

Changing Tides: Women, Lace, and Economy in Modern-Day Gozo

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Introduction

Gozo, the second largest of Malta's three islands, is relatively unknown on the world stage. Where it is known, it is sensationalized for a few of its treasures, one being lace. The knowledge of lace as women's work is widely and tacitly understood by Gozitans today. Thus, the connection made between lace's status and women's place is not much of a leap, making the culture of lace-making an optimal screen through which to study changing female identities and self-identities. Compounding this change are the divisive influences of outside forces such as globalization, capitalism, recent induction into the EU, and emerging public controversies about gender roles and rights. In looking at both individual and collective experiences, women's shifting priorities and perceptions of their place in society highlight a conspicuous change in the relationship between women and economy. This change can be seen not only on larger scales like women's involvement in the tourist sector, but on smaller scales, like speaking with those few elder women who continue to make lace and the even fewer young women who are attempting to revitalize the tradition.

Before analyzing women's relationship to lace and economy, one must first see why lace-making is an effective way to study changing dynamics in Gozo. Interviews with various informants support the idea that lace holds a contentious place in social politics. It not only involves religious conventions, but financial and domestic practices as well. Lace seems to pervade all parts of society unabated yet unnoticed. Because most lace makers are female, maintained by stigmas and gender constructions, the ambivalent yet influential place of lace in society leads one to question if the place of women in Mediterranean society is as static or dogmatic as UN meetings and Western perceptions would lead one to believe. As ideas about women's abilities and spheres of influence change, one can use the culture of lace-making to break down traditional ideas about what women are supposed to do, be, and believe. Just as theorist Gilbert Ryle observed in themany different meanings that rapidly moving one's eyelid can have in specific social contexts (twitch, wink, parody, or rehearsal), I will look at lace as a portal through which deeper social connections and understandings of Gozitan women can be accessed.

Methodology

Firstly, I had to choose my interviewing style-formal or informal. After spending a few days in Gozo, I realized that the sentiment of the areas that I visited- the villages of Xlendi, Victoria, and San Lawrenz particularly-, was welcoming and congenial. Learning that most lace makers are elderly women oftentimes described as confined by their age, I could more easily grasp the idea that some women saw lace as a part and parcel to their family history that needed to be told. Informal interviewing through everyday conversations was the most productive way to get information not only about the questions I developed myself but the issues that only my informants would know to address as problematic or deserving of attention. It is these interviews that taught me about people's opinions, ideas, and motivations, in turn introducing the influences of larger social forces and norms.

To broaden my own scope of understanding, I chose to combine interviews with participant observation (i.e. learning to make lace myself) by learning some of the simpler stitches over hours-long visits with one of my informants, an 81 year old who I will call Mary G for purposes of confidential anonymity. Sitting with her allowed me not only to hear about but to experience, at least partially, the type of female solidarity that people reflect upon as a nostalgic aspect of traditional lace-making culture. Through my combination of participant

observation and informal interviewing, I could see the connections these women had to their lace making and the emotions that women feel as the world that they know fades in the face of modernity. Particularly looking at financial and gendered dynamics, I trust that a more relaxed yet involved research methodology provided some important answers to the implicit and in many ways sensitive cultural intricacies that I wanted to examine.

In pondering my methodology, I first acknowledged that the reason I chose to research lace-making was to see how Gozitan female identity has changed over the last century, so the issue of voice is the crux of my fieldwork. My approach to reduce the threat of possible biases is twofold- both listening to my informants as authorities on their experiences and using a reflexive approach so that my research takes into account my own involvement in situations as humble, unknowing, and alien to my informants' routines. I had to acknowledge limitations of time (only three weeks), race (as an African-American female on an island whose more urban counterpart Malta has politically racist attitudes towards African migrants), and sensitivity to the research topic of identity and gender discourse. Only then could I strive to gain informants' trust and place their voices in the forefront.

Decline of Lace

My focus was on the culture of lace-making in Gozo and its connections to changing ideas of women's place, identity, and self-identity with special attention to economics. Highlighting lace producers, buyers, and sellers, the study employs a material culture approach, specifically the idea of 'thing theory' (the study of an object, lace in this case, in order to delve into larger issues, social paradigms, memories, histories, and cultural norms). The material culture of Gozo lace helped me to investigate Gozitan women's experiences and perspectives. Guiding questions include:

- What connections can be made, if any, between the practice of lace making and women's changing identities and self-identities in Gozitan culture?
- What do women and men know about the history of lace? What do they feel about lace and lace makers in modern-day Gozitan society?
- What meaning does lace have in Gozitan society? Have the opportunities and possibilities presented by changing gender dynamics devalued lace and the lace making tradition in society?
- What do the advertisements and selling tactics of the growing tourist sector say about lace?

- Are lace makers seen as people beyond or outside of their work?
- Are tradition and globalization mutually exclusive concepts when considering the culture of lace making?

In looking at material culture, people may interpret the relationship of meaning between an object and humanity in different ways. Some see it archaeologically as speaking for a past truth, as Cornelius Holtorf warns against in “Pot Sherd”. He demands people to know the difference between a thing and the meaning that people ascribe to it, as ‘material essence’ remains unchanged despite the many meanings put onto it by observers. On the other hand, some see emotionality as premier, like Susan Pollak. She uses objects as a jumping-off point from which to look at memories, inclinations, and emotions: “after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, ... more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping among the ruins of all the rest” (Pollak 2007: 228). Either way, the importance of ‘the thing’, as Martin Heidegger posits, dominates. In his essay, ‘What is a Thing?’, Heidegger questions if things have ‘lives’ before humans come into contact with them. To extend this point more relevantly, what is the meaning of lace as man-made item that is always intertwined with human narratives? As it arises under completely manufactured circumstances, lace’s social, material, economical, and ideological positions align with their makers’ histories that much more closely. In looking at these women’s histories with especial regard to heritage, it is not an ‘ultimate’ truth or thing that matters but people’s tellings and affirmations of them. In creating their narratives, lace-making women form nostalgic relationships with ideas of the ‘authentic’, merging the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ in their daily experiences.

Brief History of Gozitan Lace-Making

Lace-making, though woven first in Genoa according to documentation, was introduced in Gozo in the 1640s during the rule of the Order of the Knights of St. John. When lace re-emerged after 18th century French occupation, it became an essential part not only of ordinary people’s lives but of the church and the cultural elite. For instance, Ms. Consiglia Azzopardi describes in her book *Gozo Lace: An Introduction to Lace Making in the Maltese Islands* that “up to that time great quantities of... laces were made... used for the fine white lawn head-dresses worn with the beautiful gala dress of the noble ladies, now only found and preserved by the great Maltese families as relics of the past” (1991:13).

In speaking of the great past of Malta, one must acknowledge the various changes that have contributed to Malta’s political and social identity. Malta’s isolated position in the Mediterranean, 58 miles from Sicily and 180 miles from Northern African mainland, has served various nations as a strategic Defense colony. These nations include the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Knights of St. John, Napoleon, and finally the British. However, as technological advances like nuclear weapons and other modern, more distanced methods of warfare emerged, the military importance of Malta began to lessen, with a figurative bottoming out of this economy coming with Maltese Independence in 1964. A major portion of Malta’s new economic approach involved the expansion and renovation of the island’s tourist sector, with the people of Malta and Gozo (as Comino is an island visited mostly for its tourist attractions) sometimes competing for dominance and reputation.

Lace has always had an economic motivation but the gap between the economic and the cultural is widening as global conceptions of wealth and achievement become more and more dominant. Since Gozo lace began in 1846, its legacy has always mixed the traditional and the financial, the public and private. For instance, the stitches themselves were originally taught by an enlightened few in ‘schools’. Despite this commercialized past, the tradition of lace making that many of my informants recall centers on the women in their families. Its importance lay in its traditional passage from mother to daughter. Although lace making provided a supplementary wage to those earned by fathers, husbands, and sons, lace became popular because of its function in the private sphere. Lace making, according to Consiglia Azzopardi, kept women busy in their spare time. However, in agreement with the idea that “a life built around domestic labor, however, did not necessarily mean that women were isolated within their homes, for many tasks lent themselves to group activities” (Libal 2005:36), I see lace making as a way that women reaffirmed a solidarity amongst themselves, defined a culture of their own, and found a way to blend industry and tradition in ways that acknowledged economics but was able to see beyond them.

The involvement of women in the progressive Gozitan lace economy is quite complex, simplified by Consiglia Azzopardi’s quote, “In the past, lace making has been a means of living and a means of the women’s social encounter. Nowadays it is regarded more as an art practised by most as a hobby” (1991:7). Early years found lace abounding, made by almost every Gozitan woman. Combining meager agricultural incomes with the fact that women could not work outside of the home without disapproving looks,

small-time businesses out of the home- tailoring, sewing, and lace making - were popular among townswomen and girls. In 1839 Thomas McGill, who issued *A Handbook, or Guide, for Strangers visiting Malta*, wrote that “the females of the island make also excellent lace; the lace mitts and gloves wrought by the Malta girls are bought by all ladies coming to the island; orders from England are often sent for them on account of their beauty and cheapness” (Pullicini). Grandmothers, mothers and daughters would sit either in alleys just outside of the home or inside their home’s main living area. They would clutch the bottom end of their *trajbu*, the Gozitan lace making pillow, between their thighs on one end and, slanting the *trajbu* upward, prop the upper end up against a wall or into a corner. The grace and skill with which elder women maneuvered the hundreds of bobbins (wooden idols around which the threading material is wound and hung) was only rivaled by the beautifully designed and executed patterns in the final piece.

Walking out of one of these domiciles and into town, one would see women wearing large black robe-like garments called *ghannella* that cover the body completely and drape so as to leave only the face uncovered. They, made from the very lace that women like those described above would craft patiently by hand, provided a feeling of connectedness and purpose to the tradition, however financially motivated lace-making was initially. Despite the beauty and prevalence of lace products, greater sociocultural importance lay in the process of making lace. The female social networks formed by this practice encouraged themes of female solidarity, pride, and acknowledgment of strength in their complementary gender roles. In an economy where agricultural forms once dominated (because military purposes only benefited a colonizing few), the ‘little extra income spurred women from all walks of life to master the new art and in fifteen years the industry had developed fantastically” (Anton Tabone Ex Minister for Gozo 1991; Azzopardi 9). This made them a part of this wider circle of women and contributed, at least in part, to their formulations of self-identity.

Nowadays, where lace-making is an artistic hobby and no longer supplements wages as effectively, lace is less economically appealing. According to one of my informants, who I call Mary M. in this paper, women only receive about fifty cents per piece of lace, despite the fact that such a piece could take hours or even days to complete. John, another informant’s pseudonym, supported this idea of lace’s dying economic value by saying that he did not learn how to make lace because ‘it is for nothing. For eight days of work, a woman can make a piece that will cost twenty-two Euros in a shop. I could make one hundred

Euros in eight days working outside of the home at a job... Lace is just not worth it anymore’. Most lace makers, those who are not famous enough to be commissioned by local churches or lace enthusiasts, have even had to change their approaches by making simpler and smaller pieces to accommodate trends in tourist markets. Even within a single family, one can see this slow death of lace: Tina, my 38-year-old informant, knows how to make only the simple trim of lace while her mother knows how to make the ornate centers and her daughter knows no lace-making techniques at all. Because each shop in this study has a cooperative of women producing lace for it on their own time, I suggest that the elder women who continue to make this lace are in ways motivated by a nostalgic idea of economy. They continue to make lace as they always have because, in the process of earning supplementary funds in one of the few ways they could, they established other, more personal connections to the lace they produce.

I see this situation as interestingly parallel to the place that bread once had in Sardinia. In Carole Counihan’s “Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia”, she defines a term “modernization without development’ characterized by the stagnation of local production and the increasing emulation of Western industrial consumption patterns” (Counihan 1984: 47). Counihan continues on to mention the role that market exchange and capitalism have in terms of the rise of individualism as did Gramsci, Marx and Engels, and Sahlins (1984: 47). Completing the trifecta with mention that the decline of women’s cooperative works accompanied the decline of breadmaking itself, the similarities between the two symbolic objects-bread and lace- echo the beginnings of my own immersion into the world of lace and women’s economy.

Anthropologically, the decline of lace exemplifies Bruno LaTour’s argument that people tend to define the ‘social’ by first fixing a domain instead of tracing associations between humans and the things, institutions, or situations around them. Speaking to his actor-network theory, the decline of lace reflects this inability for dominant ideology to change in response to shifting relationships between things and people. Although the capitalist energies of Gozitan economy urge the lace-making industry to move towards simpler, more economically efficient patterns and modes of production, the idealized nostalgia that was fixed to lace within the old-time Gozitan social domain creates a harsh divide between lace’s actual and ideal place. LaTour writes that “when social scientists add the adjective ‘social’ to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon” (LaTour 2005: 3).

Within this safety net of the 'social', Gozo was largely molded by colonial hands to portray a certain image-one that, despite frictions with current trends toward globalization, fails to account for a complex network of material and conceptual meanings. Tourism, for instance, feeds off of those fundamental links between people and lace, ignoring the fact that these networks, or web of associations (Weber 1967), are vulnerable to real social changes. It is within these systems of lace and of meaning that women's identities and relationships to economy can further be explored.

The Rise and Challenge of Capitalist Ideoscapes in Lace

Referring first to Arjun Appadurai's "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy", I see the changing place of lace as a symptom of changing ideoscapes within Gozo's economy. "Ideoscapes' ...are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ...counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. ...terms and images, including 'freedom', 'welfare', 'rights', ... 'democracy'"(Appadurai 1990).As one walks through the streets and alleys of Gozo, the presence of lace in windows is at times overwhelming. The type of building is not of consequence, with lace curtains adorning windows of homes, churches, and even salons and barbershops. During one of my day trips through the village of Kercem, I came upon an old window frame, sitting out and rotting in the sun. From its appearances, it seemed as though it had been sitting either in a little-used room for a long time, molding and gathering dust. It was on the side of the road, at the end of its road, that I found this frame lined with a curtain of lace, abandoned and very aged. The glass in the frame, thick with dust and grime, nearly masked the lace from view but there it lay, discarded and rejected by others who had walked past. The prevalence of lace in ways advances its trek into anonymity, both in terms of its recognition and its history. However, it is by looking both at lace production and consumption that one can see how 'modern' desires for convenience and financial success influence women's perceptions of money and history in their own experiences. As LaTour emphasizes in his book *We Were Never Modern*, although there are few distinct differences between the ideas of 'traditional' and 'modern', we incorporate the categories into our ideologies and what we believe to be 'modern', 'progressive' and therefore worthwhile in society.

Lace acquired its place in mainstream culture after women, who once had to draw designs before pinning them to a trajbu and actually weaving the lace, were able to attain

pre-made patterns and focus wholly on producing and reproducing these into actual pieces of lace. Practical in his approach, a parish priest of Qala and Xaghra, Dun Guzepp Diacono or 'tal-Bambini', aimed to encourage the lace making culture of Gozo by developing and establishing lace as an industry in the 1860s. Hailing back to the domestic craft that it had been previously, lace emerged in central locations where the practice was taught with this new more efficient way of making lace in mind, 'Casa Industriales'. They focused on the mass production of handiwork (also including weaving and embroidery), a theoretical middle-ground between wholly familial ventures and factory-made lace that reached a peak in terms of accommodating both the social and the financial. The lace industry, in fact, "grew up privately on a family basis, with individuals working as family units producing this item on a part time basis...it was practically a local tradition until years back-for young ladies and girls to practise lace making at home" (Azzopardi 1991: 16). Diacono's developments simply helped to develop this industry on a larger scale horizontally, getting all families involved in lace by designing and printing the geometrical patterns that would allow women to skip this time-consuming and artistically tedious step.

The fame of Gozitan lace stems both from its aesthetic beauty and from its ability to tap into a nostalgia and the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) that the outside world expects from the small, relatively rural island of Gozo. As lace-making continued to provide a reliably constant supply of lace (for almost all Gozitan women made lace during the late 1800s and early 1900s), its popularity spread to other lands, including its last colonizer, Britain. Maltese lace, more ornate than today's lace, appealed to notable people like Pope Pius IX (who received lace when he established the diocese of Gozo in 1864) and Queen Elizabeth II (after opening the first post-war exhibition in 1951). Even Queen Victoria placed an order for 'eight dozen pairs long and eight dozen pairs short mits, besides a scarf' at the nascence of the lace industry in 1838'. (Azzopardi 1991: 17-18). As lace became a bigger deal in the international arena, it came to represent Gozo as a whole. It helped to reassert Gozo's reputation as 'pure; and 'authentic'. It is in this way that lace gained its place on the pedestal as one of Gozo's internationally acclaimed treasures.

As awareness of Gozitan lace spread to more parts of the globe through the acclaim of notable buyers or international craft fairs, the industry of lace making continued to grow and started to overpower the cultural aspects of lace making that had been precariously balanced since lace's beginnings. The dynamics of lace making culture, as lace proved more financially successful, became entangled

in the ideas of legitimacy, efficiency, and patriarchy that defined the public realm. It became a currency of sorts, able to be bartered for food, clothes, or even gold for wedding dowries (Azzopardi 19). As the reputation of lace grew, businessmen emerged “as middlemen and bought the lace from the women and sold it to shops in Valletta or even went abroad to England and other European countries carrying face laces out of the islands” (Azzopardi 1991: 18). In addition to men leaving the country specifically to sell lace, the increasing levels of Maltese emigration in the 1960s also got lace out of the country and exposed both lace and lace-making to peoples in other nations- Australia, Canada, and America (Azzopardi 1991: 19). In today’s market, lace contains much simpler, less timely motifs of crosses, flowers, and cross stitches made from coarser thread as everyday items (dining mats or tablecloths for constant display on one’s table for instance). This commercial lace outnumbers the more sacred lace pieces like those commissioned for church robes or services and village festas (festivals held to honor and celebrate a particular village’s patron saint).

Lace and Tourism

However strong the nostalgia for Gozo’s bucolic atmosphere, it is easily countered by a stroll through Gozo’s main villages. One cannot help but notice the strong tourist-based environment that has come to the island in recent decades. Upon entering such villages, one may be overwhelmed by the number of restaurants, bars, and souvenir shops and stalls that line the streets, especially when juxtaposed to the surrounding environment of grass, trees, open fields, plateaus of dirt and rocks. The bus lines are arranged so they use the bus stops in the areas that attract the most tourists and hardly go to the others. Even the behavior of shopkeepers implies the strong role that tourism has in Gozo. They know how exactly how to advertise their goods to tourists so as to take advantage of this increasingly capitalist democracy. Using Pierre’s Bourdieu’s ideas of the phenomenological and the objectivist, one can clearly see a rift between how one primarily responds to the Gozitan marketplace and how one can go about understanding its functions, histories, and dynamics. Bourdieu stresses that people must remember that the phenomenological- “unquestioning apprehension of the social world which, by definition, does not reflect on itself and excludes the question of the conditions of its own possibility” (Bourdieu 1977: 3) cannot be seen as unaffiliated with ‘objectivist’ knowledge “...which structure[s] practice and representations of practice...of the familiar world...[with a] supposed break

with primary knowledge” (Bourdieu 1977: 3). Accounting for this initial surprise at the overwhelming presence of tourism can help scholars more fully understand how to bridge the ‘public’ and the ‘private’, and see how the rigid, directional mindset behind capitalism so severely affects people’s formation of identity and lifestyle.

The three locations where I conducted my research were Xlendi Bay, Victoria, and Ta’ Dbiegi Craft Village right outside of San Lawrenz. All three locales cater to visiting tourists, although each does so in a different way. The appeal of tourist areas to my research was both intended and purposeful. Lace has, as already implied, an interesting position in the relationship between tradition and globalization. It is one of the few emblems of an ‘authentic’ Gozitan past, if there is such a thing, and it has been simultaneously degraded and preserved. In one of the shops in Xlendi Bay, the sales pitch given to anyone who even glanced at the small lace display was a quite popular and rehearsed one: the owner’s grandmother had made the lace by hand and, because it held a piece of this nostalgic history and uniquely Gozitan sort of labor, it was worth the purchase. Numerous situations played out this way but hardly ever mentioned what portion of that money would go to these women, making me question whether tradition and capitalism were as mutually exclusive as many theorists hypothesize. For instance, Marx writes that “globalization begins with the separation of the producers from the means of production, which estranges and alienates the worker from her ‘producing activity’” (Agathangelou 2004: 19; Marx 1988: 73). As ‘tradition’, authentic and unadulterated, is based in ideas of community, the individualism, estrangement, and alienation that Marx suggests would put the two in two distinctly separated spheres of exchange.

As one of the three tourist areas in which I conducted research, Xlendi Bay is located on the southeast shoreline of Gozo. It is one of the four most popular beach areas to visit on the island, along with Ramla Bay, Marsalforn, and Dwejra Bay. The site itself is an inlet of the Mediterranean Sea which is surrounded by land on the three sides with the fourth leading out to sea. On one of the three sides, a high rock cliff has a small climbing route for people to go up and overlook this section of the bay. On the other two sides, continuing onto back streets that branch off of the boardwalk, are numerous restaurants, bars, and souvenir shops. Around that are rental apartments, a few hotels, and residential homes. Xlendi Bay has four shops that specifically sell souvenirs, all of which have what they claim to be ‘Handmade Gozo Lace’.

Victoria, the second town in which I conducted interviews, is the central village of Gozo. It is where all the bus lines run

to and from, and is the most urban location on the island. Because of its centralized location, its businesses are built to be both tourist and local-friendly. Coincidentally, the touristy atmosphere of Victoria is clearly strongest in the area where I found lace- the craft stalls in the middle of Victoria located at the bottom of the stairs that lead up to the Citadel (religious center and tourist favorite). The stalls in this square resemble a street fair, a paved lot covered with different vendors selling different things but all vying to catch tourists' attention. Everything from football jerseys to 'I love Gozo' tee-shirts to straw hats is sold here. When I came across a table covered in lace doilies, table runners, and surrounded by hanging shawls, it seemed a bit out of place among all of the conspicuously foreign and/or manufactured items. When I asked the man who owned the stand about who made the lace, all he said and kept saying was 'the old ladies make it', no matter what other questions I asked him about these women. This instance, occurring only a block away from where Mary G lives, highlights the complex relationship between tradition and capitalism in the tourist sector.

Finally, Ta'Diegbi Village is the site right outside of San Lawrenz in Western Gozo that gives local craftspeople a central location to set up a shop and sell their crafts to visiting tourists. It is a highlight for many visitors who have the urge to 'take back a piece' of Gozo to their homeland. Among the many craft shops are a silver filigree shop, a pottery barn, the Gozo glass factory, and three shops that sell lace. One of these shops is called Maria's Lace and Yarn Shop and is run on the front end by her son John and visited by Maria herself, who does lace-making demos in the shop every weekday from 10:30 in the morning until 1:00 in the afternoon.

As a general observation, lace is oftentimes synonymous, with ideas of an 'old' Gozo. Highly sensationalized, this image centers on ideas of the 'untouched' and the 'authentic'. Tourists see lace souvenirs as keys to the past, as artifacts that prove that they traveled to this different land and can speak of its wonders. Numerous postcards feature images that focus on women making crafts, whether it be crocheting, knitting, or, germane to this thesis, lace making. These scenes portray a pastedited to portray specific ideas and trigger specific reactions from viewers. However, the biased staging is overlooked in preference of a comforting image that caters to a nostalgia for the type of devotion and skill associated with traditional domesticity. Firstly, the industrialization of lace via entrepreneurial lace ventures like Don Giuzepp's and the emergence of machine-made lace changed how people came to appreciate the beauty and history of community women's lace. Secondly, despite the industrialization of lace, one can see the development

of a new culture among the women who made and proudly displayed their lace but was unafraid to adopt and embrace the financial benefits as well.

It seems fitting that we look into lace-making in the way that many people catch their first glimpses into and began to form their opinions about lace: postcards. On the one hand, one must acknowledge the positive effects of postcards' images, those effects that tourists cling to and see no need to look beyond. The images reflect on a valued part of Gozo's national heritage, as recognized by the repetitive use of 'Gozo Handmade Lace' on signs outside of souvenir shops and in shopkeepers' sales pitches. However, the perilous effects of postcards, however, may outshine those positives ones, as they serve to limit the understanding that customers seek to gain about lace making as a cultural phenomenon. In something as simple as a postcard, a way of representing lace makers as an 'Other', is an extension of the culture of lace making that, when scrutinized, speaks to issues of social replacement, authority, forced identity, and historical amnesia. The very nature of postcards, as still snapshots, promotes frozen notions of the place of and motivations behind lace and lace making. By providing tourists with tidbits of information, shopkeepers cater to and profit from visitors' desires for a sense of cultural authority, however contrived. Informal conversations with a few locals and souvenir stall owners revealed that, for some people who sell lace, 'Handmade Gozo lace' and 'little old ladies' are the immediate responses when approached by potential customers. Here, a balance is stricken within the tourist sector with items like lace and postcards-items that tempt tourists with an all-inclusive and self-explanatory version of Gozitan history. Tourists are spoiled and salespeople benefit, perpetuating the cycle of selective knowledge and dying tradition.

Postcards normalize a practice and juxtapositions of image and place that would conventionally be considered anachronistic. Challenging chronology and context in this way greatly abridges the history of these women to the brink of erasure. Lace makers experience completely different relationships with the lace they make in the tourist sector, for they once were its mainly its material producers (maintaining their own brand of power and place in everyday social structures) but now mainly serve as intermediate story lines that link lace to the sense of legitimacy behind the stories that tourists tell the people they encounter outside of Gozo. In this narrative of Gozitan lace, people become commodities in themselves. For instance, these older women are seen as lace-makers, but not as women, as mothers, as daughters, or as carriers of heritage as in the past. Oftentimes, the humans who make the lace take a backseat to the spectacle of lace.

Caroline van Eck's response to Alfred Gell's idea of art as agency is poignant, in that this perceived agency of art, "the interaction between works of art and their viewers that makes them similar to living beings: their agency, the power to influence their viewers, to make them act as if they are engaging, not with dead matter but with living persons" (2010: 644), is directly related to its emotive place within the social context. Van Eck argues "that even when such responses are considered in terms of Gell's view of agency, they still only make sense if living presence response is understood as an experience, the experience of a work of art becoming alive" (van Eck 2010: 644) The true value and potential to understand underlying social networks lies in the ability to focus these artistic creations on the people who make the lace, and the human must once again become 'the primary agent' that gives shape, purpose, and meaning to the objects in their lives.

I witnessed the effectual impact of this trend during my visits with one of my informants, Mary G of Victoria. She, an 81 year old woman who lived through lace's history since before Malta's independence, had in many ways taken a backseat to the tourist traps that promised dominion over lace with the swipe of a debit card. Such developments not only trouble the connection made by many between authority and authenticity, but suggest the dangerous but ever more popular abandonment of authenticity for a convenient sense of authenticity. Not that I am saying that authenticity is a simple idea or even truly exists, but I find it more productive to converse with a person about her firsthand experiences with lace making than to buy a doily under the strategic eye and sweet tongue of shopkeepers to claim an equal level of knowledge. Trusted because of shared interest in lace, I was invited to sit inside of Mary's home and learn the basics of lace making. Just outside of her window, there was a wide alley lined with tourist souvenir shops. During our time together, I began to notice just how original Mary is but also just how much of a product of this changing society she is. She is quite opinionated and did not fear telling me, her apprentice in many ways, how she feels about the growth of tourism, the changing ideals of womanhood, and her own place in both of these realms. However, one could also see that she at times felt invisible and at others like a burden. Having had a stroke a year prior to our meeting, Mary often put her head down toward the *trajbu* (Gozitan lace making pillow) and then moved only her eyes to look out of the window at passersby and also would continuously say 'Sorry' and 'I cannot move because I had a stroke'. Cognizant of her demeanor, I sat with her for about two hours before I felt comfortable enough to ask her how she felt when people stopped to take her picture. She replied that she did not mind but she would

ask these people to donate money when they did so. One must have open eyes to look beyond the postcard image of the elder Gozitan women to see Mary's economic savvy and awareness.

The trend toward modernization, one indication of globalization on the Gozitan island, is influential in the logic that shop owners use to choose and display their souvenirs but detrimental to the cultural value behind the lace they aim to sell. Unlike Mary's out-of-home venture, many owners of full-fledged souvenir shops strip the lace of most of its historical and cultural meaning in efforts to make it more sensational and therefore more appealing. In response to this change in demand, the means of lace supply have changed, in the process altering the approach and mentality of the women who make it. Lace makers once commissioned to make elaborate designs for church and family events are now more likely to be paid a minimal amount of money for a lace trim destined to be a souvenir bookmark or doily. Although money has always been a factor in the culture of lace-making, the atmosphere has completely changed. Instead of women of all ages gathering in groups to make lace while chatting about their days, elderly women now sit inside of their homes and work alone in their free time to finish extremely time-consuming pieces. Instead of women learning how to make lace from their mothers and passing on the tradition to their daughters, these women focus on the task at hand, some choosing to sit outside and attract the attention and company of passersby.

Following the fundamental conceptualization of lace that drives tourist sector (described above), one can see the effects that the tourist sector is having on the place of tourism in the lace making culture. About thirty years ago, according to Tina of Souvenirs gift shop in Xlendi Bay, there were entire towns known for the lace makers that would sit outside and make lace, supporting the idea of bridging economy and community. Such areas became attractions for tourists who wanted to see a centuries-old craft still in practice and to feel a connection to that nostalgic past that makes Gozo appealing to many of its tourists. Two of these villages, Fontana and Sannat, were much acclaimed by multiple informants but neither village continues its lace making traditions on such a public and advertised level. The scenes that at least three informants described to me included images of an elder matriarchal figure, either a mother and daughter duo; a grandmother, mother, and daughter; or a grandmother surrounded by children, whether they were members of her family or just random children in the village. One local man told me about a woman in Xewjka but who makes lace outside in an alley while her grandchildren and other village children

surround her, watching her and playing with each other. Her lace-making and storytelling helped the children to learn of not only their familial and national history, but of the value of lace and lace traditions of both past and present. Tourists, with such scenes and moments accessible for them to watch, were able to garner a context and witness the passing down of an oral history and value set that emerging systems of globalization and modernization ignore and even attempt to subdue.

The economic motivation behind one souvenir shop in Ta'Diegbi Village provides a great platform for discussions about changes in women's relationships to economy. The generic souvenir shop, Rosanna's, is run by its namesake. Rosanna is a middle-aged Gozitan woman with a jovial smile, small rectangular glasses, and the experience of twenty-eight years of shop ownership under her belt. From the outside, the shop looks small and quaint. However the signs that hang outside of the shop promise just the opposite, including the common advertisement for 'Handmade Gozo Lace', this time adorned with a few samples of lace work around the print as examples. Walking into the shop is overwhelming. The small space is crammed with all types of knick-knacks, from plates and magnets with 'Gozo' written on them to scarfs to blouses. One large table is reserved for only lace, which is mounded up with items of all shapes and sizes. The lace was not only sewn into table runners, doilies, and bookmarks but was made into other crafts like fans and umbrellas. With such a large amount of lace in her possession, Rosanna and her business intrigued me and inclined me to speak to her about her relationship with lace. She went on to tell me, in a matter of ten minutes, that she learned to do a bit of lace making from her mother but commissioned a group of women to sell her the lace they made in their homes (the youngest one of which was thirty years old). Despite the interest she had in my project and her full cooperation, she never took her eyes off of the door or let me interrupt her attentiveness to other potential customers. The value of the lace lied not in its cultural resilience or history but in the price determined by the amount of labor that women put into making it, placing economics over other aspects of the lace making tradition.

The spirit of tourism is even a factor in motivating how women of older generations are choosing to make and sell their lace nowadays. They know that the lace has certain historical importance that can be economically utilized and that the tourists' obsession with gathering such artifacts is just part of an entire escapist experience they have sought out for themselves on Gozo. To satisfy tourists' expectations, women over the age of 65 are changing their approach so as to more closely resemble

market relations. An instance of this adaptation to the tourist sector refers once again to my relationship with one of my main informants Mary G. I spent four three-hour sessions with over the course of three weeks and on the last day that I went to visit her, I decided to buy one of the lace bookmarks. Eventually communicating my question to her, I expected her to just take a bookmark off of her makeshift display (bookmarks pinned to Styrofoam). Instead, she began looking around and under her seat, as if intensely searching for something. Finally Mary emerged with an ordinary, unused napkin that she found. She began to fold my bookmark up in the napkin as if she were packaging a gift at a store. No less than three souvenir shops surrounded her little doorway in the alley, exposing her to their protocols so much as to inspire her to adopt whatever practices she could. In this she put great care, partly connected to our developing relationship but also to the pervasive effects and interactions that people have learned to expect from the tourist sector and program into their own encounter, especially if they hope to compete.

However, the growth of tourism's role in Maltese economy and changes in social and gender dynamics is not wholly about a loss of culture, but about changes that many people seem to be embracing, highlighting internal complexities. It is efficient not only to the overall economy (by making use of the island's rock faces and Mediterranean waters and popularizing Gozo on the international scene), but to the small businesses that families start. It is no longer an income only for larger corporate and political hotshots (as it was when military economy dominated Malta) but could be taken up by citizens as long as they had the startup funds and the dedication to working hard in a new way. Unlike the agricultural economy that predated it, the tourist economy was one in which everyone, young to old, male and female, could participate in some way. Tourism formed a new culture, creating shared knowledge and meaning in this highly material-based sector. Each souvenir gained a new potential both economically and socially. Salespeople had to incorporate new products or stress the historical or recreational facts in old ones, all to appeal to a growing tourist market. The repetition of jargon and competition for sales in areas where people are selling versions of the same scant selection of items in ways builds a community of jargon, frustrations, and dependence upon this new influx of people.

Despite the chaos and day-to-day unpredictability of the tourist market, the general reliability that shopkeepers have on the continuance of the market economy creates a space in which nurturing traditions emerge. Tourism is important because it is a somewhat constant industry, allowing people to plan their lives and livelihoods around it.

There has been such permanence in the nature of tourism in Gozo that there is actual disappointment for some when tourist activity is lacking or lesser than previous years. For instance, Mary G. sits at her window each day, waiting to see how many tourists will pass and wondering how many will stop to say hello. The location at which she sits, housed between about three souvenir shops, may seem daunting to onlookers only concerned with financial competition. The stability and accessibility of the tourist market, however, provides jobs for women to engage in outside of the home and facilitates relationships between these different types of women, for they all are now joined by at least one commonality—the ability to participate in a world larger than the domestic one they were previously confined to. Leticia, co-owner of one of these shops, is a middle-aged woman who works at her family store alone most days. She, during the lace making lessons that Maria gave me, would come over to watch and support me as she herself is a former lace maker who had given up many of the hours she had once spent making lace to devote to running the shop. Her shop, packed with items both local and foreign (she sold me an obviously imported scarf at a discount because it had been in a delivery that had been left out in the rain and damaged), had merchandise ranging from sunglasses to scarves to lace fans to costume jewelry. In this realm of tourism, however, Leticia found solace in a shared bond that she formed with Mary over the years they worked in the area. They commiserated over the annual decrease of tourist numbers and chatted about approaching festivals or the best foods to get around town. In ways, these tourist sector helped Mary and Leticia return to a time when lace making is a social encounter and women chatted over lace about their lives, their griefs, and their histories.

Also, the tourist sector, dependent on an emerging capitalist fascination in Gozo, encourages the establishment of family businesses, where women are able to work both outside of the house and alongside their husbands. Gender roles are becoming less ideologically defined, as can be seen in these family souvenir shops where wives work, oftentimes alone while their husbands attend to their main careers. This can last the whole week, giving women roles in the public and economic spheres and de-stigmatizing women's place in the larger community. Two of my informants owned shops with their husbands and spent most of the summer months working in the shops. Though these women worked in different locales, they all told me that they knew a time when women either did not work outside of their homes, or had to place their domestic duties and roles before any external job. Both communicated, whether implicitly or explicitly, that women's role and identities were definitely different than when their mothers were younger.

Tina, for example, told me that her mother, when she had worked in the family shop, had to come into work at 11am instead of 8am as Tina did, because she would have to perform household chores like preparing dinner before coming to work. Now Tina, a thirty-eight year-old mother of a son and a daughter who has worked in the shop since she was sixteen, has mastered running the flow of business expertly at the shop, both handling the money and charming tourists and locals alike with her wit, openness, and willingness to answer any questions her customers may have. Having learned English from constant exposure to the language in the tourist sector, Tina is truly integrated into society through her activity in the tourist economy, working from 8am to when the shop closes at 8pm. As she later pointed out, Tina only works outside of the home during the summer months, giving the tourist sector an even more ameliorating role in the equivocation of gender relationships. Another informant Mary M. works in her family's shop everyday but Saturdays and Sunday morning; Sunday morning she practices her religion and Saturday is her day for chores like cooking, cleaning, and being with her son. These days out of the shop, however, are more so her choice than conformity to tacit gender norms, although the latter interpretation is still valid to some degree. Maria is not confined to domestic life and appreciates both of the spheres, public and private, in which she participates. She is a devoted mother of three but also a dedicated shop owner, once again demonstrating the changing gender dynamics that a tourist economy has nurtured.

In this look into the dynamics between lace, tourism, and women's identity, I see a gradual shift in how women perceive their social roles and consequently themselves. As many of these women (Mary M. being my only exception) have never left the island, these changes impact them and their ideas acutely because their conceptualizations about life and self are entangled with Gozo's political and economic structure. This narrative biography of a community of lace producers, buyers, and sellers pays looks at how changing social and economic relationships affect gender roles, identities, and self-identities. Women are cognizant and participatory in society's economic dealings, becoming more aware of themselves and their roles as workers, commercial producers, and providers.

There can never be enough study on the differences between external and internal representations of the women involved in lace making culture for all communities, especially one that received its independence only forty-seven years ago, are fluid and responsive to global dynamics. Another angle in need of study, on which I hope to later do, looks at attempts to revive lace as a cultural

tradition despite economic matters. Some are trying to revitalize lace by offering classes; “Lace making is taught in Government trade schools for girls, while private bodies such as the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce also hold special evening classes” (Pullicini). Because this school in Mgarr, another Gozitan village, is not in session during the summer months, I could not attend classes or interview teachers in this context. Also, Ms. Azzopardi told me that, once she finishes her thesis on the history of Gozo lace, she hopes to establish a museum, to display the lace she has collected over the years, and to teach lace making classes to young girls through the museum. Both of these would be excellent places to pick up this research in terms of looking at the changing meanings of lace and possible connections to or responses against ideas of globalization and economy. All in all, we need to see women as agents in their capitalist identities. They are not women who are trying to become men and they are not squelched by the tyrannical capitalist system, but program within it in ways that must be acknowledged as the new ‘given’ within academic discussions.

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