

Finding Balance: an ethnographical approach on how Band Club youth on Gozo perceives Development

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S U M M A R Y

This article is based on a three weeks research carried on during the summer of 2013, which included semi-formal interviews and informal talks with several teenagers members' of a Band Club. Strongly influenced by the theories of Marshall Berman and Gustavo Lins Ribeiro I intends to make a digression on Gozo's development and its impact on the island Band Club youth's expectations for the future. When Malta joined the European Union, Gozo, a traditional world, started facing a so-called development. Gozo is modernising, and it is affecting the island's youth worldview and lifestyle choices.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords

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This article intends to make a digression on Gozo's development and its impact on the island youth's expectations for the future. A world of tradition is facing a so-called development, in other words, it is becoming modern. Where between modernity and tradition do Gozitan youth stand? Is it possible to develop and maintain tradition? Or is modernity and development absolute?

Modernity, as understood in this article, is a set of philosophical concepts and values that have been guiding western societies since the Age of Enlightenment. Modern beliefs include development, individualism (a focus on the ego and its will instead of social rules) and the universalism of reason (all human beings think rationally). These beliefs lead to an urban, contractual, progressive, libertarian and equalitarian society. Traditional societies have very different beliefs between themselves so tradition is better described as everything that is not modern¹.

Gozo is one of the three inhabited islands of Malta, a country with a long Catholic tradition, dating back to 60 CE with the shipwreck of the Apostle Paul. It has been under several foreign rulers including the Knights of Saint John, France when ruled by Napoleon and the British². The influence of foreigners can be noticed in the language, which is Semitic but filled with Latin influence. (Castillo, 2006)

Malta gained its independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 21 September 1964. Malta joined the European Union (EU) and in 2008 adopted the Euro currency (CIA FACTBOOK). Joining the EU meant the need to develop, which can be seen in an increase on tourism and an expansion of industries. The country, also, started to show internal regional economical differences. The main island (also called Malta, here referred to only as main island to avoid confusion) developed faster than Gozo, attracting Gozitan youth as it offers better jobs. The smaller island afraid of completely losing its youth and wanting to keep EU subsidies is trying to speed development by increasing tourism and building new facilities (such as banks, and shopping malls like Arkadia in 2007). On the other hand they are also trying to protect scenic views and the rural lifestyle. (Jarvis, 2008)

The development process, attached to modernity, has supposedly caused a decrease in Mass attendance, among younger generations. According to Weiss (2010), even with the recent variation in church attendance, the Gozitan youth still identifies as strongly Catholic. One of Weiss's informants, Francesco, said that when people get older, generally into their 30's, it is customary that they return to attend daily Mass.

The Church is the centre of Maltese community, a place of history and pride of the village (Boissevain, 1965). The research that influenced this article focused on members or supporters of Band Clubs, which implies they are very attached to tradition and church life.

The Band Clubs were developed during British rule. They were based on Sicilian groups of the nineteenth century and on British military bands (Campbell, 2008). The Band Clubs usually coordinate their activities with the Parish which most of its members attend. In Gozo, La Stella coordinates with Saint George's Basilica and Leone coordinates with Our Lady of the Assumption Cathedral, they compete and have a well-known rivalry, as many other band clubs in Malta.

To be a band club member or supporter means a very unique and enthusiastic relationship with church and religion. This can be seen clearly when Dalia³, 17 years old, a band member supporter, expressed emotionally, almost crying, how much she loved "Santa Maria".

A Theory about Development and Gozo

Modernity, a western culture creation⁴, has an unquestionable, almost religious belief in development. Development is an ideology (manipulation of the past into the present) and a utopia (manipulation of the future into the present), and is seen by its believers as the truth, the

natural world order (Ribeiro, 2005).

Any aspect of human life can be developed, and developing is progressing, is getting better, is transforming, and is destroying the old to build something new. This, according to Berman in *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1986), is present in the Tragedy of Doctor Faust, written by Goethe. Faust, a lonely intellectual middle-aged man makes a deal with the Devil Mephistopheles, to develop.

Faust wants to achieve the maximum of his capacity in every sense and way possible, but if he does stop developing, even for a minute, the underworld will come for his soul. He has to continue destroying things to build new ones, maybe feelings or material goods, and building new ones in its place. A dangerous immoral deal that makes Faust hesitates. In order to win Faust's soul the Devil tells him the "truth" about God. God is a destructor; he had to destroy whatever existed before the world, in order to create it.

Faust, in the beginning of the story, is lonely and well-educated, an intellectual full of ideas. He considers suicide because the only thing he has are ideas and he wants to turn the world into a better place, and himself a better man, but keeps failing to do so. The church bells ring stopping him from kill himself, as they give him hope and invite him out of his apartment to the lively streets. The bells and the outside reinvigorate him, and when he returns to his apartment he is sure that what can change the world is action. The only way Faust can get action to improve things is through Mephistopheles. So he closes the deal with the devil.

The first thing Faust has to do to develop is to leave behind the world of his childhood represented by the church bells he loved so much. The bells helped to save his life by preventing him from committing suicide. By leaving behind the world of his childhood, he is actually destroying it to create a better more developed one. That is the thing about development, at least in Goethe's story: everything that is new is better than the old because things cannot stop progressing.

When Faust meets Gretchen and falls in love with her, the first real clash happens in Faust's story between the old traditional medieval world and modernity. Gretchen is a pure, traditional girl from a medieval village whom by having an affair with Faust, a modern man, begins to develop modern feelings. She wants to make her own choices independent from her family and what village she comes from. Nonetheless she is not prepared to abandon her old values, her family and her village. Gretchen's traditional world does not accept her, now that she has started to develop, which leads her to suicide. The outcome demonstrates that the traditional world that

chooses not to let its children develop becomes a ghost world. Gretchen's suicide is the way she finds to destroy her old self and develop, and that Faust who is a modern spirit, an individual who embraces development as life's most important endeavor, cannot exist simultaneously with the traditional world without trying to destroy it by transforming it into something new. Faust, also, cannot see tradition without feeling fascinated by it.

The fascination and the impossibility for the modern to live with the traditional is seen again when Faust manages to develop the whole world using machines, technology and big construction projects that transform nature itself. Faust uses science and its creations. Human reasoning is working in its total capability and all resources have been optimized with the exception of an old farmer Filemo and his wife Baucia (and their small piece of land). The only things that have not developed in the world are Filemo, Baucia and the small piece of land they refuse to sell Faust. The farmer and his wife represent for Faust the beauty of the traditional life that should not be remembered. Mephistopheles kills the farmer and his wife when Faust asks him to deal with the problem⁵. The problem was the remains of a traditional lifestyle in the middle of a modern world. Faust believes that the modern developed world could only function completely sovereign in a homogeneous space.

In development dramas, like the tragedy of Faust, normally there are two types of subjects: active and passive. The passive ones are those transformed by the active subjects during the development process. Most of the time the active subjects are outsiders (people who plan a community's future) and powerful insiders (people who will be transformed) of course with different power situations. The passive subjects are the insiders whose opinion is not heard (Ribeiro, 2005). For example, in the construction of a hydroelectric, the government and the big construction companies are the active subjects. Populations that live by the river are the passive subjects as they are not consulted about the construction, and they will be the most affected. The inhabitants will have to find another place to live completely changing their way of life.

The building of Gozo's Arkadia Mall is the construction of a development program. Gozitan and Maltese government and the capitalists involved in its construction are the active side. The passive is the common Gozitan citizen who saw the architectural alteration and experienced a change in their lifestyle, for the good or the evil. Some changes caused by the mall include the change on siesta habits. The families have started going to the mall during that time because of the air-conditioning. There were also changes in job opportunities. These changes means Gozitan youth

are less likely to move or commute every day to Malta for work. (JARVIS, 2008)

About Gozitan development, it is possible to identify the EU and Malta's central government with Faust, a developed modern active outsider planning the community future.

Gozo's politicians are the farmer and his wife but they choose to bargain with Faust in order not to become Gretchen's extinct world, or a city of ghosts. They also do not want to destroy tradition. In this way it is possible to compromise goals and rationales with tradition. This allows Gozo to try and develop economically and protect its scenic views and rural lifestyle which Gozitans are very proud of, especially because it is what makes the island so unique in the Maltese archipelago and attracts the main island inhabitants from vacations

Gretchen represents the Band Club youth. They were touched by development, they are modernizing, but they are also attached to their old values. Can they manage to find balance between old values and modern feelings, like Gozo's government is trying to do?

The field and the feelings of the Band Club Youth about Modernity and Tradition

The research that informed this article was conducted during the first three weeks of August 2013, during Off the Beaten Track summer school. The summer school is held annually and intends to help its students to get field experience while closely guided by competent faculty⁶. I, a social anthropology undergraduate, decided to take this course in order to improve my skills on the field and enjoy holidays at the same time.

My research occurred during Festa season, therefore most of the conversations I had with the Band Club youngsters took place while they were helping prepare the decorations for the festa, or doing something else related to the festa, like one of the band club's internal parties. The method I used was participant observation, which included semi-formal interviews and completely informal talks.

My hosts⁷ have shown great appreciation and a huge wish to follow traditions when it does not conflict with their personal interests and wellbeing (their own development). Below are five of my key host's opinions on Malta and Gozo's situation and their individual wishes for the future.

Roxanne is attending her second year at The University of Malta so she lives on the main island during winter spending the weekends on Gozo. She supports the Nationalist party (as do the majority of people I met in Gozo) especially

because of their support of student financial aid. Roxanne said she needed money to live on the main island and could not study and work at the same time. When she graduates where she lives will depend on the availability of jobs in Gozo. There is a waiting list for jobs in Gozo. Roxanne wants to be a teacher. She would like if possible to get a job in Gozo and would rather live there and marry a Gozitan. Paradoxically she thinks it is better for children to grow up on the main island, and would also like to live one day in the United States of America (USA). She enjoys the main island nightlife but loves the Band Club in Gozo because it feels like home. She believes that it is okay to date in public she would rather keep it private because there is so much gossip on Gozo. She also said that separation rates are increasing and she strongly disapproves of this especially when the couple has children. She is upset about divorce being legalized, and thinks it is only justified when abuse occurs (does not matter what type of abuse. It can be economical, physical, spiritual, psychological or even cheating). She dreams about her wedding day "as every woman does" and expects a husband who is caring and willing to help at home. She said that council marriages are very rare, as most Gozitans would rather marry in the Church. She is very close to her mother and used to take care of her younger cousins.

She holds tradition close to her heart but wants to experience the world and develop economically. Modern life attracts her but she is still attached to her traditional values, she struggles between the two, at times wanting one at other times wanting the other.

Dalia just got into university. She dreams about a big white wedding, the relationship that will follow and wants three or four kids. About the Band Club she said: "it is everything for us, it comes from our heart, it is in our blood" meaning that the Band Club is a family thing, you are there because your parents were there and it is the place where the community comes together and socializes. She is very devoted to "Santa Maria" and is in love with a particular statue that is very beautiful and was sculpted by an artist who went to sleep and when he woke up the statue was ready. "When you look into her eyes...I don't know how to explain it." She told me that there were some changes in the preparation of the festa around three years ago. The changes were made by the committees in an effort to make festa even more exuberant. I would say in order to develop it.

Dalia tries to go to church every day but sometimes school gets in the way. Although she admits that Gozo is better for retirement as it is very quiet and does not offer many jobs she wouldn't like to live anywhere else. She would rather commute every day than to live on the noisy main island.

Living in other countries does not even cross her mind. *Dalia* is probably the most traditional one among my hosts, being very attached to religion, church, the band club and family life. Could it be because she hasn't experienced Maltese university life yet?

Dean is finishing his university education. He told me that the Band Club was a family tradition, and it was different in Malta from other countries: "it is more social. In the afternoon you don't have nothing to do, you say let's meet there. It is also more culturally rich than in other countries." He also talked about the Carnival that traced back from the fourteenth century and the Knights of Saint John but "recently by influence of other countries, like Brazil, more modern elements were introduced."

This shows how they are taking elements, like music and costume styles, from outside and possibly reframing it, they are transforming, but are they necessarily destroying what it was originally? Are they simply changing because of the impact with other cultures or are they developing?

We talked specifically about development and he was very clear in his belief that there should be a balance between modernity and tradition and that Gozo should "try to develop our own way cause our culture is a little bit different." *Dean* believes their traditions should be preserved, as should the scenic view, part of their history, which he is proud of, as are most people on the island.⁸

Christine just got into university and is homosexual. She plays in the band because it is a tradition in one of her parent's family, and for her the Band Club is like a second family. When she told her parents she was gay they did not accept at first but now they are supportive of her. She wants to get married, in a very simple ceremony, but does not want to have children. In her words: "children should not be raised outside the norm". She does not agree to all church views, especially the ones about homosexuals, but goes to Mass every Sunday and is enthusiastic about the new pope Francis. She supports the Nationalist Party but feels glad the Labour Party is in power because they are more likely to legalize gay marriage. She strongly disagrees with divorce, not even in the case of cheating. She believes single mothers need help but it is negative for a child to be born from a single mother. She hopes by moving to Malta her chances of dating will increase. Gozo is too small and because of all the gossip it is hard to come out of the closet. *Christine* hopes that in the future she will be living in Malta, winning money, travelling around Europe and if possible with a partner.

Among all my hosts *Christine* is the most radical about her traditional views, but modernity is the solution to

her situation (being gay in a very conservative Catholic community). So she chooses which values to follow according to her individuality. Even if she does not realize and strongly supports some of the island's traditional values she is already very modern.

with their traditional views, signifying modern values and development itself? If Gozitans manage to give new meaning to modern concepts and values, achieving the balance they wish, they will have bargained with Faust and out-maneuvered him.

Mathew is a student at the University of Malta and as such he is very happy to receive student aid. He strongly believes in Malta's future because it did not have any problems during the economic crises, while other Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Spain are suffering terrible consequences. Mathew believes the high Maltese taxes are reasonable because education and health care are free. He pointed out that the average Maltese family is changing: they are getting smaller, having fewer children. There are more homosexual couples but he prefers a couple composed of a man and a woman to marry and have children. Single mothers receive financial aid from the government, and while older generations gossip about them the single mother's friends try to help. There will be one or two people that will stop being friends with the single mother. Divorce is a new thing, there was a referendum last year, and afterward the government legislated to make legal. The mentality is slowly changing but it is still quite masculine. Mathew also expressed his bad feelings about the main island inhabitants: "They mix a lot Maltese with English, speaking incorrectly both languages, they look at the Gozitans as lower class people, and they are less independent (live with their parents until 25)." He, as the others, embraces tradition, but is also concerned to show appreciation for some modern values.

Final Remarks

The Band Club youth are still very attached to tradition but are slowly accepting some modern values, especially after living some years in Malta. The range of their acceptance varies. In general the Band Club youth seem to be aware that not everything that is modern is good, and hold on very tightly to some parts of their tradition, but again what can be more modern than being able to choose between ranges of values, the ones that suit the individual? Is it not very modern to ignore church life and then come back to it, as it suits you?

Modernity and the concept of economic development arrived, and it began to influence the development of the island's youth. Nonetheless, Gozitan youth seem not to be ready to abandon the traditional values they grew up with, and are eager to find a balance. Can they find it or will this desire destroy itself as Gretchen did? Is development really changing Gozitan values or are the Gozitan youth,

Notes

¹ For a further debate on modernity and Tradition sees: *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, David Harvey; *Individualism: An Anthropological perspective of modern ideology*, Louis Dumont; *The Savage Mind*, Claude Levi-Strauss; *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, Berman.

² They gave themselves over to British rule after the defeat of Napoleon.

³ All the names have been changed to protect the privacy of my hosts.

⁴ It is western but not capitalist as it is part of many other economic systems including socialism, communism and some types of anarchism.

⁵ Faust does not want the old couple to get killed, but this is a discussion about his and Mephistopheles nature, which does not have space for in this article.

⁶ For more information see <http://www.xpeditions.be/>

⁷ I use hosts instead of informants because of the warm relationship I had with them, which turned into friendship. I think the word informant implies a more vertical and distant relation.

⁸ I have realized it is the third mention I make on how proud Gozitans are proud of their history, lifestyle and scenic views. I do so because those things are very important to them and they keep repeating it emphatically, so I think by doing the same the readers can get the feeling of its importance to Gozitans.

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