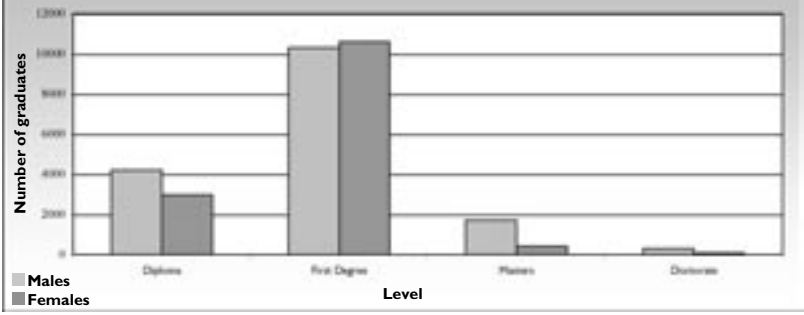


[3] Source: 'Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain', Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005.

A look at the student list of the University of Malta also reveals a degree of vertical segregation. Although in general female students outnumber male students, the tables are turned at the higher, post-graduate levels of study (see Figures III.3 and III.4). This difference is borne out when one looks at the national statistics for education level successfully completed (Table III.2, Figure III.5). Again, one notes that although in general women tend to be better qualified, they are overtaken very markedly at the post-graduate levels of study. The composition of the academic staff reflects this trend. In the Faculty of Arts male lecturers outnumber females by about 5:1, and in other Faculties the gap is even more drastic; the exceptions are Health Care, Psychology, and the caring professions.

The pattern of segregation evident at University is also present in other, more technical, institutions of post-secondary education. The Malta

FIGURE III.5 NUMBER OF GRADUATES BY GENDER IN THE GENERAL POPULATION, 2004
(Source: Labour Force Survey 2004)



EDUCATION LEVEL	MALES	FEMALES
Primary	39 072	53 384
Secondary	57 801	64 433
Post-secondary	12 376	12 652
University diploma	3 604	3 348
First degree	10 370	10 717
Masters	1 697	964
Ph.D.	745	78

TABLE III.2 National figures for education level successfully completed (15+ years).
(Source: Adapted from LFS, October-December 2004)

College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) is the leading vocational college in Malta and runs a total of 65 day courses at its 12 centres in Malta and Gozo. In 2004-5 a total of 3603 students attended these courses, 2383 (67%) of whom were male and 1220 (33%) female.

The student number statistics (see Figure III.6) are interesting in two respects. First, unlike at University, two-thirds of the student population at MCAST are male, the reason being that most courses are of a technical nature. Second, the degree of segregation by course is remarkable. Females greatly predominate in the Community Services course, which includes options such as Certificate in Hairdressing, ITEC Diploma for Beauty Specialists, National Diploma in Early Years, and National Diploma in Care. The high concentration of females in Business and Commerce is primarily due to the fact that the course includes the Diploma in Administrative and Secretarial Studies, which attracts mostly females. Most of the other courses and in particular Building and Construction Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering, represent high concentrations of males. Again, the patterns of segregation described for MCAST are hardly an isolated case. It is clear that in Malta the technical side of post-secondary education is a man's world, and this is by no means surprising. In Britain too, for instance, a high level of segregation can be discerned in many sectors of Modern Apprenticeships. Some of the most female-dominated sectors are Early Years Care and Education, Hairdressing, and Health and Social Care.

FIGURE III.6 STUDENT POPULATION (TOTAL=3417; MALE=2295; FEMALE=1122) AT THE VARIOUS MCAST INSTITUTES IN MALTA BY INSTITUTE AND GENDER (Source: MCAST, November 2004)

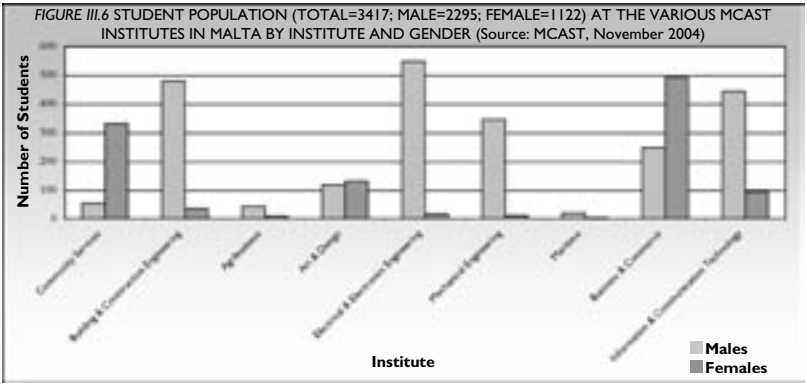


PLATE III.1 "The Times of Malta", February 5, 2005, pages 25 (upper) and 18 (lower). Six male and two female bank managers, and six female and two male psychologists, make the news.

Starts in Plumbing, Construction, and the electrotechnical sector are almost entirely by men.[4]

The Institute of Tourism Studies, too, shows a marked degree of segregation (Figure III.7). Males predominate significantly in Food Preparation and Hotel Management, while females concentrate in Accommodation, Agency, and Guiding studies. These figures will of course eventually translate into a similarly patterned workforce.

Moving beyond educational institutions, Table III.3 shows the number of Journeyman's Certificates (all of which represent technical options) presented by the ETC in July 2004; again, with the exception of Hairdressing (for which 100% of awardees were women), Heritage Crafts, and to a lesser extent Graphic Design[5], the data show an impressive degree of occupational segregation.

[4] Source: 'Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain', Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005.

[5] Stained Glass Manufacture is not significant since there was only one student.

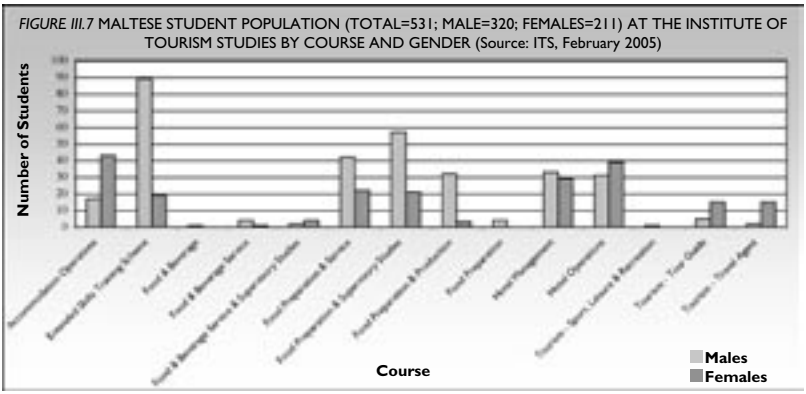


FIGURE III.7 MALTESE STUDENT POPULATION (TOTAL=531; MALE=320; FEMALES=211) AT THE INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES BY COURSE AND GENDER (Source: ITS, February 2005)

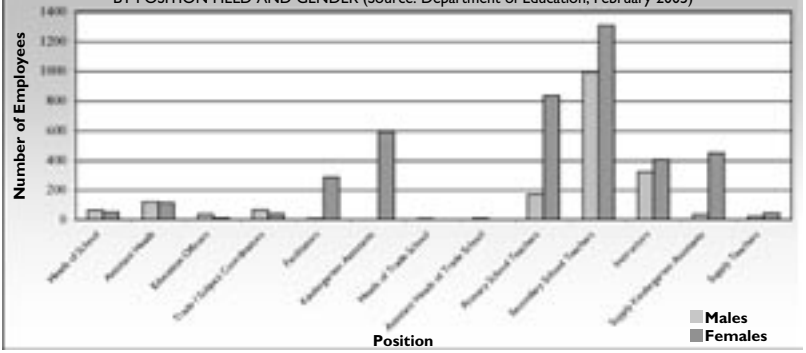


FIGURE III.8 TEACHING STAFF AT THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (TOTAL=5977; MALE=1847; FEMALE=4130) BY POSITION HELD AND GENDER (Source: Department of Education, February 2005)

The LFS data indicate that 61% of workers in the field of education are women, but a closer look at the Department of Education tells a much more interesting story. Figure III.8 in fact shows that certain fields of education, such as facilitation, primary schoolteaching, and kindergarten assistance, represent very high concentrations of women. Heads of school, on the other hand, tend to be men, and secondary schoolteaching is broadly equally represented. Again, there are important semantic continuities: in Malta, many narratives of schooling begin with '*meta kont żghir kont immur għand is-sorijiet*' ('My first school was a nun's school').

The segregation of schoolteachers is not endemic to Malta. In the US, for example, women make up about 70% of all schoolteachers. Within the occupation, however, there are striking concentrations of men and

TRADE FOR WHICH CERTIFICATE PRESENTED	% MALES	% FEMALES
Electrical Installation (n=3)	100	0
Electronic Servicing Fitting (n=6)	100	0
Food & Beverage Preparation and Production (n=37)	87	13
Food & Beverage Prep, Production, and Services (n=6)	83	17
Food & Beverage Services (n=6)	83	17
Graphic Design (n=7)	47	43
Hairdressing (n=21)	0	100
Heritage Crafts (n=3)	33	67
Mechanical Fitting (n=12)	100	0
Motor Vehicle Mechanics (n=20)	100	0
Plumbing (n=1)	100	0
Printing (n=12)	92	8
Stained Glass Manufacture (n=1)	0	100
Stone Carving, Dressing, and Masonry (n=5)	100	0
Vehicle Body Repair (n=5)	100	0
Welding (n=1)	100	0
Wood Carving and Working (n=13)	100	0
Computer Aided Engineering Technology (n=4)	100	0
Civil and Mechanical Draughtsmanship (n=17)	94	6
Electrical and Electronics Technology (n=11)	100	0
Industrial Design and Electronics Technology (n=37)	95	5
Information Technology (n=25)	100	0
Telecommunications Technology (n=13)	100	0
Refrigeration & Airconditioning (n=19)	100	0
Motor Vehicle Technology (n=13)	100	0
Mechanical and/or Electrical Engineering (n=13)	100	0

TABLE III.3 Journeyman's Certificates under the Extended Skill Training (ESTS) and Technician Apprentice (TAS) Schemes, presented by the Employment & Training Corporation, Malta, July 2004 (Source: ETC, as published in The Times of Malta, 9 July 2004).

women in particular fields. At the elementary level (kindergarten through sixth grade, known as K-6) men comprise only 12% of the work force; even within this bracket, most men concentrate in the upper elementary classrooms (4-6) or work across grades in art, music, or physical education. Men teaching in the primary grades (K-3) are very rare (Allan 1993).

Statistics for Maltese Church schools were not forthcoming but informal inquiries hinted at similar if not more striking patterns. In this sector, for instance, girls' schools represent very high concentrations of women teachers; I was told by a long-serving teacher at a Church girls' secondary 'convent school' that in the twenty five years she has been working there, the only male employees were an IT teacher (probably recruited because of lack of women in the field) and the janitor. '*Biex ma niltaqghux ma' tentazzjonijiet*' ('to avoid temptation'), as she told me somewhat tongue in cheek but no doubt accurately.

The trade union sector in Malta is almost exclusively a male domain. Interestingly, even in the case of unions which represent mostly women, council members and activists tend to be men. The Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN), for instance, represents 95% (2290) of all nurses and 96% (128) of all midwives in Malta. 70% of nurses and 100% of midwives on its list are women; and yet, out of ten council members, seven - including all the senior officers - are men.[6] The reasons behind this dominance are probably twofold. First, Union meetings and activities are very time consuming and held after working hours, which does not exactly make them 'family friendly'. Second, keeping in mind what I said earlier about men being seen as breadwinners, male workers who emphasize their gender are in a good position to construct their occupation as indispensable to themselves and their families. This ultimately enhances their bargaining power, which is of course essential if a union is to be effective.

The so-called 'caring professions' constitute another female-dominated field. Figure III.9 shows the composition of staff at Eden Foundation.[7] In this case women outnumber men in all occupations except Administration and Marketing, and Maintenance. The reason for this dominance is plainly the historical conceptual link between women and the family. In recent decades in Malta much lip-service has been paid to the family as the 'basic building block of society'. From a religious perspective hardly

[6] Source: Data kindly provided by MUMN, August 2005.

[7] Source: Data kindly provided by Eden Foundation, January 2005.

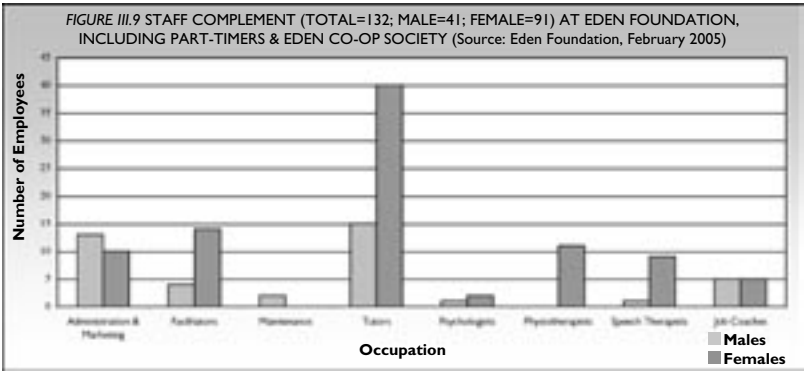


FIGURE III.9 STAFF COMPLEMENT (TOTAL=132; MALE=41; FEMALE=91) AT EDEN FOUNDATION, INCLUDING PART-TIMERS & EDEN CO-OP SOCIETY (Source: Eden Foundation, February 2005)

a week passes without the bishops making statements to this effect; from a secular one 'the family' is one of the main targets of psychologists, sociologists, social welfarists, and politicians. 'The family' is becoming more and more reified into a sociological object and, expectedly, a professional body of knowledge is fast developing in accordance with this process - the quintessential example being family therapy. Jobs, most of which are female-gendered, are being created to service families. Their gendering is an extrapolation into the professional field of the traditional perspective of the woman as the 'keeper of the family' ('*il-qalb tal-familja*'), and the female psychology as 'caring' and 'nurturing'. Jobs associated with children, such as the post of Children's Commissioner, are likewise 'naturally' female-gendered.

The gendering of tasks and subsequent concentration is equally prevalent in less formal and institutionalised settings. Consider, for instance, the fishing industry in Malta. No doubt a man's world, with much implication of physical tenacity and occupational danger (see for instance the fascinating fishermen's narratives collected in Psaila 1996). Officially, according to LFS data, there are at present no women employed in fishing in Malta. Yet women have an important role in this economy – that of selling the catch. One very commonly sees women cleaning and selling fish at the Marsaxlokk market, and fishmongers are often named after the women of the household – 'Rita's Fish Shop' (Marsaxlokk), for instance, or 'Connie's Fish Shop' (St. Paul's Bay). This is not just a local or recent phenomenon – women sifting through their menfolk's catches

are a common sight on Indian beaches, for instance, and the 'fishwife' is a frequent figure in European art. The engravings of William Hogarth (1697-1764) and the paintings of Frans Hals (1582-1666), to mention two leading artists, present a particular and popular image of the fishwife – coarse, ill-mannered, and prone to getting drunk and brawling. I do not believe that the negative connotation is incidental; rather, it is as though fishwives, with their sexually ambiguous bearing, act as brokers between the rough and masculine world of fishermen (their suppliers) and the domesticated and tranquil lives of housewives (their customers).

This section would not be complete without a look at the national obsession, politics. In this case statistics are only partially useful, since they tend to overemphasize formal structures – gender representation in Parliament, for instance, or the Local Councils. Clearly, there are many men and women who are involved in politics at informal party levels – organizing fund-raising activities, subscriptions, and such. Be that as it may, the gendered segregation of Maltese politics constitutes an interesting field, its most striking aspect being the dearth of women. Lane (1995) holds that, generally speaking, proportional representation systems (such as obtains in Malta) tend to be relatively favourable to women candidates. This is because they consist of multi-member constituencies, which means that parties do not have to select women as sole candidates; rather, they can include them as parts of long lists, minimizing risks.

In spite of this, Maltese political parties have never nominated a sizeable amount of women. Lane (ibid.: 141) notes that "although Maltese political parties have been almost profligate in fielding candidates, this tendency has obviously not accrued to the benefit of women." He goes on to show that, once nominated, female candidates tend to fare as well as their male counterparts. The answer to the paucity of women in Maltese politics must therefore lie in what Lane calls the 'secret garden' of politics – cultural sets of predispositions such as the female gendering of domestic activities, social separation of the sexes, and the allocation of subordinate roles to women.

One should note, however, that since Lane's research, the representation of women in the Maltese Parliament has increased sixfold. In 1995 there was

only one woman (1.5%) out of 65 MPs; in the present Legislature there are six (9.2%), three for each Party. All three for the governing Nationalist Party have portfolios – two are Ministers and one is a Parliamentary Secretary – and two of the three Labour MPs have shadow portfolios. Although current female representation in Parliament is only around half the EU average, there seem to be good prospects for the gradual erosion of occupational segregation in Maltese politics. It would not be out of context to hazard a few suggestions as to why things seem to be moving in the direction of equality.

To my mind, three factors are acting as catalysts in the increasing participation of Maltese women in politics. First, there is a mild shift away from the constraints identified by Lane (ibid.). As the participation of women in the labour market rises, there is a gradual erosion of the idea that the home is the sole domain of the woman. The corollaries are that social separation of the sexes decreases and more and more areas of public responsibility open up to women. This is particularly relevant in the case of the professions and especially medicine and law - the legal and medical professions ('*professjonisti*') have classically constituted the primary recruiting fields of Maltese politics.

The second factor that seems meaningfully to converge with the increasing participation of women in politics is the development of local governance. Modelled on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Local Councils Act (XV/1993) established the principle of local government and the setting up of 68 local councils. Although almost 25% of the 68 councils (16) are made up exclusively of men, the female participation rate for local government currently stands at exactly double that for Parliament. At the time of writing (February 2006), 78, or 18.3%, of a total of 427 councillors, were women.[8] This makes sense when one considers that women have since a number of decades been politically very active at the local, mainly informal, level. Both main parties draw to a large extent on women for the organization of grassroots activities. A number of women therefore have very well developed local political networks, which are often readily translatable into votes at the level

[8] For a quantitative analysis of gender in local politics up to 2003, see the 'Local Councils Election Report' of that year (Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity).

of local governance. Ultimately, experience at the local formal level of politics serves as an excellent springboard for participation at the national level.

A third factor may be affecting women's participation in politics. Increasingly, the State is broadening its scope and penetrating areas which were hitherto considered as private and/or domestic. A look at the portfolio of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, for instance, shows a burgeoning of structures related to family policy, childcare, lifestyle, and social welfare in general. This means that the number of spheres of individual and social life that are being politicised is increasing. Interestingly, since many of these spheres are also female-gendered, more women may find themselves taking part in activities that are newly-politicised and controlled by the State. Clearly, this hypothesis merits a more systematic examination.

IV
ENCOUNTERS WITH THE GENDER BENDERS

In the following sections I shall be looking at the various aspects of the working lives of men and women in non-traditional occupations. Clearly the separation is purely analytical and there is much overlap between the various sections.

The processes of choice: Entering the field

It is important to focus on the processes of decision-making and entry into non-traditional occupations, not least because in many ways they represent the most delicate and risky periods of these men and women's working lives. It is on the one hand true that occupational choice is a lifelong process rather than a one-off event. On the other hand, it seems - certainly from my data but also from general experience – that most questions are asked and battles fought during those first few weeks or months, possibly years. Eventually, as workers learn how to negotiate structural and cultural contexts, as their careers advance and their colleagues get to know them, they settle into the job and question it less.

I shall therefore start at the beginning. My work at MCAST was conducted in order to observe occupational decision-making in its early stages. All my informants were school leavers in the 16-18 age group and as such they offered me an invaluable glimpse into students' first experiences in non-traditional occupational choices. My first line of inquiry concerned choice per se. A number of reasons were given which may analytically be grouped into four categories:

- Family background;
- a strong attraction to the occupation in question;
- a wish to do something unconventional;
- a more or less arbitrary decision.

Some of the students I interviewed had family backgrounds that encouraged them to choose a particular occupational line. Two students at the school of hairdressing had a parent who was a hairdresser, two sea cadets had brothers in the army, and a third cadet was attracted to the job through her grandfather:

> My mother is a hairdresser and she has now been joined at the salon by my sister. I followed them really.

> It's an interesting job, different and creative. My father is a barber. When I used to go to the shop as a child, he didn't really encourage me – he wanted me to do other things (*'tgħallem l-iskola'*). Now of course he encourages me and he has even offered to help set me up as a hairdresser.

> I knew already at age 13 that I wanted to work at sea. I've always wanted to work at sea. My grandfather was in the Merchant Navy and I suppose that's where the attraction comes from. Not that he encouraged me – he passed away when I was a little child, so he couldn't have done so.

Choice and family background are not necessarily correlated in a direct causal way. In fact it was noted that students were often initially *discouraged* from choosing as they did. Choosing in line with family background (be it father, mother, or grandfather), however, gave these students a sense of continuity and this was deemed desirable and advantageous. More practically, having the right background helped because the support structures it provided helped lubricate the process of entry into a non-traditional occupation. It often intersected with a deep-rooted attraction for the occupation, which was a second main reason why students chose particular courses:

> I have always wanted to be a hairdresser. When I was 13 I attended a couple of courses and when my cousins used to visit I always used to play at doing their hair. Eventually I got my O Levels and I applied for Junior College but my heart was here and here I am.

> I have always been attracted to the services. I was interested in joining the Army and I sat for my A levels to be able to join as an Officer. I took a detour to Junior College but I soon realised it was not for me, and I became interested in the cadets course. My mother was against it especially because of the seafaring aspect, but I managed to convince her.

Both 'family background' and 'love for the job' explanations do not necessarily represent causally-linked chains of events. Rather, they are to be understood as narratives of occupation which, like all narratives, may involve poetic licence and back extrapolation. These narratives are important because they present the person as ideally suited for a particular occupation, implying good performance. Through stories of family legacy, deep-rooted attraction, or both, individuals construct themselves as 'the right person for the job'. Such a construction is especially useful to men and women in non-traditional occupations, who may find their claim to their jobs periodically challenged.

I also found that a number of MCAST students chose non-traditional lines simply because they wanted to do something unconventional, something 'different'. This was true of the females in traditionally-male courses. As one sea cadet put it, "I have always wanted to do something different. I dreamed of being a pilot, an electronics engineer, an air hostess ... as a naval officer you get to travel, to see the world." For these students, a non-traditional choice was also a choice away from the claustrophobic world of local, rigid, gender-inscribed roles. Perhaps less tangibly, during my conversations I sometimes got the impression that these young people were 'out to shock' and that they actually derived pleasure from doing something unusual. It must be kept in mind that at the age of 17 very few people have clear career trajectories in mind. For many, occupational choice is a way of exploring – and questioning - the world for the first time after years of straightforward and sheltered schooling. This came across very clearly during my interviews with female students in construction-related and car mechanic courses; there was a lot of giggling ('*issa naraw x'ġej,* 'let's see what's in store')', and emphasis on difference - as one student put it, "I have always been a bit mad" ('*dejjem kont naqra miġnuna*').

This line of thought, I found, was more applicable to girls - which makes sense, given that teenage boys tend to be encouraged more than girls to take up exploratory extra-curricular activities (sports, camping, hobbies, etc.). A headmistress I had a conversation with told me that she thought that one of the reasons why males tend to do better than females at challenging jobs is that young men tend to 'involve themselves' more than girls; as she put it, "of course girls do sports and all that, but see what happens the minute they find a boyfriend".

A few (mostly male) students I interviewed held that they had 'ended up' in their particular fields because of job considerations. As one male in the secretarial course put it:

> I have 10 O levels but I hate studying and I didn't want to take it further. My mother and especially my grandma, however, were of a different opinion. So I came to MCAST, which is more job-oriented and not academic like Junior College and University. I chose secretarial studies because it prepares one for business. I wanted to choose Banking but people told me that there weren't many jobs there. My mother and my grandma are delighted, of course.

This excerpt is fairly typical of a small number of interviewees who did not seem to have a clear idea as to why they were following a particular course. This was true of the less demanding courses (such as Foundation Studies, a level which does not require any entry qualifications) but not at all applicable to courses such as maritime and hairdressing, in which cases students were more inspired. One aspect which I found very interesting was the role of mothers. Most of my informants told me that, in choosing a non-traditional field, they had gone against their mothers' wishes – they specifically mentioned their mothers. It is widely known that mothers tend to be closer to the educational process than fathers - in fact to encourage children in their studies, '*tirsistilhom għall-iskola*', is seen as an essential component of the mothering programme. My interviews very strongly confirmed this role, not least with respect to occupational choice, and this has rather far-reaching policy implications.

These experiences at MCAST are not very different from what I came across in my broader research. My informants had various stories to tell and the following quotes should serve to give the reader an idea of this variability:

> I had good options at secondary school and career aspirations in the social sciences. However, I chose the technical field. My background had something to do with it. I was always daddy's little girl, going fishing with him, helping him load cartridges for hunting, helping him in the fields. I always wore my hair short and my fingernails were always broken! Plus, I used to spend time with my older cousins, fixing cars and things like that. Background helps.

> My father, now retired, was also a bus driver and owner. Before becoming a driver I had other jobs, one at Dar tal-Providenza, another in manufacturing ... I know, my calling (*'ħajra'*) is a tad unusual. Growing up, however, I was always pottering around buses with my father. I loved to sit on the steering wheel as he drove! In a sense I have always wanted to be a driver. However, it happened when we bought a new bus and did not want anyone else to drive it (*'ikollok trakk ġdid trid tibża' għalih'*). What with rising cost of living, might as well drive your bus yourself rather than employing people.

> I have been a port worker for eight months now; previously I was a housewife. My grandfather and father were both port workers. You see, our job is inherited, and the pay is very good. I have no brothers. At first my father was reluctant to pass the job on to me, but we saw a lawyer who suggested we go ahead so as not to lose our hereditary right. My son has already agreed to take over eventually.

Again, men tended to be less enthusiastic about their occupational choices, and more prone to narrating plots based on arbitrary decisions and circumstances. Such differences were commonly encountered by Williams (1989) in her work with male nurses in the US. Many of her

interviewees, in fact, did not 'freely' enter nursing in the first place. Rather, they entered the occupation from prior hospital experience or because they perceived only limited options; some even said that nursing was probably the last occupation they would have considered in their youth.[1]

It would, however, be unfair to try to clear-cut the argument or over-stress the point. Some of the male primary schoolteachers I interviewed, for instance, told me that they had chosen their occupation because they loved working with children. Interestingly, a number of men I talked to had entered non-traditional jobs as a result of previous involvement in NGOs and/or voluntary work, usually linked to the Church. I found this to be especially true of men in occupations that involved a level of caring. Two facilitators had previously worked with disabled children as part of their activities in a village 'prayer group'. One primary instructor was a football coach in his spare time, coaching seven-year-olds. The following was one of my more heart-warming interview moments:

> At my parents' home in Gozo, we keep horses. Our neighbours had a disabled child and I used to let him ride a pony. He really progressed and eventually could ride it all by himself. It was great ... At the job interview I mentioned this, and they liked it.

Another facilitator first started taking an interest in care work through his activities as a member ('*soċju*') of MUSEUM, a lay Catholic organisation that is very well integrated in local communities, particularly at the grass-roots level.

In the case of women in non-traditional occupations reasons for choice were very similar in flavour to what I came across at MCAST. "When I was a teenager my wall was covered with posters of ships. And teenybop idols, of course! But the ships were very important", a Naval Officer told

[1] Note, however, that in Malta the word 'nurse' does not have the same semantic connotations (with breastfeeding) as it does in English. It has been incorporated into Maltese, to be sure, but it has only one meaning. In this sense at least, the occupation is less female-gendered in Malta than it is in Britain and the US.

me, echoing the theme of exploring the world in new ways. The pictures of ships on her walls represented mobility and escape: "I always wanted to leave Malta, to see the world, to travel – and I have". It is worth mentioning at this stage that, especially for women, non-traditional jobs are often the only alternative to repetitive, alienating work. This is particularly true of women who are not very well qualified but would like to work. As Melanie, previously a 'factory girl' and now involved in haulage, told me, "This job has its drawbacks but it's much better than being locked up in a factory with the same people for several hours a day". As I watched her work, I really could see her point.

One thing I found particularly fascinating was the importance of the 'work-phase'[2] in the case of qualified workers. Three of my informants in fact told me that they had first sampled their non-traditional field while on work-phase placement, and two of them had specifically asked for that particular placement. Because it is of fixed duration and has no delusions of permanence, the work-phase can be seen as a sort of betwixt and between the (safe) world of school and the (risky) world of work. It is a tentative, low-risk first step that dares to be experimental. Given this quality, policy-makers could probably seek to challenge occupational segregation by assigning more students to non-traditional fields. As my data show, the stakes are low and the gamble could well pay off.

Against the grain

One aspect of the gendering of labour (and therefore of occupational crossing-over) that emerged very clearly during my interviews was that of physicality – of the ways, that is, in which gender associations are *embodied* and acted out in a particular type of *physical* environment. Occupations that involve '*xogħol ta' barra*' (outdoor work) and/or '*xogħol ta' strapazz*' (physically arduous work) are almost invariably associated with men, and the physical environments within which they exist are accordingly male-gendered. Two female teleclerks I interviewed told me that probably the most trying aspect of their work was the physical environment:

[2] A system in which Junior College and University students are assigned work, usually in the Public Service, during the summer vacation. Students are usually asked to indicate their preferences.

> Our main problem is that we work outdoors (‘*qiegħdin barra*’). There are no hygienic facilities, no bathrooms or anything. For men it’s easy, they just urinate behind a (shipping) container – it’s not the first time we chance upon someone doing just that and beat a hasty retreat! There are no offices or canteens where to take a break. The men just sit around anywhere (‘*raġel jaqbad u jintefa` ma’ l-art*’), but we can’t do that.

Male-dominated jobs have created their own (male) environments in which women find it hard to cope. A shipping captain told me how woman sailors and officers create logistical problems on board, in that they have to have their own cabin and particular privacy arrangements (such as separate bathrooms) that are not taken into account when ships are designed. It is not only ‘rough’ physical environments that are gendered. The ‘professors’ table’ at the University canteen is hardly a ship’s double bottom but one female academic has gone on record as saying that as a woman she feels unwelcome when, as often happens, (male) academics share men’s jokes (pers. comm.). Even equipment can cause hitches – a female technical officer, for example, explained to me that her department had had to order small-sized safety boots especially for her, and that it had been a long wait.

One of my more instructive interviews was that with a female port worker, conducted at her workplace at the Marsa docks. The place is essentially a large hall with a counter at one end where the clerks who assign work to the stevedores sit and organise the day’s schedule. We sat in a corner on a bench, totally surrounded by small groups of men bantering, arguing hotly about football, and even at one point pulling crackers to some very loud bangs. When I listened to my recording at home, I was struck by the extent to which sound can be gendered. My informant spent her working life in a soundscape that was completely masculine.

One should note at this stage that the sectioning and gendering of space is a very real phenomenon even *within* workplaces. Figure IV.1 is based on a number of observational visits to a supermarket; it shows very

clearly that the workspace, while gender-neutral as a whole, is internally gendered in very definite ways, according to task.

The second aspect of physicality I encountered in the field was that of embodiment – the gendering of labour through the body of the worker, that is. This was particularly true of women in male-dominated jobs, especially those '*ta' strapazz*'. As a female port worker told me,

> When I told my friends and family that I was interested in the job, they laughed. They teased me about cutting hunks of bread with a penknife, and going to work with a pet Greenfinch in a cage ('*mur arak tiekol il-ħobż bil-mus, jew sejra x-xogħol bil-verdun taħt abtek!*' – a common image of the male manual worker).

Snide remarks about broken fingernails, sunburnt complexion, and oil-stained hands were very often mentioned by female interviewees when I asked how their friends and colleagues related to them. Not surprisingly, humour is often used to talk about gendered bodies; as Billig (2005) argues, humour makes sense socially as a means of upholding norms and cultural meanings (in this case with respect to gender and labour). A technician whose work involves climbing ladders to fix electricity units in high places told me that (male) clients would sometimes remark that she should have worn a skirt; and when I asked a police constable why there are no women traffic policemen, he told me, "Can you imagine, everyone would stare and leer at them and there would be many accidents!". One of the funniest and most powerful moments in the Coen brothers' cult film *Fargo* (1996) occurs when heavily-pregnant Police Chief Marge, searching for clues to a murder, bends forward and appears to scrutinize the ground; when quizzed by her colleague, she replies "It's just morning sickness". Clearly, even if such humour fits contemporary social critiques, it is not always welcome, and may in some instances render life irritating for women and men in non-traditional occupations. The technician explained to me her annoyance at such jokers: "On bad days when work is difficult I don't feel like old and tired jokes about knickers and skirts, and I sometimes react and tell them to sod off".

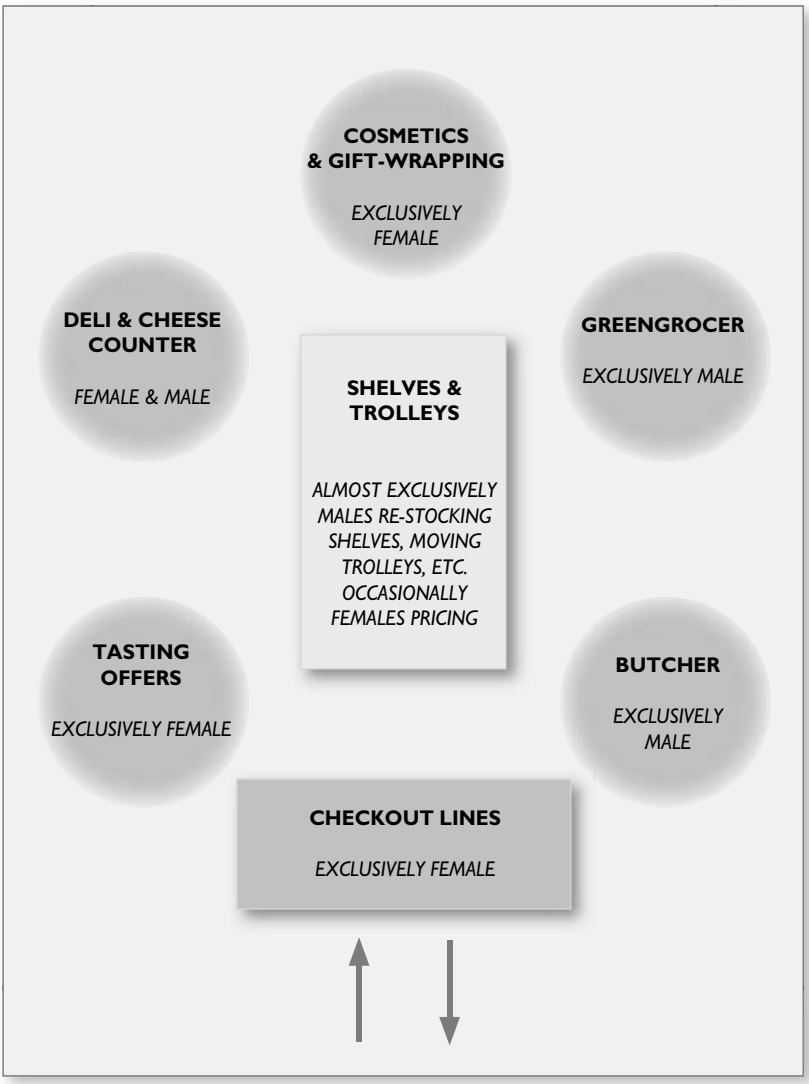


FIGURE IV.1 Stylised layout plan of Jolly Supermarket, Fgura.

There seem to be two closely-related ideas at play. First, arduous manual work is not seen as feminine in that it does not really fit in with the image of a woman; as one informant put it, "*in-natura ta' mara mhix ta' strapazz*" ('arduous work is not in a woman's nature'). And of course, occupational

segregation is often popularly explained in terms of physical strength. Women, the argument goes, can never be builders or dock workers, simply because they lack the strength necessary for the job. One of the questions I asked was whether informants could think of any job that women definitely could not do; heavy manual jobs – notably construction – were always mentioned (‘*ma nimmaġinax mara tibni*’ – ‘I cannot imagine a woman building’). The logic is prima facie tempting, but several factors mitigate against it.

First, it seems to me that the fact that machinery and masonry are ‘too heavy’ for women (which they sometimes are) is a result of the fact that machines and stone slabs were invented by men for men. There is no reason why in Malta the standard *ċangun* (stone block) should weigh 70kg instead of, say, 10kg (indeed a local entrepreneur had at one point suggested this change to make builders’ lives easier). It would seem that when the world was made, the tenet ‘man is the measure of all things’ was taken too literally. The second point is that the argument from strength does not really stand up to cross-cultural comparisons. In sub-Saharan Africa and many parts of Asia, for example, collecting firewood and fetching water are back-breaking tasks that involve long treks across difficult terrain carrying heavy loads – yet they are exclusively women’s occupations.[3] In India women commonly work alongside men on construction sites, sometimes carrying an infant in one arm and a bucket full of cement in the other (pers. obs.).

It is not just construction and other ‘tough’ jobs that draw upon embodied distinctions of gender. During my interviews with men involved in primary education I was struck by the degree to which popular psychology was used to female-gender occupations. “We were very few boys in the B.Ed. Primary course, men cannot deal with children (‘*mhux kapaċi mat-tfal*’)”, a primary schoolteacher told me. ‘*Paċenzja*’ (patience) emerged as the key and most desirable attribute of primary schoolteachers, facilitators,

[3] In Caroline Link’s film *Nowhere in Africa* (2001), Owuor, the Kenyan manservant, offers to help the German-Jew refugee Jettel in her trek back from the well. He is jeered and laughed at by a crowd of Kenyan women at the well. In this case Owuor’s sensitivity to cultural diversity was not matched by that of his onlookers.

and kindergarten assistants, while '*dixxiplina*' (discipline) was described as an essential characteristic of higher-level education (particularly at secondary school). Further, women are thought to be naturally patient and artificially disciplined, while for men the opposite is the case. It is believed that the two qualities may be found in both men and women: "Discipline comes from the person ('*id-dixxiplina tiġi minnek*'); my wife is a teacher and I think she's more of a Hitler than I am in class." Men in primary schoolteaching, however, feel that they have to work hard at being patient, simply because it is not 'in their nature'.

Another aspect of embodied gendering is that of physical contact. My informants told me that one of the difficulties that men in primary school education face is the physicality of the job - the contact with children and what they produce. The following quotes are typical:

> I cannot even begin to imagine myself teaching infants. As men we feel much more comfortable with older children. Women in general are much more patient. Take for example Year 1 children: You have to hold their hands to teach them how to write, they smear you with their sticky lunches ('*jiġu jdellku l-lunch miegħek*') ... I really can't imagine myself.

> I don't think women are better with children. Except of course very young children, such as those in Year 1, who are like babies really. In that case, yes, women are much better adapted ('*il-mara iktar addattata*'). I cannot imagine taking young children to the toilet, for example.

These embodied distinctions are significant not least because they pattern the gendering of many caring occupations and professions (psychology, nursing, occupational therapy, and such). Facilitating, for instance, was described to me by many as a particularly inappropriate job for men, because of the prolonged physical contact it involves between facilitator and disabled child. Older children, I was told, were an exception – in that case male facilitators were needed to care for boys at and after the age of puberty.

Partly of course the answer to these differences lies in different socialisation processes in society at large. (In this sense my informant's comparison between schoolchildren and babies is relevant.) Perhaps more interestingly, however, from my interviews it emerged that men are thought to be better at (literally) handling the world – as in machines, tools, stone, etc. – while women are better when it comes to physical interaction with people. As a builder's son told me (my emphasis), "*missieri kburi bix-xogħol tiegħu, frott ta' jdejħ, mhux idejn ta' mara! ... jien nahseb l-anqas tgħaddilhom minn moħħhom il-bennejja li n-nisa jibnu*" ('my father is proud of his work, *produced by his hands not the hands of a woman*! ... I don't think it ever crosses builders' minds that women could become builders').

These deep-rooted cultural meanings are relevant in two ways. First, they pattern the lives of women and men in non-traditional occupations on a daily basis. A job interview may turn out to be a gruelling and sexist nightmare but it is ultimately a one-off event. The embodied gendering of labour, however, is a process that these workers have literally to live with. Second, this type of gendering often goes hand in hand with hierarchies. '*Xogħol ta' strapazz*' tends to be well-paid by virtue of the hardships it involves – construction work, for instance, commands high daily rates in contemporary Malta. And of course '*dixxiplina*', which is male, is a higher-prized quality (on a national scale of salaries and prestige) than the female '*paċenzja*'. I have shown elsewhere how (male) dockyard workers at Malta Shipyards have historically used the notion of heavy manual and dangerous work as a bargaining tool for better salaries, not least through a system of bonuses known as 'danger money' (Falzon 2000, 2002). Dockyard workers are particularly fluent in the language of male-gendered labour (hard hats, nicknames, blackened faces, etc.) and this language is crucial when negotiating better conditions. Given such a powerful gendering context, it is not surprising that manual work at Malta Shipyards is an exclusively male domain which is very difficult for women to break into. A few years ago two women joined the apprenticeship scheme only to give up and leave after a few months.[4] This is by no means an endemic situation – consider, for instance, the male-dominated imagery of the

[4] A.Restall, Personnel Manager, Malta Shipyards (pers. comm.). A small number of women have clerical jobs at the company.

miners' industrial ferment in 1980s Britain (with Arthur Scargill as the protagonist-hero), or Lech Walesa's shipyard workers and Solidarnosc in Poland.

At this stage the argument links up with ideas about the nation-state. In their discussion on gender and the nation-state, Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1989) have shown how women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities, cultural reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, ideological reproducers of the collectivity and transmitters of its culture, symbolic signifiers of ethnic/national categories, and participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. Their point on 'economic struggle' makes much sense within the present context, since the image of the worker is central to a number of nationalist narratives. (Gellner's theory of nationalism (1983) posits a meaningful convergence between the development of industrial capitalism and the rise of nationalist ideology.) In certain forms of nationalist narratives, notably those of a socialist[5] bent, the process of the glorification of the worker as the basic and most essential component of the nation often uses imagery of strapping men in heavy manual jobs – thus lending these male-gendered occupations a level of prestige and power. Examples are not lacking in Malta, especially since local nationalist narratives include the post-colonial theme of 'building' the nation. The Workers' Memorial in Msida, for example, gives pride of place to a working man carrying a heavy sledgehammer (his wife, alongside him, holds a baby), and the Freedom Monument in Birgu actually portrays a man in a boiler suit, presumably a dockyard worker, to represent the Maltese native taking over from the British coloniser. (It actually *was* a dockyard worker in a boiler suit who raised the Maltese flag on the big night. See Plates IV.1/2) The '*Repubblika ibbażata fuq ix-xogħol*' ('work as the foundations of the Republic' – a central theme of the Maltese nation-state narrative, and indeed of the Constitution) has the face of a man doing a man's work. Metaphors of work and workers, '*il-ħaddiema*', are almost invariably

[5] Including National Socialist - consider for instance the work of 'Hitler's sculptor', Arno Breker (1900-1991). Interestingly, although nationalism is traditionally seen as 'rightist' and socialism as 'leftist', they often produce similar narratives.

PLATE IV.1 Gendered Labour. The Workers' Memorial, Msida (1980) (Photo by author)

PLATE IV.2 (Male) Workers' Republic. Freedom Memorial, Vittoriosa (1979) (Photo by author)

male: '*is-saħħa tal-ħaddiem*' ('the power of the worker'), or '*il-ħaddiema magħqudin f'ponn wieħed*' ('workers united in a clenched fist'), are classical rhetorical devices of worker empowerment, and they draw upon the image of physicality my informants told me so much about. (My earlier point on trade unions being controlled by men makes sense within this framework of understanding.) Metaphors of physical strength and toughness may be nuanced aspects of everyday working life but they always exist in interaction with the rhetoric and power structures of the nation-state. Within which women as workers have little or no place.

The transgression of gender roles

> A woman shall not wear an article proper to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's dress; for anyone who does such things is an abomination to the Lord, your God. *(Deuteronomy 22:5)*

One of the challenges that workers in non-traditional occupations experience on a daily basis is that of gender-role transgression. Many of

these men and women feel that their occupational choice problematizes their masculinity or femininity. Men in female-gendered jobs often live with the threat of being considered losers, effeminate or even homosexual, while women in male-gendered jobs risk being labelled 'butch' or lesbian. When I asked one informant to describe male hairdressers, his answer was "*Dawk kollha jixxutjaw kontra*" ('They do things the wrong way round'). "I don't tell anyone outside a small circle of friends that I play football", a young woman who plays League football told me, "people immediately assume I'm, you know ...". With this in mind, men and women in non-traditional occupations often resort to damage-control techniques, as it were. This point came across very clearly when I approached a male hairdresser for an interview:

> Of course you may interview me. I'm no paedophile or pervert though ... Granted, many hairdressers are gay. I'm quite the opposite - I chase skirts all day (*ma nistax nara dublett*)!

Which seemed true. During the time I spent in his salon he passed several saucy remarks to his lady clients, often in a loud and brash way. Admittedly, not all male hairdressers resort to such overt displays of sexuality (the second one I interviewed, for instance, was very composed). Most of my male interviewees, however, tended in some way or another to emphasize their masculinity – generally through the use of language, by saying things that men say, as men say them. Writing about the US context, Williams (1989) and a number of subsequent authors argue that men who cross over into female-dominated occupations are immediately suspected of not being 'real men'. They find they have to manage their gender identity on a daily basis and they do this by accentuating their masculinity and attempting to distance themselves from their female colleagues. She goes on to argue that unlike masculinity, femininity does not seem to be threatened when women engage in non-traditional activities. Various psychological theories have been proposed to explain this difference (see for instance Chodorow 1978) and the arguments are many and often conflicting.

Based on my data I cannot unreservedly agree with Williams' distinction. Although it is true that men in non-traditional occupations seem to

display a more marked anxiety than their female counterparts, I suggest that the crucial difference lies in the *type* of sexuality that is represented. In the case of women in non-traditional occupations, the situation is complex.

First, many women in non-traditional jobs *do* feel threatened in similar ways. As Holly, a British explosives engineer, deemed fit to qualify,[6]

> I don't think I'm a particularly 'butch' girl – in fact, out of work at least, I'm probably one of the most girly girls you could meet. People think it's a butch job and so on, but the only physical work that we do is literally putting the explosives in – which is 5% of the work . A lot of the time I'm wearing a business suit, going to meetings.

Perhaps more importantly, the women I interviewed emphasized their femininity in a particular, culture-bound way. What they emphasized was their modesty, their propriety as '*nisa tal-affari tagħhom*' ('women of good morals'). Basically they felt that working in a male-dominated environment threatened to undermine their reputation. The challenge in this situation was how to '*iżżomm id-dekor tiegħek*' ('preserve your honour') and the best solution was to avoid familiarity with their male colleagues, '*ma taghtix kunfidenzi*' ('avoid over-familiarity'). This indicates that femininity was being articulated within the framework of what anthropologists studying the Mediterranean have called the values of 'honour and shame' (see Peristiany 1965). (This may explain the divergence from Williams' data, which derived from an entirely different context.) Working in a male environment surrounded by men threatens a woman's honour in the eyes of others (and honour is always an ascribed status). As a telecoms technician told me, "people must say 'look at those two together in that manhole, God knows what goes on'".

I suggest that Maltese women in non-traditional occupations are caught in something of a double bind. Because they transgress gender roles (by

[6] As reported on BBCNews, 4 August 2005.

doing rough manual work, for instance), they risk being labelled unfeminine. Unlike men, however, they cannot compensate by emphasizing their femininity in overt ways, since such an attitude would seriously undermine their honour, which is already threatened because of the fact that they work surrounded by men. On the contrary they feel the need to adopt techniques (such as 'appropriate dress', '*tilbes diċenti*', commonly mentioned by my informants) that effectively downplay their femininity. All my informants thought that decorum is an innate quality, '*dik trid tiġi minnek*', '*is-serjeta` iżżommha int*', which fits in beautifully with the widely-theorized notion of honour as an intrinsic quality of the person – in this formulation, the woman is ultimately responsible for the maintenance of her honour. The type of femininity these women project may have escaped the attention of previous scholarly contributors, but it is very significant indeed.

The argument that non-traditional jobs may threaten a woman's honour holds particularly well for occupations that are historically and profoundly male-gendered. These occupations tend to generate what are often termed 'sexually-permeated workplaces'. A female port worker told me how she sometimes avoids her colleagues: "sometimes when they gather ('*tarahom qaqoċċa*') and tell (men's) jokes, the thing to do is to leave – it's up to you to be firm ('*minnek tiġi*')". A gathering of men telling bawdy jokes is no place for an honourable woman, even if she happens to be their colleague. The experience of Lara, a 28 year-old qualified First Officer who spent almost two years at sea before giving up, is very telling:

> It was getting very uncomfortable for me as a woman. If I as much as said hello to someone on the bridge, rumours would immediately spread that we were having an affair. I had absolutely no social life except at our ports of call where I usually socialised at the Seafarer's Clubs, which are run by the Church and very woman-friendly. But on board ship my attitude had to be different – I couldn't afford to make friends, or at least it was very difficult to find the right balance of friendliness and distance. I became very solitary and introvert. Is that sane? I don't think so.

In the case of Lara the very particular circumstance of living and working in a confined space with an all-male crew for several weeks at a time meant that work and socialisation had to be kept separate in a rigid way. One should add that Lara's problems draw in part upon a whole subtext of images of the sexual lives of sailors – images that have been portrayed beautifully in Melville's *Billy Budd* (1924), for example. There are other occupations that present particular problems to women because of some sort of subtext. Work that involves night shifts, for instance, is seen as particularly threatening, presumably because eroticism is classically considered a creature of the night; and until quite recently, air-hostesses were considered somewhat suspect (in this case mobility threatens honour).

I should add, as a last but no less essential comment on this issue, that even the complexity outlined above does not fully do justice to the mechanics of the transgression of gender roles. Little instances during my fieldwork conveyed to me the feeling that cross-over is not all bleak. Rather like the knight Parsifal, engaging in a non-traditional occupation carries the connotation of discovering one's 'other side'. The Jungian psychology needed to explain this is beyond the scope of this work, but certain tonalities of voice, certain looks – such as when women told me about their dirty fingernails and men about their '*paćenzja*' – pointed directly at the gratifying aspects of transgression. One of my informants (a male hairdresser) had no qualms hiding them: "When I went into hairdressing, fashion itself was gay. I wore turquoise trousers, bright red shirts, and god knows what else! I loved being in a room with ten women."

Career development and work experiences

During fieldwork I only came across one worker who had serious misgivings about her job; this was a woman in a specialized but completely male-dominated occupation who had found herself in difficult circumstances that included a sexual harassment incident. My other informants tended to be optimistic about their prospects and in fact quite a few of them had excellent occupational profiles that featured promotions and upward mobility.[7] When

[7] Note, however, the issue of selectivity bias. My brief was to do research with people *in* non-traditional occupations, not drop-outs.

I asked if they thought of their occupation as a job for life within which they could develop their talents, the majority answered in the affirmative. In spite of the many difficulties, in fact, the prospects and experiences of men and women in non-traditional occupations are not always gloomy. I even came across several instances where crossing-over was described as an asset. A woman bus driver, for instance, told me that passengers tend to be more polite to her than to her male colleagues. And male primary schoolteachers felt that it was easier as a man to deal with the mothers of students (the mothers generally represent the parents, especially in primary school), simply because they tend to keep their distance – "*il-parents ma jiehdux kunfidenzi daqs kemm jiehdu ma' teachers nisa*". It must be remembered here that parent interference – as distinct from participation – can be a problem for teachers, who find their authority undermined by that of parents.

Analyzing a number of interviews with male primary schoolteachers in the US, Allan (1993) holds that being under-represented offered his informants both disadvantages and advantages. On the one hand, they felt they were given preferential treatment at their recruitment interviews, for a number of reasons: The institution's commitment to affirmative action in favour of equality, the desire of male school principals for male companionship, and the parents' demand for male role models in the classrooms. This last reason was in fact the most frequently given rationale men perceived as a hiring advantage. On the other hand this preferential treatment resulted in tensions with their female colleagues: "The men felt challenged to prove to women the sincerity of their motivation, their aptitude for teaching, and sensitivity in human relations" (ibid.: 118). Their gender thus served both as an asset and a liability – as Allan puts it, it put them in a 'double bind' situation. My data tend to support these findings.

KARL'S UNISEX SALON
(name and location changed)

Karl is a hairdresser and has been in the business for twenty years. He did his training at the Vidal Sassoon School of Hairdressing at Davies Mews, London, and opened his salon in Swieqi shortly

after returning to Malta. He is married with two children. The salon is 'unisex' but most clients are women.

The salon consists of a very large space with two rows of workstations in the centre. There are eight workstations which means that the salon can accommodate up to eight clients at a time; most of the time there are two or three clients but it tends to get very busy on Saturdays. Karl employs three female assistants, two of whom have been with him for a couple of years. Most appointments are arranged by telephone. Both Karl and his assistants answer the phone and take appointments but any difficulties there may be are sorted out by him. Upon entering the salon one is greeted cheerfully by Karl and asked to take a seat at a washbasin/workstation or, if all hands are occupied, in the waiting area. As Karl's '*Ibdihieli lil Mrs. ...*' ('Prepare Mrs. ...') indicates, the assistants' first task is to prepare clients by washing their hair, seating them, etc.

The client's hair is then done. Most of the work is done by assistants except for cuts, which are done almost exclusively by Karl. Whenever clients discuss a cut or hair colour they do so always with Karl, not with an assistant. The 'dirty work' of dyeing is done by assistants but Karl checks on the process from time to time. Assistants have other tasks to do, such as sweeping the salon of hair trimmings and rinsing equipment. When it comes to payment, the cashier is always Karl.

Karl, then, spends most of his time hovering between clients, chatting to each individually or to all of them at once, discussing cuts and colours and a million other things, checking on his assistants' progress, taking appointments and payments, etc. He is never rude to his assistants but he makes it clear, in nuanced ways, that they are just that and that he is the salon owner and hairdresser.

The relation between career prospects and non-traditional occupations can get very intricate. Male hairdressers are a good example. Consider the following two quotes, drawn from interviews with an established hairdresser and the headmistress of a hairdressing school:

> I used to employ men but not any more. They tend to build a clientele (from among your own clients!) and then bugger off. Women do it as well but much less. I sort of pity young men in hairdressing, they do not readily find employment. I've heard students complain that no one wants to employ them.

> Salon owners tell me outright not to send boys as trainees. Generally I would say that the boys who study here have that little extra ambition and they often open their own salons. I find them more creative, more adventurous. I hear about my male ex-students much more often than I do about my female ones. On television for example, the ex-students I see tend to be boys. They have that edge when it comes to restyling and being in touch with the latest fashions.

In this case the balance sheet is very difficult to draw up. I have already discussed the implications of creativity and prestige that men in hairdressing (a minority) enjoy, so in that sense male hairdressers are at an advantage – they are seen as independent-minded stylists and entrepreneurs. However, this often hinders their training and apprenticeship period because they find it difficult to place themselves with a salon. Ultimately, however, this may paradoxically benefit them, since the employability hurdle encourages them to set up their own salon.[8]

Prestige is one of the factors that pattern the work experiences of men and women in non-traditional occupations. Williams (1989) argues that in general women are much more eager to join male-dominated occupations than men are to join female-dominated ones. This is in part due to the

[8] Edna Bonacich's classic 'middleman-minority' theory (1973) makes exactly the same argument for immigrants, arguing that employment difficulties push them into self-employed business.

higher pay and greater status associated with men's occupations. My data tend to support this argument. Male primary schoolteachers, for instance, struggle with the problem that their occupation enjoys a low prestige. They do not agree that it should be so, of course, and they think that measures should be taken to change this perception. It might not trouble them that much, but they are acutely aware of it:

> At Sixth Form, teaching Primary School was not an option for me. Today, however, I think differently. I used to think that teaching children shows a lack of maturity in a man ... I think the methods we use put many men off. We teach through games not through lectures. Maybe many people see this as childish for a man. In this school I don't really feel this - here children are very mature and advanced.

My informant, who teaches in a Primary school in a working-class and relatively deprived area, was referring to the fact that children from such backgrounds tend to be worldly-wise. In a sense, of course, he was reinforcing the stereotype he set out to demolish in the first place, since it was only the relative 'maturity' of his rather particular students that enabled him to avoid the 'immaturity' of teaching average children. His was not a one-off opinion. Another primary schoolteacher told me that he felt rather silly in his job at first, that it was actually a woman's job: "*Thossok naqra qisek iblaħ, anke meta għażilt kont ngħid dan iktar għan-nisa*". Language is a very important clue here. One of the prized qualities of primary schoolteachers as explained by my informants is to be able to pitch lessons at the level of students, "*tinżel għall-livell tagħhom*". This is a desirable attribute for a teacher to possess, but the metaphor of downward mobility ('*tinżel*') expresses exactly the loss of prestige that men in this occupation are threatened with. Male facilitators are particularly open to this threat, since their job involves sitting in class *on the children's side*, effectively following primary school lessons – "*terġa ssir tifel żgħir*" ('you go back to your school days'), as one facilitator put it, adding that he finds it quite amusing that he spends his time reading the same books he used to enjoy in his childhood ("*tal*-Ladybird"). Another told me that his uncle joked with him that he had just finished school but was now going back there ("*spiċċajt l-iskola u se terġa' tmur fiha?*").

To make sense of this one should keep in mind my earlier question: What does society value? Caring and 'going down' to the level of children are appreciated but not prestigious. The two male nurses I interviewed both maintained that one of their greatest concerns is that nursing is not valued, '*in-nurses mhux stmati*'. Further, I was told that nurses rank low on the hospital staff hierarchy. Typical comments were, "nurses are servile – in fact in the past they were actually called servants ('*servjenti*')", and "nurses have always been the underdogs".

At this stage one notes an interesting divergence. Consider the following two quotes, the first from an interview with a male nurse, and the second from an interview with a female director-owner of an IT company:

> My ambition has always been Engineering – that has always been my line. As things turned out I was very ill when I sat for my Physics exam, and I failed it. I tried Catering and got a number of certificates. In those days, however, the trend was to go for a government job ('*tidħol mal-gvern*'). I am not very tall and I couldn't become a policeman; so I resigned myself ('*għidt m'hemmx x'taġħmel*') and applied to join the Nursing course. In those days well-qualified boys did not, of course, choose Nursing. They went to University or studied other things.

> I have always been extremely ambitious. People tell me I should have been born male ('*missek ġejt raġel*'). There never was any doubt to my mind that I wanted to do something different. At University, for my BSc course, I was one of four girls in a class of boys. This made me study harder and I placed first in my finals. I did a Masters, now I'm doing a Ph.D., I started my own business. Yes there were obstacles – the bank manager, for example, would not give me a loan until my husband signed for me. But I'm ambitious and I wanted to be my own boss, which is what I am today.

The narratives of women in non-traditional occupations tend to be upwardly-mobile, centred on the theme of striving to attain prestige against the odds – the odds being sexism, the glass ceiling, resistance

from colleagues, etc. Two of the women I interviewed, both in top business positions, were quite happy to tell me that they considered themselves 'unemployable' – by which they meant independent-minded and ambitious. Typically: "I grew up in an environment where all the ladies of the house were successful businesswomen – all the women of my family are strong characters." This attitude was not restricted to high-status jobs – in fact, a number of my female informants in manual 'men's' work told me that they were very proud that they had managed to succeed.

Their male counterparts, on the other hand, tend to tell downwardly-mobile stories that start out with what are deemed high aspirations and then gradually subside into a condition of acceptance – '*spiċċajt ħawn*' ('I ended up here'). Men, that is, engage in non-traditional occupations *in spite of* prestige; women do so *because* of it. Which does not mean of course that men in non-traditional occupations do not like what they do, or that given a chance they would leave. In quite a few cases the main reason behind acceptance was an attraction to the job ('*vokazzjoni*' in the case of teachers); they saw much scope for their individual development. Perhaps the feeling was best summed up by John, who has been a nurse for 25 years. When I asked him whether he would recommend nursing to a young man, he said he would tell him, "*ħabib, jien ma jiddispjaċinix, imma jekk issib xi ħaġa oħra ...*" ('Buddy, I don't regret my choice, but if you can do something else ...'). Similar responses were encountered by Williams in her work with male nurses in the US (1989). One nurse she interviewed for example said that he hoped his own son would choose a profession other than nursing. Williams argues that a daughter who enters a 'man's job' *enhances* her status, while a son who does 'women's work' suffers a *decline* in status; my data tend to support the argument.

Interestingly, male nurses (and men in non-traditional occupations in general) very often do 'men's' jobs on a part-time basis, and quite a few carpenters, plumbers, plasterers, and so forth, turn out on closer inspection to be nurses on their days off (many nurses work a day-off-night-off shift). The rationale here is no doubt some extra cash but I do not think it is far-fetched to argue that this part-time work has the side

benefit of recouping some prestige, as it were, or at least re-gendering the working self in line with the mainstream. Clearly, this is a *side* benefit, a perk as it were, which many can do without – in fact many nurses today work part-time as nurses in private hospitals.

Another important issue with respect to work and career aspirations was that men in non-traditional jobs tended to think that they deserved better in terms of prospects and especially salary. "I believe that government should provide more opportunities for us men, especially promotions ... as it is, men only choose nursing when they find nothing better to do", a nurse told me. Schoolteachers were equally vociferous: "Our salary is a slap in the face. I mean, a notary studies for five years, as I did, and earns at least double what I do. Is this fair?"; "There are much better jobs in terms of salary, and we spent five years at University"; "Many people think there are no career prospects in teaching; our salaries are bad and in fact I work part-time in a shop".

It is of course a truism to talk about people complaining about salaries. If we link these staple complaints to ideas about prestige and gendered aspirations, however, they take on a completely different flavour. Men in non-traditional occupations feel cheated of adequate remuneration and respect. (Interestingly only one or two female informants complained about their salaries, and none about prestige.) Salaries are always linked to the social prestige of an occupation, and both are in turn linked to gender. A man in a traditionally-female occupation, therefore, is likely to resent the relatively low prestige and salary of that occupation, particularly if he is well-educated as in the case of teachers, who have University qualifications. Again, I emphasize that this does not mean that these men are not satisfied with their jobs – quite a few told me that they loved their work, and that salary was a secondary issue.

All my teacher informants but one (who told me that his love of being in a classroom is too strong) expressed aspirations to become Assistant Heads and eventually Heads of School. Interestingly, they legitimated these wishes by referring to their gender: "Men are better leaders. Headmistresses, most of whom are spinsters, tend to put themselves on

a pedestal ('*jagħmlu lilhom infushom allat*')". Two remarks are required here. First the reference to the marital status of headmistresses, implying that women in top positions are so un-feminine that they even deny their reproductive side. Second, Department of Education data indicate that the wishes of male schoolteachers tend to be fulfilled – Figure III.8 showed, in fact, that while most teachers are women, Heads and Assistant Heads of School are mostly men. The connotations are interesting in that they show men striving to improve their status (and salaries) by *moving* to male-gendered strata - not by trying to *redefine* female-gendered ones.

Structures and contexts

In this section I shall look at the organisational structures within which men and women in non-traditional occupations are embedded. Ultimately, of course, these structures reflect the patterns of occupational segregation discussed earlier in this work.

My research did not yield examples of outright discrimination at job interviews – and it was not bound to, since by definition I interviewed the ones who got and kept the job. Quite a few informants, however, recalled being asked rather asinine questions. A female technician was asked if she would have a problem climbing ladders, to which she replied that housewives climb ladders all the time to clean windows and dust chandeliers, a feat to which their husbands do not usually object. A female air-traffic controller was asked if she had ever been a boy scout – her answer was in the negative, but she had been a girl-guide "if that helped" (!). In all of these instances humour was never far from my informants' replies. Male facilitators and supply kindergarten assistants were made aware, in a positive way, that the job they were applying for was female-dominated. One facilitator told me that he had been strongly encouraged by one of his lecturers at University to continue his course in spite of being outnumbered.

With respect to training periods, most of my informants mentioned that there had been some teething problems, mostly related to being outnumbered in class. A few experiences were altogether more serious:

> I entered University in 1976. I was the only married woman there and immediately I had problems with a professor, a priest. He couldn't stomach the idea and once he burst out in class and told me 'You should go home and nurse your child!' ('*aħjar tmur id-dar tredda' dak il-baby*'). My son was three years old at the time! Later I was told that the same professor had boasted in the academics' common room that he was 'giving me hell'. Thankfully, the other lecturers were of great support to me and he was isolated.

Two 'teleclerks'[9] I interviewed had been through a very hard time until they established themselves in the job. One of the things that their case highlights is, of course, the crucial importance of legislative structures that seek to regulate equal opportunities for men and women. The 'new legislation' Anna and Francesca referred to is in fact the Equality for Men and Women Act (Act I/2003), which states that:

> It shall be unlawful for employers to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against a person in the arrangements made to determining or in determining who should be offered employment or in the terms and conditions on which the employment is offered or in the determination of who should be dismissed from employment.[10]

Another issue within the context of the workplace was giving orders and delegating. One of my informants told me that one worker had left because he did not want to 'take orders from a woman'. "I once asked a stevedore to move his forklift truck elsewhere; it was not a good idea and he screamed and swore at me", a port worker told me. Some of my informants were of the opinion that men need to be 'handled with care', as it were: "*Skond kif ittihielu raġel – trid tikkmandah b'ton ta' ħlewwa*" ('orders to a man should be given gently'). In general I found that men found it easier to take orders from women in workplaces where clear and formalised hierarchies obtained. Hospital staff, for instance, are located along a bureacratised hierarchy which has solid foundations due to historical understandings of

[9] A teleclerk is basically a clerk who does not sit at a desk. In this case, my informants performed clerical tasks at the ports, counting and assessing shipments.

[10] Equality for Men and Women Act Section 4.1. Government of Malta Act I/2003.

prestige (as in the historical continuity of surgeons' prestige, for instance), clear-cut levels of qualification and training, as well as formal titles that serve to maintain hierarchies ('*Dott*', '*Profs*', '*Ser*' etc.). Thus male nurses, for example, find themselves embedded in a deep-rooted hierarchical system and as such find it easy to take orders from women in higher-status posts. I should add at this point that many people mentioned that hierarchies are particularly difficult for women to cope with, since they tend to be 'by nature jealous' ('*jgħiru*').

Another fascinating instance I came across with respect to giving orders and delegation was that of a male nurse who recalled working with a rather particular type of women 'managers': Nuns of the Sisters of Charity, who in the past ran the nursing aspect of the hospital. In many ways they were resented by male nurses and their presence probably did nothing to attract men to nursing:

> In the past we had the notorious nuns who dominated the hospital. Some of them were qualified nurses, many weren't. They were like gods. It was better to fall out with God than with one of them – you might get God's forgiveness ('*aħjar ikollok xi tgħid mal-Bambin, forsi jaħfirlek*'). When you're young you resent these things, you ask what right they have to throw their weight about ('*tgħid x'jiġifieri tiġi din ...*')

Formalized and well-structured workplaces were in general easier to negotiate (with notable exceptions, as the case of the teleclerks shows). The experience of a telecoms technician is worth quoting in full:

> Maltacom is a very fair employer. Management is open to new ideas and there are actually quite a few women directors and managers. There was no question of discrimination at interview and anyway, one could always take one's case to the Appeals board. We also had to sit for a written test, which is much less open to discrimination. I have never felt out of place here.

She went on to tell me that the company has actually set up a Gender Equality Committee (of which she is a member) that aims to set up a

child-care centre and is working on a clear, formalized sexual harassment policy. It also makes it a point that interviewing boards always include women. Especially within the context of equality legislation, structured workplaces find it more difficult to discriminate than informal ones do. Not all women feel that structure helps, however. In an interesting take on the subject, one informant told me, "In private business and the professions you make yourself. In the public sector, however, you need men to appoint you." She felt that the advantages of structures may actually work against women in the sense that they tend to get confused with ability.

Another issue that men and women in non-traditional occupations have to pay attention to is how to articulate their gender in an alien environment. Women, especially (but not exclusively) when outnumbered in non-traditional occupations, often find themselves open to accusations of abusing their (gendered) characteristics:

> When they get married and have children, they solve it by taking sick leave. Women have their own sick leave, their husbands', and their children's. They transport their problems at home to the workplace ('*il-problemi tad-dar iġibuhom fuq ix-xogħol*').

It is very common for men who work with women to complain about '*l-affarjiet tan-nisa*' (menstrual cycles), which they see as providing women with an excuse to stay at home. They also tend to think that women want to have their cake and eat it, in the sense that they want to work but they expect to be treated better than their male colleagues – for instance by being spared heavy tasks. Women in non-traditional occupations are very much aware of this set of accusations. When I asked my female informants what advice they would give to a young female aspirant to their job, many of them said that it is vital to work as hard as the men do and not avoid any aspects of the job. As one female technician put it,

> She would have to be prepared to do all sorts of work, to be thick-skinned when dealing with jokes and comments, and to be willing to get her hands dirty ('*ma tiddejjaqx titħammeġ*'). *Trid taħdem daqs l-irġiel u mhux toqgħod tgħid għax mara, jien anke jelly-filled cables mill-kbar inwaħħal* ('she would have to work as the men do and

> not expect any special conditions; I fix the heaviest of jelly-filled cables without any qualms').

As another one of my informants put it, "I hate it when a woman who works with men plays the weakling (*'iddejjaqni li mara li taħdem mal-irġiel toqgħod tilgħabbha tal-miskina'*)".

The worker as a social animal

Workplaces are not just sites of production and economic activity. They are also the venues of sometimes-intense forms of socialisation which can affect workers in a multitude of ways. What I encountered in the field was a very mixed bag of socialisation experiences. Some of my informants said that it really was no problem to socialise with their colleagues:

> I get on well with my colleagues. I now even spend my break with them, whereas in the past I used to take my break alone in the van. It depends where of course – sometimes they go and have tea at a men's bar, and there I don't always join them.

> I get on very well with my colleagues. Bus drivers have a bad reputation but in fact they are very nice people. Even older colleagues respect me, possibly out of the respect they have for my father. One driver in particular is known to be rough and boorish, but with me he's jovial, nice, and always polite. Sometimes a colleague will drive alongside me as if to say, 'let's see if she can overtake' (*'ħa nara għandhiex ħila taqlani'*). It's all in good humour, however.

In many cases relations with colleagues were so good that informants told me they were 'hardly aware they were different'. A woman who works with forty men is worth quoting:

> It really is no issue, to the extent that one stops thinking about it. At our last Christmas dinner the manager suddenly stood up and proposed a toast 'to our only woman employee'; I was caught unawares and blushed violently (*'sirt ħamra nar'*). Really, one forgets about it completely.

There tended to be no hindrances whatsoever with respect to formal social occasions, and a good number of the people I interviewed told me that whenever their colleagues organized dinners or barbecues, they always made it a point of attending. Gender was 'not an issue'; one of my informants, in fact, told me that she was usually the '*perċimes*' ('ringleader') at these events. I had occasion to observe her at a pizza night with her colleagues, and she really did not seem to feel left out.

On the other hand, a good number of the people I worked with mentioned that at the everyday nuanced level, some aspects of socialisation did present difficulties. This was especially true of occupations with a strong 'working man's' culture, like bus driving and manual labour. Workers in these jobs often socialise ('*ipoġġu*') at men's bars ('*ħwienet tat-te*`'), for instance. Some of these bars, such as the Butterfly Bar in Birkirkara and the Crystal Palace in Rabat, are very well-known and are always full of working men taking their breaks there; for the most part they are considered to be out of bounds to self-respecting women.

THE CASE OF THE TELECLERKS
(names changed)

Francesca and Anna's work at the cargo handling company Trasbord Ltd. is somewhat Janus faced. They spend their mornings doing clerical work at the company's airconditioned offices in Pieta`; after hours, however, they work as teleclerks at the docks, keeping check of un/loading movements. The latter is a harsh workplace but these days they scarcely mind and the pay is good. Things were not always so bright, however.

When they first applied to do overtime they were flatly refused, the company's blunt rationale being that they were women. "It was not fair – they were always doing overtime and getting bumper salaries, while we as women were left out", Anna said, "they used to tell us that it was not women's work ('*l-ambjent mhux tan-nisa*'), but their real problem was that they did not want to have to share their overtime money with us."

Their case was brought before the Union, which supported them. The company, however, shrugged off the Union's recommendation, and Francesca and Anna took the company to Court. "It took years and the compensation we got was peanuts, but in a nutshell we won the case – not least because new legislation made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender."

So they won the right to do overtime, but the battle for their colleagues' approval was far from over. Some male teleclarks urged drastic action: "We'll go on strike and cripple the docks (*'inwaqqfu x-xogħol tal-port'*)". Others were more subtle. "A very few did encourage us but there are some who avoid us to this very day. Only yesterday, in fact, a colleague turned his back on me at a funeral", Francesca told me, "and I remember one colleague who told me that if anything happened to me at the docks, he would just walk past and refuse to help me". Snide remarks are not lacking; they tell us that we must be starving to work overtime (*"dawk jinżlu hemm għax mejtin bil-guħ"*), or tease us that we are too greedy (*"ara tħallu xi ħaġa!"*).

The telling 'detail' is that not all port workers resent their presence. "It is only the teleclarks who showed us disrespect – stevedores, for instance treat us very well. Of course, our work does not affect their salaries!"

Then there is the issue of sharing ideas with colleagues as a means of socialisation. Observations at two stations in a government department (a messengers' lobby where all employees were men and an office where all employees were women) taught me that men and women tend to talk about different things. During my observation period, men talked about football and politics, and women about home decoration and shops where one could pick up good deals on soft furnishings. These may be tired cliches but there is much truth to them, and above all my informants felt that they are very real issues. Most held that that preferred to work in the company of at least one same-sex colleague. "A woman understands

you better because she would going through the same things", "At work I need the company of a woman", were among the many comments in this vein. A male student in the Secretarial Studies course at MCAST told me that during breaks he leaves the school precincts to socialise and play football with other young men at a nearby school; he called them '*sħabi*' ('my mates'), while his classmates were '*tal-klassi*' (under normal circumstances the two usages overlap). The most interesting case I came across was that of a female bus driver who is most of the time accompanied by her 'best friend', who sits beside her on a small passenger seat and keeps her company. I found one exception to this, a woman who told me that she prefers to work in an all-male environment since she like to stay away from the jealousy and 'bitching' of women colleagues ("*in-nisa jgħiru wisq*").

These issues, albeit significant, are comparatively mild in terms of impact on career prospects of men and women in non-traditional occupations. The real issue lies elsewhere.

Socialisation is, in an instrumental sense, central to the career prospects of a worker. In spite of expectations to the contrary, even the most meritocratic of workplaces harbour a subtext of 'networks' (to use a hackneyed but quite unavoidable notion).[11] In a sense, meritocracies are ideal breeding grounds for networking, because they always depend on someone assessing merit on the basis of often quite arbitrary criteria; it is for this reason, of course, that meritocracies require as professional and faceless an audit culture as possible. In any case, networks more often than not develop within informal contexts of socialisation, which means that a worker who for whatever reason (including feeling 'out of place' gender-wise) does not socialise is at a severe disadvantage.

The difficulties of socialisation mentioned above take on a different meaning when viewed from this perspective. My earlier snippet on

[11] This tendency is probably increasing in some sectors. In the Public Service, for instance, the key to promotion used to be seniority ('*tilħaq biż-żmien*'). Since the Public Service Reform Commission was appointed in 1988, however, structures in this major field of employment have been moving steadily towards a meritocracy.

the 'professors' table' at the University restaurant is significant in this respect. It is a badly-kept secret among academics that this table is also a networking venue, and many academics who eat there regularly are also involved in University politics such as Faculty Boards, Senate, Council, etc. It is also a good place to 'get to know things', to form alliances and network, and to learn the latest news. If, as my informant told me, this is also 'no place for a woman' (and I should add that not all of the female academics I spoke to share this view), it follows that University politics, and posts, will continue to be dominated by men.

Homo faber has relatives, too

Working in non-traditional occupations affects men and women as individuals but also as members of families. In the first section of this Part I described the ways in which family background intersects with occupational choice. I shall now look at the relations between work experiences and family life. There are two general points to be made here. First, my data indicate that it is not so much horizontal as vertical segregation which exists in a meaningful relation with family. Second, the unit of kinship that is relevant in this sense is the immediate nuclear rather than the extended family.

My informants had diverse stories to tell about their families. Madeleine, a bus driver, told me that she had applied for and gotten her license without telling her parents. "I then gave them a surprise and they were delighted, as was all my family. You should have seen how many family members phoned radio-DJs to ask them to dedicate a song for me!" There were many similar narratives and it seems that men and women in non-traditional occupations for the most part enjoy the support of their families. Two women in challenging business positions, for instance, told me that grandparents' babysitting role was essential in providing child care.

For women and men in non-traditional occupations, some of the most trying situations develop when family members are divided over their

support. A University academic explained to me how, when she entered University, her husband's family embarked on a "three year war" against her; their rationale, common at the time and not as uncommon as one would wish today, was that her extra-domestic activities would cause her marriage to break up ('*kienu jibżgħu li jwassal għat-tifrik taż-żwieġ tagħna*'). In her case she had the full support of her husband as well as her natal family.

The structures of workplaces very often create vertical segregation in rather subtle ways, and this causes family problems for men and especially women in non-traditional occupations. Family and especially children are crucial factors here, even in contexts where discrimination is 'non-existent'. This is how a (male) air-traffic controller explained the lack of women in the job:

> In this job, as soon as a woman gets pregnant she has to leave (her ATC licence is suspended) or to limit herself to clerical work. I suppose it has to do with safety – remember, our job requires maximum alertness and attention at all times. In principle it's fine, they get their job back when they return to work; in practice however it affects women negatively because while they are away they fall behind in terms of 'hours of service'. Maybe that's why we only have one woman here.

This was not a one-off experience. Naval and aviation officers, for instance, get promoted partly on the basis of hours of service. Women in these jobs (which are invariably dominated by men) tend to find it very hard to advance their careers.

One aspect which can cause problems for married men and women in non-traditional occupations is the fact that by definition they work surrounded by persons of the opposite sex, and this sometimes creates tension with their spouses. Night shifts are particularly problematic in this respect, especially for women. "These days female nurses do not worry about night shifts", a nurse told me, "most of them are single anyways

and they tend to flirt and have many affairs" ('*daż-żmien kollha jħalltu u jgħaffġu*'). A single woman in her 30s whose work involves night shifts shared her concern:

> I am single now but I know that if I had a partner there could be problems. I mean, which man is happy that his partner is spending her nights surrounded by other men? Of course my career is important to me and I would tell him to take it or leave it! On second thoughts, however, I say this *now*, but who knows how my opinion might change?

Apart from night shifts, the other problematic type was work-related travel for business, conferences, and further training. Again this affected primarily my married female informants, who said that the two problematic issues with travel were leaving the family alone and the maintenance of one's honour as a family woman. The first is a very real issue indeed, particularly in the Maltese context. It is interesting to study the trajectories, the spatial production as it were, of qualifications. The typical circular route starts with a first degree or some other form of basic training in Malta, followed by post-graduate/specialized instruction abroad – usually in Britain, the US, or Canada – and eventually back to Malta as an altered self. The journey is seen as a rite of passage that bestows on initiates the savvy, cosmopolitan, cutting-edge qualities of the metropolis.[12] Impediments to travel therefore have a devastating impact on career formation and development, and I identify them as one of the major causes of vertical segregation. I emphasize that they affect many types of work. One hairdresser told me, for example, that men had a huge advantage in their careers because they could spend periods of time abroad at will, learning about the latest cuts and colours: "girls lag behind ('*jibqgħu lura*') mostly because of family commitments; we just go abroad whenever we need to, married or not. Don't forget that knowledge of fashion is crucial in our business."

[12] These pilgrimages have their roots in the colonial encounter and more recently in global core: periphery dialectics, and are by no means limited to Malta.

Of course I have not explained the divergent meanings of male and female mobility. The first part of the answer relates to the expected proximity between a mother and her children. The second part is linked to the latter point I introduced above, that of honour. None of my informants talked about it directly so I rely on my interpretation of several oblique remarks, typically: "you know, a woman who is always abroad ..." ('*ma tafx int, mara li dejjem imsiefra ...*'). Semantics are very telling here: the word '*tiġġerra"* means 'to roam', but also 'to sleep around'. Mobility is inimical to female honour because honour is always inscribed in a locality and invested in a local community.[13] This difficulty results of course in vertical segregation and concentrations of men in positions that require mobility, extra hours, and specialized training.

An important distinction which emerged in my conversations concerned the support of partners and vertical segregation. The women I interviewed who were in non-traditional occupations in the sense that they occupied top managerial positions, all affirmed that the support of their spouse was crucial. The following extracts will help introduce the theme:

> My job involves long hours at the office, board meetings, etc. I would have loved to be able to spend more time with my children, who have grown up too quickly. Thankfully my husband's job means that he works largely from home and he can be with them. I have a very supportive husband. Let me tell you, one thing that no legislation can change is that for a women to succeed, she either has to be single or else have a supportive husband.

> My husband really supports me. When I work night shifts he drives me to work and then sleeps in the car all night. Not because he is jealous or anything, simply because he cares ... yes, of course his support is crucial – family is important to me and his objection would have mattered.

[13] cf. the Maltese proverb '*Baqra tajba tinbiegħ f'pajjiżha*', or the Italian '*Donne e buoi de' paesi tuoi*' ('a cow's (≈woman's) value (≈honour) is best judged locally').

The quotes indicate that there are in fact two ways in which the support of spouses matters for working women in general and those in non-traditional occupations in particular. First the direct and more tangible aspect, that of being able and willing to run a household - taking care of children, cooking, doing the housework, etc. - while the wife is away. Women in non-traditional jobs depend on their spouses acting as 'house husbands' – basically, men who replace the women in their traditional role as the nurturing and caring parent. This is of course tricky for men to accept, in part due to the connotations of weakness and subordination, and also due to the fact that it is traditionally females who from an early age are socialized and taught (by their mothers) to do the housework. During an informal conversation with a female police constable who works overtime, for instance, her husband told me that his neighbours give him 'funny looks' whenever they see him sweeping the porch or cleaning the windows. He personally does not mind but there is no doubt that most men would not find the 'funny looks' very amusing. In many contexts, the 'house husband' is a vulnerable character, open to mockery and ridicule.

There are other instances in which husbands find it difficult to reverse roles. Businessmen, for instance, derive much sustenance from circles within which networks are established and reproduced; these may be formal, as in Lions Clubs, or informal as in dinner parties. Their wives play a vital role in such networking activities – provided, of course, they do not have time-consuming jobs themselves. "When I started working full-time, the bone china and silver were stashed away", the wife of a businessman who herself is in a challenging occupation, told me, "and I was told that the word began to spread that "Dora has become very unsociable" ('*Dora m'għadha tagħmel xejn*'). Wives are also expected to join their husbands at social events, *as spouses*. Many men are not happy doing the same, i.e. going to parties as spouses of the invitee. Some of my female informants in high-status positions told me that this could be a problem. Finally, role inversion has its humorous aspects. A top businesswoman told me how, whenever she travels with her (male) accountant, hotel receptionists assume she is either his secretary or his mistress ('*il-poġġuta tiegħu*').

Women may find themselves discouraged by their husbands in different, and often nuanced and subtle, ways. This is no doubt one of the causes of vertical segregation. Consider the following experience of a female high achiever:

> I wouldn't be here without my husband. Not because my husband did anything directly like help me study or give me money, but simply because he is different from other men in not judging me, not feeling threatened by the fact that I am successful. He's in a different field, successful in his own right.

My informants, as well as a number of people I discussed the subject informally with, maintained that men often feel threatened if their spouses have higher status and better paid jobs than themselves - which partly explains why male schoolteachers and nurses feel uncomfortable. This is generally known as the much-discussed 'male breadwinner' model (see for instance Creighton 1999, Crompton 1999). As one of my informants put it, "men need the support of their wives when they fail or when the going gets tough, while women need the support of their husbands when they succeed."

In an interesting take on the relation between work and domestic life, my informants thought that a positive aspect of being in a non-traditional occupation was that they could do things at home that average people of their gender could not. "It's funny, but the soldering iron at home sits in *my* drawer. I also fixed my husband's mobile, poured and whitewashed our roof, and many other things"; "I don't worry about my nails or my hands, I did the plumbing and electricity myself at home ... women can do many things ... my mother tells me 'You were born instead of your brother' (my brother is a nurse)'". Interestingly, within the safety of domestic and/or family circles, the problematic implications of gender transgression discussed earlier, disappear. Within the private space of one's home, one may enjoy the pure delight of being a gender-bender.

Life in the limelight

> I'm a strange animal, I know. It attracts the media, which I loathe.

> It has its compensations though. It's not the first time someone whom I've never met before comes up to me at the supermarket and tells me, *'Alla jbierek kemm nammirak, mara f'dil-pożizzjoni!'* ('Goodness, I really admire you, a woman in such a high position!') (Lisa, a well-known professional)

A number of my informants felt that being a man and especially a woman in a non-traditional occupation makes one stand out. Colleagues, clients, spouses, family and friends, and the public at large, are aware that they are dealing with a rare species and sometimes behave accordingly by staring, passing comments, and cracking jokes. "You should see the faces of clients when I turn up to fix their phone", a technician told me, "sometimes they can't stop themselves from exclaiming 'Are *you* going to do this?'". Managers of companies are generally happy to employ a few (some would say 'token', but my data do not necessarily agree) men and women in non-traditional tasks, since this reflects positively on their gender policy. They also tend to over-publicize their presence. One thing that bothered all my informants was the 'freak show' tendency of employers to point them out as different. "At board meetings and social events, my manager proudly presents me as 'the only woman working in our company' – I don't like it, it makes me feel like some sort of curiosity". Another was more forceful: "I mean, why all this fuss? Am I handicapped?"

Beyond the remarks and wisecracks, which one learns to live with by developing a 'thick skin', there are more fundamental aspects of being under scrutiny. A female senior manager I had a long conversation with told me that she was appreciative of ETC's and women's groups' efforts to combat segregation, but she went on to qualify her optimism: "Women's organizations have already done their bit but they must be careful not to go overboard – it might backfire if gender is overemphasized." Her point about the dangers of 'going overboard' is that if individuals are singled out because of their gender, their performance is likely to attract more than its fair share of surveillance (by employers, clients, etc.). All workers are scrutinized and/or embedded in peer-review structures to some extent (what is called the 'audit culture' is nothing but a bureaucratic

and formalized type of surveillance, usually carried out by specialists) but workers in non-traditional occupations are prone to a type and degree of review which I shall call 'hyper-surveillance'.

On the one hand hyper-surveillance has its beneficial effects as the worker is motivated, and often manages, to perform beyond normal expectations. When I first sought to fix an interview with Madeleine, our bus driver, her (male) colleagues spent the best part of ten minutes explaining to me how well she did her job, how well she handled her bus (*'taf kemm tibza` għalih it-trakk!'*), and how cordial she was with her passengers. Indeed, when I met her at her workplace, I got the impression that she was making an effort to prove herself; she seemed very proud of her bus and of the fact that she could even drive the older-type buses (which require special driving skills because of their 'double clutch'). This of course is positive in itself, since motivation is undoubtedly one of the most desirable attributes of any worker. There is a fine line, however, between motivation and job stress, and this is what the senior manager was referring to when she warned about 'going overboard'.

It has also been pointed out by Williams (1989) that the increased visibility and consequent heightened attention that workers in non-traditional occupations attract can become a problem in that the pressure to deliver and the resulting enhanced job performances ultimately end up exacerbating gender differences – a negative feedback mechanism par excellence. Put simply, as long as one stands out, one recreates difference. This point is taken up in Part V.

Men and women in non-traditional occupations being by definition a rare and 'intriguing' breed, they often attract the interest of the media, which is happy to cash into what in the business is called the 'shock factor'. This is especially true in the case of women in strongly male-

[14] The bullfighter Cristina Sanchez is a major celebrity in Spain. In her case the subversive element is very powerful indeed due to the image of the matador, who is seen as the epitome of masculinity. That said, she retired in 1999, only one year after completing her training and becoming the first woman matador. She complained that, in spite of her considerable skills, gender prejudice got in the way to the extent that some matadors stated publicly that they would not fight on the same billing as her. See (www.andalucia.com/bullfight/bullfighters/cristinasanchez).

gendered occupations, a couple of whom have become regular fixtures of the Maltese public sphere.[14] While this study was being conducted I came across four high-profile instances of this type. On a local level, the popular chat show Xarabank featured a female Naval Officer who was asked about her experiences aboard; and interviews with a female kart racer, land surveyor, sailor, and police officer were carried in the monthly women's interest magazine *Pink*. Further afield, the BBC World Service's World Today recently featured interviews with an Egyptian Supreme Court judge, a Nigerian mechanic, a US orchestra conductor, and a British explosives engineer, all of whom were women; it also broadcast a piece on a female gondolier in Venice.[15]

Quite often this media coverage has a sexual subtext - when the Naval Officer was asked "*kif kont tħossok ma' sbatax-il raġel?*" ('how did it feel [to live] with 17 men?'), the audience burst out laughing and forced the presenter to specify, "please note, she only *lived* with 17 men". It is probably this factor which causes many men and women in non-traditional occupations to be suspicious of the media. My informants in fact had mixed feelings about sharing their experiences on TV. A few have actually done it and others said they would very gladly take part, but a significant number told me that they would certainly turn down an offer because they do not like being 'stared at'.

Notwithstanding its mixed blessings, hyper-surveillance may have interesting consequences in certain sectors. During the course of my research I had an interesting and light-hearted conversation with a young lady who ran for local politics and very nearly got elected. The following is an excerpt:

> It was quite funny, I didn't really work very hard or lobby or anything. I honestly suspect people voted for me because I am a woman. They must have liked the idea of a new and attractive female face! ('*ara, wiċċ ġdid, żagħżugħ, ta' mara*'). I even got cross-party votes, would you believe. I think being a women helped no end.

[15] BBCNews, 22 October 2004.

In this case the hyper-surveillance of a woman in a non-traditional field (politics) worked in her favour – simply because in politics, the more publicity one gets (for whatever reason), the better. Attracting votes, especially for a first-timer, is very much a matter of 'getting known', of people becoming familiar with one's name and face. In a country where most politicians are men, being a woman helps.

Quite a few of my informants, particularly female ones in highly-qualified positions, told me they were involved in formal and/or informal organizations that lobby for equal opportunities. "It's essential", an IT manager told me, "my husband is very supportive (*'bully kemm tridu'*) but when we wake up in the morning and our daughter is sick, there's no question whose job it is! Things like child-care are crucial." Another businesswoman is actually part of an EU commission on equal opportunities and she flies to Brussels very often to take part in high-level meetings. In this case being employed in a non-traditional occupation is a useful biographical characteristic, since it lends legitimacy to the person's engagements.

V
OUTLOOK

Is change possible/desirable?
The historical nature of occupational gendering should come as good news to policy-makers and gender-equality campaigners - be they legislators, women's organisations, or the ETC - in that historical processes have a beginning and an end. Nurture appears more malleable than nature, although it is often by no means easy to find the right tools to break the mould.

Before discussing these tools, there is the question as to whether or not one should even *try* to combat occupational segregation - a relevant one not least because many of my informants brought it up. After all, the world of work will always intersect with cultural understandings of prestige, status, power, and of course gender. Following my research, during which I had the opportunity to listen to the stories of a very significant number of men and women in non-traditional occupations, I believe there are at least three logical arguments in favour of seeking to ease or at least re-define occupational segregation:

- The argument from opportunity: My research brought me in contact with people who, in spite of cultural expectations to the contrary, sought to develop occupational interests in fields where they felt they had something special to contribute. Assuming that it is desirable to live in a society which provides opportunities for people to pursue their ambitions and develop their talents, it follows that hindrances such as occupational segregation are undesirable and should be combated;

- The argument from fairness: This study has outlined the ways in which vertical segregation blocks (mostly women's)

occupational trajectories, resulting in a very significant gendered wage gap. Assuming that it is desirable to live in a fair society which does not discriminate between the sexes, it follows that all mechanisms to the contrary should be combated;

- The argument from economic development: Because it blocks (mostly women's) career paths and discourages or even stops them from developing their skills, vertical segregation results in what has been called a 'skills deficit' on the national and global levels. Both horizontal and vertical segregation lead to market rigidity and interfere with the free mobility of labour, reducing the likelihood that the market will allocate the best person to a specific job (see Walby & Olsen 2002). Assuming that it is desirable to live in a developed economy which maximizes on the individual potentials and skills of its members to create wealth and flexible labour markets, it follows that anything which hinders this process should be combated.

A cursory look at various experiences of occupational segregation reveals a chequered picture characterized by both resilience and change. In the US, the imbalance in gender distribution across occupations came to be recognised as a socioeconomic problem in the early 1970s; accordingly, the period 1970 to 2000 saw a spate of federal legislation addressing the issue of segregation and aimed at education, training, and employment. (Table V.1 summarizes this legislative framework.) However, Department of Labor statistics show that while a handful of non-traditional occupations are now 20-25% female (most efforts were intended to boost the number of women in these occupations), many remain below the 10% mark. Despite the 1978 goal that the construction work force of 2000 would be one quarter female, in 1999 the figure was around 2.7% - the same as 1970, that is. 1999 estimates showed that, to reach parity in gender representation across occupations, 77% of the US labour force would have to change jobs. In education and training, secondary vocational enrolments were still largely gender segregated, with marketing being

the only balanced programme area. Although women had increased in postsecondary education overall, their numbers remained low in some programme areas; among vocational education faculty, women still concentrated in health, home economics, and office occupations, while those in agricultural, trade and industrial, and technology education were few (Kerka 1999). 2003 data confirm this trend, with 'physical' jobs such as brickmasonry, power-line installation, and iron and steel work, at the bottom of the list in terms of proportion of women; in general, the overwhelming majority of strongly male-segregated occupations are technical/mechanical/manual. In the US Public Service, the occupations of ambulance driver, detective, firefighter, guard, and police officer remain strongly male-dominated.[1]

TITLE	DATE AUTHORISED	PURPOSE/S WITH RESPECT TO OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION
Title IX of the Education Amendments	1972	Prohibited discrimination by schools and contractors receiving federal funds
Executive Order	1978	as above
Carl. D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act	1984 et seq. (1998)	Established state equity coordinators and set aside program funding specifically for gender equity
Nontraditional Employment for Women Act	1991	Amended the Job Partnership Act to require employment goals for women in NTOs
Women in Apprenticeship Occupations and Nontraditional Occupations Act	1992	Provided technical assistance to employers and unions for integrating women into NTOs
School to Work Opportunities Act	1994	Increasing opportunities for people to prepare for careers not traditional for their race, gender, or disability

TABLE V.1 US legislative landmarks with respect to occupational segregation, 1972-1994. (Source: Adapted from Kerka 1999)

[1] Source: US Department of Labor statistics online at (www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2003).

Similar longitudinal research in Canada showed that, despite the transformation in women's education and labour market activity, there was remarkable stability in the number of traditional and non-traditional occupations for women and men. Where change *did* occur was, for the most part, within non-traditional occupations for women; in contrast, men recorded little advancement into those occupations in which they were most under-represented. The number of occupations that had a very low proportion of women dropped from 224 in 1971 to 162 in 1986. Even so, the pace of change slowed considerably in the late 1980s. The occupations with the greatest influx of women between 1986 and 1991 were in management and administration, professional categories and sales. Moreover, women in the fastest-changing highly non-traditional occupations tended to be older, better educated, and better remunerated than other female workers. Yet, when compared with their male counterparts, they tended to be younger, less likely to have a university degree, and less well paid. The gap between women's and men's median incomes in all highly non-traditional fields combined was narrower than that between female and male workers overall, suggesting that such occupations remain an important avenue for women wishing to improve their economic prospects (Hughes 1990, 1995).

In Britain, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) enjoys the stewardship of research and policy initiatives with respect to work and gender equality. As established by the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, the EOC's brief is to work towards the elimination of unlawful sex discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women generally. However, despite decades of work by the EOC, the labour market in Britain remains strongly delineated by gender, horizontally as well as vertically. 75% of working women are still found in just five occupational groups – associate professional and technical (e.g. nurses), administration and secretarial work, personal services (e.g. caring for children or old people), sales and customer service, and unskilled manual work. Female-gendered jobs command lower wages than 'men's work', even when they require similar qualification levels, leading to inequalities in pay and income. (At present, the average weekly wage for

men is £514, for women £383.)[2] There is very little movement of women into science, engineering, IT, and the skilled trades. On the other hand women are increasingly moving into law, medicine (women's applications for medical school now outnumber men's), and accountancy. Men are likewise affected by occupational segregation and find it particularly difficult to get jobs in, for instance, childcare and homecare.[3] Table V.2 provides a snapshot of the types and levels of segregation in contemporary Britain.

Gender breakdown of Foundation Level Modern Apprenticeships (2001-2002): Construction: Men: 99%; Women:1% Engineering manufacturing: Men: 96%; Women: 4% Childcare: Men: 3%; Women: 97% IT: Men: 67%; Women: 33%.
The five most common occupations for women are: sales assistant/cashier; secretarial, teaching profession, healthcare and related personal services, administrative occupations (finance).
The five most common occupations for men are: transport driver and operative, functional manager, construction trade, production manager and electrical trade.
Examples of average weekly earnings of full-time employees in selected occupations: ICT professionals: Women: £599.80; Men: £675.70 Engineering professionals Women: £528.20; Men: £609.40 Plumbers, heating and ventilating engineers: Women: n/a; Men: £439.10 Construction trades: Women: n/a; Men: £401.40 Childcare: Women: £235.60; Men: n/a.

TABLE V.2 Showing a selection of data pertaining to occupational segregation in contemporary Britain. (Source: Adapted from (www.eoc.org.uk), 2006)

A number of efforts to ease segregation in various other labour markets have likewise met with mixed success. In Australia, for instance, in spite of various efforts to the contrary, the large gender imbalance in the Information Technology and Telecommunications sector is not improving (Newmarch et al. 2000). Moreover, one should note that statistics are only part of the story. According to Eisenberg (1998), for instance, the efforts of the US government of the last thirty years have been largely

[2] Source: Equal Opportunities Commision, (www.eoc.org.uk), 2006.

[3] Source: Equal Opportunities Commission, 'No more jobs for the boys and jobs for the girls' campaign, (www.eoc.org.uk), 2003.

add-ons; they have not been institutionalized, and cultural/structural change has not happened.

Scenarios of change

My data for the Maltese labour market as presented in this work, as well as the mixed experiences in the various contexts outlined above, show that shifts in the gendering of occupations – and the subsequent movement of workers across 'traditional' gender barriers – are complex processes that cannot be contained within a single model. With this in mind, I suggest that future policy formulations and evaluations should steer clear of the following two pitfalls:

- at the planning stage, it is crucial to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. Both the present work and a wealth of comparative data show that the notion of 'occupational segregation' in fact subsumes a number of types and a diverse set of underlying social values and meanings. Any policies/initiatives should therefore be type-specific – that is, should be specially tailored for specific occupational fields;

- at the evaluative stage, it is necessary to avoid 'all or nothing' assessments. The data in fact tend to show that while in some fields little or no progress has been made, in others the results are encouraging. In Malta, for instance, IT was and still is very strongly male-gendered; law, on the other hand, has in recent years witnessed an unprecedented influx of women; further, my earlier discussion shows how the latter shift affects changes in gender participation rates for politics, among other spheres. As in the case of planning, evaluations should therefore be as type-specific as possible.

I shall now go on to look at a number of possible scenarios of change – ideas, that is, as to how one could address occupational segregation to create a more flexible, fairer, and wealthier labour market. There are of course a great many initiatives in this sense, some deriving from international sources (such as the ILO) and others located within national contexts (as in the case of the EOC in Britain). These have spawned a

vast quantity of policy papers, recommendations, and such. It is not my intention to reproduce or discuss them in detail here, not least because one should be wary of importing ideas wholesale from contexts which may be historically and culturally very different from our own.[4] Rather I shall present issues as they derive directly from my data.

The first and most structured means of combating occupational segregation is legislation. The job adverts shown on Plate V.1, with their blatant gender bias, are no longer possible in Malta. The Equality for Men and Women Act (I/2003) makes it illegal to advertise jobs along the criterion of gender, among others. Such legislation is of course the most basic and essential feature of fairer labour markets.

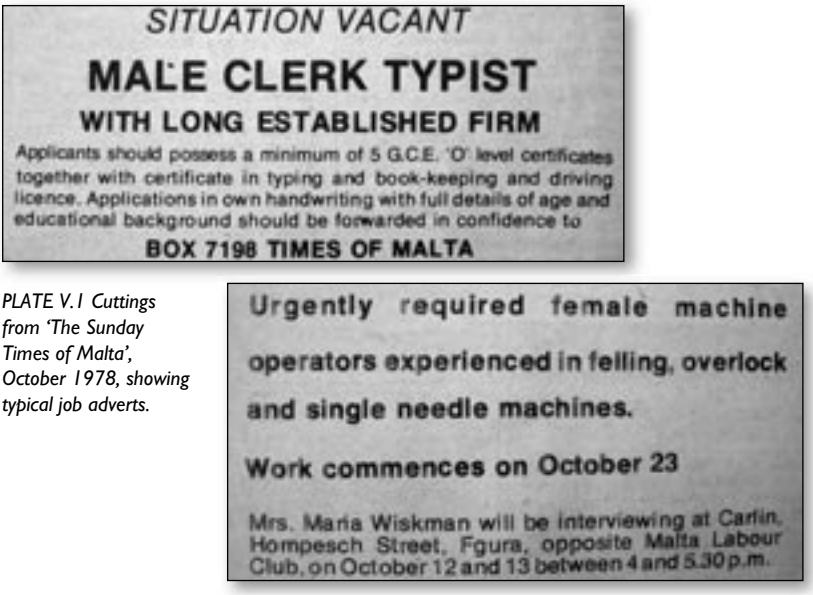


PLATE V.1 Cuttings from 'The Sunday Times of Malta', October 1978, showing typical job adverts.

The Equality for Men and Women Act, however, does make one important qualification:

> Nothing... shall be deemed to constitute discrimination in so far as such treatment constitutes measures of positive action for the purpose of achieving substantive equality for men and women.

[4] See (www.ilo.com) and (www.eoc.org.uk) for detailed information.

This effectively makes positive discrimination legally possible. There are various examples in national policy formulations (though not yet in Malta) of giving financial incentives to employers that hire non-traditional labour, attracting boys and girls to non-traditional apprenticeships through financial packages, fixing quotas, and so forth. This is the 'top-down' approach in which the state intervenes directly in order to encourage occupational integration within a relatively short time-frame. There are, however, at least three problems with this approach.

First, only two out of a total of 80 or so people (including all my interviewees) I asked agreed with positive discrimination. The rest saw it as unpardonably interventionist and they also thought it would backfire in the sense that granting a minority privileges would only serve to reify its marginal (albeit privileged) status. My informants were particularly uncomfortable with the idea of quotas. Second, it has been shown that it is one thing to devise and operate measures that quantitatively erode occupational segregation, and quite another to eradicate the qualitative gendering of labour. Following her study on male nurses and female Marines, Williams (1989) warns us that:

> (O)ccupational integration does not necessarily result in the diminution of gender differences and sexual inequality. In World War II, this was especially evident. Despite their 'integration', women in the military and men in nursing were segregated in their duties, and their contributions to the war effort were described in ways entirely compatible with traditional gender qualities ... Even though there are more women in the Marine Corps and men in nursing today than ever before, job segregation continues to persist internally, and the prospects for their future integration remain bleak.

As one of my informants put it simply, you can take a horse to the water but you can't make it drink. The third and to my mind most serious problem with positive discrimination is that it rides roughshod over the cultural complexities of occupational segregation as outlined in this study. Financial incentives that lack a cultural infrastructure cannot have the desired effect. They could also create serious structural problems. If

primary schoolteachers' salaries were increased to attract more men, for instance, other (mostly male-gendered) occupations whose members perceive themselves as being of a higher status than teachers, would immediately expect a pay rise. Structural inflation would ensue. This again shows how apparently hard-nosed economic concepts are embedded in historically-produced ideas about gender and prestige. I therefore believe that bottom-up approaches are required that seek to re-articulate these complexities in a positive direction. Clearly such strategies must be long-term.

A widely-used grassroots strategy in various countries is that of the setting up of specialized services. In the US, for instance, the WANTO Act of 1992 (see Table V.1) authorised a grant programme administered jointly by the Women's Bureau and the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Office of Apprenticeship, Training, Employer, and Labor Services. From 1994 through 2003, over $8.6 million were awarded in 81 grants to 37 community-based organizations "to provide technical assistance to employers and labor unions, and to enable them to recruit, hire, train, and retrain women in apprenticeships and non-traditional occupations".[5] (Note that the programme ignores female-gendered occupations, a common bias as remarked upon in various sections of the present work.) Still in the US, there is a very large number of specialized organizations and institutions dealing with (and providing some sort of support services to) workers in non-traditional occupations. These include the Association for Women in Computing, Engineer Girl!, Chicago Women in Trades, Men Teach, and American Assembly for Men in Nursing[6]; most of these are affiliate members of the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE), set up in 1990. On a more informal level, a large number of schools and colleges (particularly those in the post-secondary sector) operate small but specialized units offering technical support, mentoring, and/or information. Many of these resources are online, further decentralising and lubricating access.

[5] See (www.dol.gov) for further information.

[6] See (respectively): (www.awc-hq.org), (www.engineergirl.org), (www.chicagowomenintrade.org), (www.menteach.org), and (www.aamn.org).

I have argued that occupational segregation and equal participation in the labour force are sometimes, albeit not necessarily, linked. Initiatives that target the more general issue no doubt affect the level of occupational horizontal and vertical segregation. Referring to my earlier discussion about women and paid labour, there is an interesting intersection which is very relevant policy-wise. If women working outside the home are seen as a threat to the well-being of their family (as unfortunately they tend to be in Malta), it follows that those women who *do* work tend to choose jobs that are seen as 'female friendly' – jobs, that is, that allow them to combine paid employment and care of the family. This can be seen as a sort of damage control mechanism. If, however, facilities are provided (such as child-care centres) that make this compromise easier to reach *across a broad spectrum of occupations*, women would have a wider choice and still be able to control the 'damage' that paid employment represents. This is particularly relevant in the case of vertical segregation, where top jobs require more commitment by the worker; again, facilities that make this commitment possible will go a long way in combating vertical segregation.

Flexible working hours, which many of my informants mentioned specifically, could also be effective in easing vertical segregation. One of the major problems that upwardly-mobile women encounter is the clash between family and career; this is especially true of highly-skilled occupations that require constant and intensive training. As one of the few female academics in Malta put it, "when I was studying for my Masters and doctorate I was also working as a teacher. Thankfully my schedule meant that I could take a lot of unpaid leave, which proved instrumental for me." Maltese policy-makers have in recent years taken many steps in the right direction in this field, and this should be encouraged. These initiatives should also be broader in scope – at present they are somewhat restricted to the Public Sector.

Following on my earlier point, measures in favour of integration ought to be directed at specific sectors, rather than operating on a broad front. Experience abroad indicates that the former is a better option. In Britain, for instance, a specifically-targeted Resource Centre for Women in SET

(Science, Engineering, and Technology) has just been launched. The centre, which has access to £4 million of government funding, will focus on ensuring more girls and women take up SET and stay in those professions. This will benefit the British economy by encouraging more women to take up and advance their careers in highly-qualified services occupations. As it is, a substantial chunk of human resources is being lost – suffice it to say that about 75% of women with SET degrees are not in science-related careers.[7] Based on my data I suggest that targeting specific fields would constitute a sensible approach in the sense that initiatives need to be articulated along the cultural parameters, discourses, and imagery of particular occupational fields. Targeting, say, the construction sector, would require the use of a specific language and strategy, which would themselves need to be sensitive to the cultural implications of the sector (some of which have been discussed in the present work). A sensible structure would therefore bring together a series of focused initiatives under one loosely-coordinated set of broad objectives.

When choosing which field/s to target, it is imperative that labour market trends and outlooks be taken into account. If, as held by most economists and observers, Malta is moving away from a manufacturing- to a services-based economy, it follows that there is an urgent need to address occupational segregation (amongst other aspects) in fields such as IT and Communications. The former is particularly important, especially in the light of developments such as the SmartCity@Malta project, which looks set to employ around 5600 people, 65% of whom in the knowledge-based IT sector. The remaining 35% will include many supporting roles, of course – administration, hospitality, retail, maintenance, and such – but the choicest and best-paid positions will go to individuals with qualifications and experience in IT-related spheres. Given that IT is so male-dominated, SmartCity@Malta may well end up exacerbating occupational segregation and widening the wage gap.

My data revealed that most men and women in non-traditional occupations come to realise that the situation is much more tolerable than they first thought. Once they develop that all-important 'thick skin'

[7] BBCNews, 17 September 2004.

and learn how to negotiate structures and contexts, they usually cope well. To my mind, the most delicate stages in the process are the actual decision-making period and the first few months following entry. Policies should reflect this. Non-traditional fields could be targeted directly by focusing on training courses, University degrees, and so forth, where men or women are outnumbered, and starting initiatives such as the setting up of groups within which issues like the ones discussed in this work could be discussed. These need not necessarily be formal – actually there is much to be said for an informal gathering over a few bottles of wine, since many of my informants expressed their dislike for what they deemed to be 'gender militancy'. At University, for instance, female academics meet informally every so often to share experiences.

Given the findings of the present research, it would probably make sense to target parents and especially mothers, given that they play such an important role in the decision-making processes of their children. Informality is an important issue here, as is the need to avoid pathologizing men and women in non-traditional occupations. Which means that approaches such as counselling could well turn out to be counter-productive, since they would make these individuals feel (and appear to their colleagues) even more 'special', which is of course the last thing they need. All my informants insisted on this – they would not wish to see an institutionalization of marginality. They felt 'different' but not pathologically so.

In a sense, secondary school career guidance has much to answer to with respect to occupational segregation. Boys' and girls' schools relate differently to the world of work – the former are exposed to male-gendered, the latter to female-gendered, jobs. One possible solution could be co-ed education at least at secondary level, which would probably go a long way in undermining the idea that boys and girls follow different trajectories. Another much simpler solution would be to encourage career guidance to cross-over – to introduce students, that is, to non-traditional occupations. As Clare, who does a '*xogħol ta' barra*' in the technical sector told me:

> I remember very clearly making up my mind following a promotional visit to our school by an instructor at the Technical

> Institute. Exactly what he said escapes me but I remember it was interesting. I thought to myself: This would not lead me to a boring desk job.

Taking further my argument for a bottom-up approach, occupational segregation needs to be combated at source – or rather the many sources that my data identify. One initiative that could affect segregation by affecting the gendering of labour, is finding and backing role models – men and women doing well in non-traditional jobs, that is – for young people contemplating their careers to look up to. This is actually being done by the Equal Opportunities Commission in Britain, which is also planning to introduce a Mentoring Scheme whereby newcomers and veterans in non-traditional jobs get to share their experiences. In my interviews I did probe informants about their willingness to participate in such schemes, and the majority said that they would be interested. A significant number were enthusiastic about the idea and I have no doubt that they would make very good models.

Note, however, that the notion of role models may actually foster the myth that only 'exceptional individuals' can succeed in non-traditional work (see Eisenberg 1998). This is especially true if the media is used. The media, and in particular television, tends to bestow prestige on people, which in this context may actually be counterproductive as otherwise 'normal' individuals are exoticised.

PLATE V.2 Excerpt from the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (MCAST) prospectus, showing effort to avoid gender stereotyping

In a similar vein it is also important that course prospectuses for University, MCAST, and other institutions of learning seek to combat the biased gendering of jobs. Steps in this direction are already being taken - the MCAST prospectus, for instance, which is very professionally designed and published, clearly takes care to avoid gender stereotyping by including photographs of both male and female students across the range of its courses. This point on images and gendering is not as superficial as it may seem. Skuratowicz & Hunter (op.cit), for example, describe the power of images in the gendering of new jobs created in the course of bank restructuring. Some job adverts featured a small graphic representation of a man wearing a tie, while others such as that for customer service featured a photograph of a woman wearing a phone headset - predictably, applicants took the cue.

Equal-opportunities initiatives abroad are emphasizing the idea of 'outreach', of finding ways of linking State structures (such as ETC) to the grassroots level via a number of brokering techniques. An interesting initiative in this vein has been taken by the School of Computer Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, US. The school, obviously concerned by the dearth of women students, regularly holds interactive 'roadshows' that aim to increase the visibility of young women in IT, to challenge gender stereotyping, to promote role models, and to publicise a mentorship scheme for young women in IT. The roadshow, that primarily targets schoolchildren and their parents, consists of a presentation by a group of 'normal, average' women students and graduates in IT, who talk about their experiences and expectations. There is also a slideshow, an opportunity to ask questions, and an invitation to children to join an email penfriend circle. In order to make the experience more memorable, the roadshow has apparently enlisted the help of two robots (!)[8] The point is to develop effective systems of brokerage between bureaucratic, paper-based policy-making bodies, and people living their everyday lives.

These are only a few preliminary indications of possible ways forward. If tools for breaking the mould cannot be found, it is hoped that we can at least find some that will help us reshape it in the image of man and woman alike.

[8] See webpage at: (www.women.cs.cmu.edu/What/Outreach/Roadshow).

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