

# Time to Push: An Ethnographic Study of Reactions to Socially Unsanctioned Pregnancies in Gozo, Malta

by *Stephanie Chung*

## S U M M A R Y

This paper presents the results of an ethnographic study conducted over a period of three weeks in Gozo, Malta concerning responses toward socially unsanctioned pregnancies and forms of motherhood. Gozo is the second largest of the populated islands of the archipelago nation in which the Catholic religion has traditionally held strong influence. In Gozo, socially unsanctioned pregnancies fall into two major, although not exclusive, categories: teenaged pregnancies and pregnancies occurring outside the bounds of matrimony. The ethnographic research was done primarily through semi-formal and informal interviews with a variety of informants throughout the island of Gozo. The results gathered during this research drive me to suggest that while there are high levels of social stigma directed at women with socially unsanctioned pregnancies from both institutions and individuals, some attitudes might be changing as socially unsanctioned pregnancies become more common.

## A R T I C L E I N F O

### *Keywords*

Pregnancy, social stigma, religion, social drama, midwives

### *How to refer to this article*

Chung S., Time to Push: An Ethnographic Study of Reactions to Socially Unsanctioned Pregnancies in Gozo, Malta, 2017, Omertaa, Journal for applied anthropology, <http://www.omertaa.org/archive/omer-taa0078.pdf>

## Introduction

Socially unsanctioned pregnancies are pregnancies whose presence offend the community because they represent actions taken by the parent that are contrary to socially accepted behavior, usually related to sexual activity, marital status, or social compatibility of parents. Key to a pregnancy being socially unsanctioned is the reaction of the community: the measures individuals and institutions implement to demonstrate their disapproval. In Gozo, Malta, where I conducted fieldwork for three weeks in June 2015, I focused on two categories of socially unsanctioned pregnancy that were not mutually exclusive: pregnant teenagers and unmarried pregnant woman. In the course of this fieldwork, I examined ways in which individuals and institutions interacted with and passed judgement upon the woman who had broken social norms.

In order to understand socially unsanctioned pregnancies in Gozo, it is necessary to have some background concerning the traditional role of pregnancy in Maltese and Gozitan culture. Malta is a strongly Roman Catholic

nation made up of three islands: Malta, Gozo, and Comino. Gozo is the second most populated island in the archipelago, and for the purposes of this paper “Gozo” will refer to the island and “Malta” to the nation, not the largest island. Before the rise of the Internet and television, Malta was geographically and socially removed from the rest of mainland Europe, and Maltese culture contained many elements of Catholicism, traditionalism, and superstition (Zarb 1998, 12). *Folklore of an Island: Maltese Threshold Customs* was written by social researcher Tarcisio Zarb in 1998 and provides some insight into the superstitions and folklore of the Maltese people, including the prescriptions and taboos around birth and pregnancy. Zarb explains that for Maltese women, superstitions were widespread “among those for whom birth still [offered] that great sense of mystery owing to lack of knowledge about birth,” a lack of knowledge that came from a reluctance to talk about sex, especially with girls and women, that resulted in women marrying knowing nothing about sex, pregnancy, or birth (Zarb 1998, 3). Families did not speak frankly about sex or procreation, and did not answer questions about babies or birth. “Pregnant women used to take all possible measures to make sure that no information is given about this phenomenon, which might generate dirty thoughts, unnatural feelings, and morbid curiosity, especially among the young,” which involved hiding the pregnancy with flowing clothes, like the traditional long faldetta head covering, and refusing to speak about the pregnancy, especially with children (Zarb 1998, 71). There was a culture of shame around pregnancy, even pregnancies sanctioned by marriage, because it was physical proof that a couple had engaged in intercourse. In Malta, “women, who were pregnant for the first time, usually were somewhat ashamed of being pregnant... undertones of shame often made communication about the subject difficult” and thus, Zarb claims that communication about pregnancy was usually limited to women, and then typically only happened between mothers and daughters (Zarb 1998, 71). Children were often given a variety of evasive answers, one of the most popular being that babies were brought on ships, and did not learn of the truth until they were much older (Zarb 1998, 76).

It must be noted that most of the information in Zarb’s book was accumulated through interviews with the older generations, who often remarked about how things were changing in their present of the late 1990’s. By the time of my visit in 2015, change had further accelerated: the

inside of a Maltese maternity ward looks virtually identical to one in the United States, the faldetta is no longer commonly worn, and children receive some form of sex education in schools (Field notes 16.6.16). Despite Zarb writing that the Maltese believed that “extra-marital sex ... contaminates the guilty parties and may also bring disaster to those with whom they come into contact or even to the entire social group,” there were some younger people I spoke with who did not fear the premarital sex itself, but rather the difficulty of escaping the watchful eyes of their parents to have sex (Zarb 1998, 45; Field notes 23.6.15).

The Roman Catholic Church still holds a great deal of power in Malta. According to the International Religion Freedom Report in 2015, the Maltese Constitution established Roman Catholicism as the state religion, 91% of the population is Roman Catholic, and Catholic religious education is compulsory in state schools (United States Department of State 2016, 1). It was only on June 24, 2014 that the law was amended to place authority with the state over religious authorities for deciding matters of marriage, divorce, and annulment (United States Department of State 2016, 2) The Catholic Church forbids extra-marital sex and contraception, thus, abstinence is what is encouraged in sex education in Maltese schools (Camilleri 2013, 5). Not coincidentally, teenage pregnancy is a real and growing problem in Malta. Recent reports indicate that the incidence of teenaged and unwed pregnancies are rising, as “in 2005 the number of children born out of wedlock constituted 19% of all births, – compared to 2.2% in 1992 – while 48.7% of all births to mothers aged between 15 and 24 were registered outside marriage” (Cefi 2015, 22).

In the midst of all of this social change, I was curious about the cultural perceptions of teenaged and unwed pregnant woman in Gozo, Malta, and how salient cultural perceptions of unsanctioned pregnancies were expressed by individuals and institutions in Malta. As Victor Turner wrote, the structure of a society becomes more visible when society moves toward a goal, an aspiration for itself (Turner 1974, 37). To study the structure of society is to study its goals and reasons for which it strives for those goals, which is itself a study of the ways in which people and institutions communicate to attain those personal and group goals (Turner 1974, 37). Unsanctioned pregnancies set the stage for conflict, the social drama which Turner defines as “units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations” which

propels society into motion toward what it views as the best version of itself (Turner 1974, 37). Social dramas as described by Turner have four stages. The conflict in this case would be the occurrence of the unsanctioned pregnancy, the overt breach of a crucial norm (Turner 1974, 38). I wanted to investigate what came next: the reaction to the crisis in which the breach is either sealed or widens to reveal an issue, the redressive action in which leading members of the community push back against the breach, and finally either the reintegration of the violator or the irreparable separation (Turner 1974, 38-40). When beginning this project, I was solely interested in the redressive action faced by these women and the consequences of that action, but as my research developed I began to investigate the ways in which the response of individuals and institutions fit into Turner's theory of the social drama and the possibility of a movement toward individual and group goals.

## Methodology

My positionality resulted in fieldwork that was both constrained and aided by several factors: my age, ethnicity, the amount of time I had in Malta, and my own experience levels. When I arrived in Malta, I was an eighteen-year-old American student who had taken only one introductory-level course in anthropology and was attending a field school as an introduction ethnographic fieldwork. I was largely unaware of the impact of colonialism in Malta, I was unfamiliar with the theories and methodologies of anthropology, and my frames of reference were limited by my age and experience. In retrospect, there are several subjects I wish I had spent more time on, asked questions about, or had even realized might be of import or interest. My lack of formal training meant that the process of gathering this information was full of difficulty, self-doubt, and setbacks. I was only able to spend three weeks in Gozo, and just when I had figured out what avenues I should have pursued for research, it was time to leave. There is little written about social perceptions of pregnancy in Malta or Gozo, and most of the literature on this subject reflects views that were held generations ago that are not necessarily present in twenty-first century Malta. I believe that my outsider's perspective asks new questions to complement what Maltese researchers have said about socially unsanctioned pregnancies in Malta.

During my three weeks in Gozo, I collected data through a combination of formal and informal interviews,

observation, and interactions with the people I met. Informants included four nurse midwives and an obstetrician at Gozo General Hospital, one Catholic priest, two women from the island of Malta, four women from Gozo, and two immigrants to Gozo. Additionally, I observed a parentcraft class at Gozo General Hospital, focusing on both the information being presented and the reactions of the other men and women in the room to a young unaccompanied teenager's presence in the class. Although this sample is on the smaller side, my informants were from a wide variety of backgrounds, and most of the information they gave me overlapped significantly. I chose to interview members of two of the largest institutions in Gozo – the Catholic Church and the medical system – to formulate an idea of the institutional response to unsanctioned pregnancies. Interestingly, these were the only men I was able to interview. Having only two male informants is low, but it was not for lack of trying – when I casually approached the subject with men, they were uncomfortable and quickly shifted the conversation. Interviews were largely unstructured, but I asked questions about both personal experience and 'general opinion' toward unsanctioned pregnancies. Although all parties interviewed gave permission for their personal information to be published, I chose to change participants' names to protect their opinions and privacy.

## Findings

### *Institutional Responses to Unsanctioned Pregnancies*

I had been told that the Catholic Church was the largest and most influential institution in Malta, but I did not realize the scope and complexity of this influence until I arrived in Malta. In Gozo I witnessed extensive preparation for the traditional village festas, and attended one with loud music, much celebration, and enormous fireworks. It seemed as if every conversation I had with Gozitans included religion in some way, from questions about labor practices to discussions about the foster care system. When I spoke with midwives at the hospital, they mentioned the tradition of saying a Hail Mary prayer with the mother when the baby crowns, and how they felt better able to serve Ethiopian and Nigerian migrants because they were Catholic, as opposed to Somali migrants because of their Muslim faith (Field notes 27.6.15, 16.6.15). Two informants I met in Victoria, the capital of Gozo, when I asked about teenaged and unwed mothers, immediately offered information about how the

Church responds (Field notes 17.6.15). Orphanages on Malta were described to me by two Gozitan women, who explained that there was usually a woman to care for the children's bodies and a sister to care for their souls (Field notes 23.6.15). The two church services I attended were small, but worshippers of all ages were present. On both of my visits to the famous Basilica of the National Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of Ta' Pinu, visitors were primarily middle aged or older, but there were still a fair number of young adults and teenagers. It was clear to me that despite modernization and globalization, the Catholic Church still retained a great deal of power in the community, not only in political and official life as mentioned above. In both literature about Malta and in informal interviews with informants, religious life was described as social life, and exclusion from religious life was described as a severe social sanction (Zarb 1998, 95-98).

However, despite Malta being known as a Catholic country, news articles and interviews with Gozitans revealed a disconnect between teenagers and their parents' generation. Secularization, the popularity of Western media, and membership in the European Union have all been identified as a reasons for the more liberal mindset of Maltese teenagers (Azzopardi and Clark 2005, 162). The reported disconnect between teenagers and the Catholic Church has been blamed in Maltese newspapers as resulting "in the statistically proven higher level of inner distress, anxiety and dysfunction manifested in our drug, alcohol, teenage pregnancy and self-harm problems increasingly widespread among children and young people" (Chetcuti 2015). Some religious figures blame not the teenagers themselves, but the failure of the Church to connect with teenagers in a meaningful way because it has a reputation for being a "forbidding set of challenging moral injunctions that are either unfairly misconstrued or [judgmentally] applied" (Chetcuti 2015). The distance of youth from religious life is complicated, however, by the ubiquity of religion in Malta. As described above, religion permeates almost all sections of life, regardless of whether or not a person adheres to the Catholic faith. This creates a complex situation in which religious life and morals have an impact on a person's quotidian life, regardless of their personal faith. Regardless of whether a single mother agrees with what the Church deems right or wrong, she can still be held to those standards by her peers, her community, and her culture. Therefore, the Church as a social rather than strictly a religious

institution seemed an appropriate place to begin looking for responses indicative of social aspirations.

The clearest religious sanctions were found in the practices of Baptism and Communion; two rites whose purposes are to bind the religious community together. Francine was a woman I met in a kitchenware shop in Victoria, with whom I struck up a conversation. She was interested to find an American researcher in Malta, and we began talking about my research. Francine and her friend Crista were in their early seventies, and happy to reminisce about what Malta was like when they were young women in their twenties who were having their own children. When I asked about social repercussions for pregnant teenagers, Francine said, "In the old days they would refuse to baptize the baby. Maybe they still do that here" (Field notes, 17.6.15). I was immediately intrigued by her mention of an outright sanction by the church, and was curious if the practice of not baptizing infants born out of wedlock was still practiced in Gozo. This appeared to be a religious sanction, but I wondered if it was also a social sanction. This line of inquiry led me to Father Camilleri, whom I interviewed with a colleague and a member of his congregation after the service.

Francine was correct – according to Father Camilleri, in Gozo, the diocese is permitted to decide what they wish to do concerning the baptism of babies born out of wedlock, and Gozo has decided to not allow the baptism of those infants during Mass (Field notes 24.6.15). They can be baptized at other times, but not before the church congregation with the normal ceremony. As Gwen Kennedy Neville writes in "Baptism Revisited: An Anthropological Perspective," the rite of baptism has social implications in addition to its religious purpose.

*"As a rite of passage, baptism serves three important functions in the life cycle of individuals and communities. One of these is the incorporation of a new infant member into an existing social group. Another is the initiation of the infant's parents into a new social status – that of parents. A third is to provide a ceremonial gathering place for the parents, grandparents, and close friends to affirm the infant and the parents and to accept partial responsibility for assisting in the tasks of child rearing"* (Neville 1994, 14).

If one assumes that religion is indeed a large part of social life, it could be hurtful that the important milestone of both birth and parenthood is essentially ignored by the

larger community. Symbolically, the child is not accepted into the church community, and the parents are actively barred from this rite of passage. As Neville describes it, “in the words and prayers, and in the questions and answers exchanged by the parents and the priest or minister, the parents are initiated into the role of parents within their faith community” and charged with not just biological parenthood, but the responsibility of transmitting religious heritage to the child (Neville 1994, 20). By denying the parents of the new child a public baptism, the Church sends a message that it does not trust the parents with this important responsibility: that because the parents have failed to uphold the tenets of the faith the Catholic Church does not sanction their parenthood before the congregation. “In the act of performing a baptism, the priest or minister of the congregation is symbolizing the inclusion of a new member for whom the total congregation becomes partially responsible,” and by removing the congregation from the ceremony, they are no longer responsible for the child (Neville 1994, 20).

Father Camilleri defended this decision. He explained that the purpose is not to hold the child’s immortal soul hostage to force the parents to marry. If so, they would not baptize the baby at all, as they used to do. Rather, they do it outside of the regular Mass in order to spare the parents the shame of being unwed, and therefore unable to take Communion or stand together at the altar. This action is not strictly religious, nor is it strictly social; it is a religious action charged with social commentary. The priest I spoke with believed that this was the right thing to do, especially since he thought that parents were no longer seeking baptism for the right reasons – such as for the sake of the child’s soul – but for more secular reasons, for example, the social importance (Field notes 24.6.15). “They are not trying to baptize their child for holy reasons,” he argued, “or else they would marry to create a favorable environment for the child” (Field notes 24.6.15). For the Catholic Church, unwed parents are not living in “a state of grace” because they have forsaken the holy sacrament of marriage (Field notes 24.6.15). Turner wrote that social conflict shows of the major goals of an institution (Turner 1974, 37). In the case of the Catholic Church in Malta, their social conflict shows that one of their goals is to bring the younger generations, and especially those they see as most in trouble, back into the ways of the Church.

I was also curious as to whether or not there were repercussions for socially unsanctioned pregnancies in the medical institutions of Gozo. My multiple visits to Gozo General Hospital included several informal and semi-structured interviews with midwives, a formal interview with an obstetrician, and observing a parentcraft class. From these interviews, I learned of several issues that affect all women giving birth in Gozo, many of which could have a more severe impact on teenaged or unwed mothers specifically because they experience social repercussions from their families and their communities.

There are several pieces of evidence that point to a problem with C-sections on the two islands of Malta, which would affect any woman giving birth, not just those with unsanctioned pregnancies. Although not a problem unique to Malta, the high C-section and inducement rates have been criticized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as they are some of the highest in the world. The midwives were proud to note that the C-section rate had fallen from 36% in to 32% in recent years – although it is still far over the recommended percentage of 15% (Field notes 16.6.15). However, I believe that a woman with a socially unsanctioned pregnancy might be affected by the methods by which have created this high C-section rate. An article in *Malta Today* reported that doctors routinely advise pressure Maltese women into C-sections because it is more convenient for the doctors (Diacono 2015). Jenny, a young midwife at the hospital, agreed with this assessment and shared plenty of stories about doctors in Malta who scheduled C-sections around their vacations for no sound medical reasons and then deliberately used jargon and medical terms unknown to mothers to avoid protest (Field notes 16.6.15). Advocacy can be difficult in a situation where a woman has the full support of her friends and family, but can be even harder for a woman who is facing social stigmatization.

In my interviews I did find one way in which women advocated for themselves during their pregnancies: bribing health officials. I met two women in Gozo, Maria who was in her forties and her niece Christine who was in her twenties, who described the bribing system for pre- and post-natal care in Gozo. Maria bribed her obstetrician more than 200 euros to insure that if she needed stitches like her sister had after Christine’s birth, he would attend her. Christine’s mother had not sufficiently bribed her doctor, and the ER doctor had done her stitches, resulting in pain and recurring infections for more than eight years

(Field notes 23.6.15). This was confirmed confidentially by one midwife, who admitted that midwives also accepted bribes from their patients. Bribes are one of few ways the women on Gozo have control over their pregnancies and their delivery experiences. But for teenagers who are pregnant, this creates a large issue: where are they supposed to find the money to bribe doctors and midwives when they are pregnant? This is an issue of class as well as of age: when there is financial bribery in the medical system, it hurts those who cannot afford to get the best care. The situations mentioned above are those that could be faced by any woman on Gozo with even socially sanctioned pregnancies, but given that women with socially unsanctioned pregnancies tend to be younger and face disapproval or abandonment from their families, these issues could disproportionately affect them.

#### *Social and Individual Responses to Socially Unsanctioned Pregnancies*

In the course of investigating institutional responses to socially unsanctioned pregnancies, I frequently encountered descriptions of how individual responses influenced what I would have considered institutional reactions and vice versa. An example of the first is the parentcraft class that is offered at Gozo General Hospital. The inverse can be seen in the reactions of individual Gozitans to the social benefits system being utilized by unmarried or teenaged mothers. Finally, informants also shared their own stories of their own reactions to or their witnessing of other people's reactions to socially unsanctioned pregnancies.

When I attended the parentcraft class, the nurse-midwife conducting the course, Gabriella, provided a great deal of insight into the problems faced by teenaged mothers. As a participant observer who was assumed to be just another member of the class, it is reasonable to assume that the other students thought I was also expecting a child. It would provide one explanation for the clearly disapproving looks I received and the fact that the seat next to me remained empty until all the other seats in the room were filled. Later, when I interviewed Gabriella, she said she was not surprised, and that the reactions I received would be typical for a teenager in the class. Apparently it is not uncommon for teenagers to only attend one parentcraft class, and then never show up again. "It's the ones who need it the most who don't get

the help," she said (Field notes 27.6.15). She knew that fear of judgement from others in the room was one reason that women with unsanctioned pregnancies avoided the parentcraft classes – something that these women had expressed to her in the past (Field notes 27.6.15). The parentcraft classes have important information about proper pregnancy diet, how to care for oneself during pregnancy, warning signs of dangerous medical conditions, what happens during delivery and after delivery, and how to care for a newborn. Much of this information is new to first-time mothers, because the PPD (Personal and Physical Development) classes in school do not cover this information (Field notes 27.6.15). Additionally, after the parentcraft class is an ideal time for women to ask a midwife questions about their pregnancies, as normally women only meet with their general practitioner in a formal context during their pregnancies. Women take steps to give each other privacy in this situation, waiting outside the room for their turn with Gabriella. Out in the open, such as during an intake at the nurses' station where any of the other nurses or patients could hear, patients are less likely to disclose sensitive information that may have an impact on their care. If women with socially unsanctioned pregnancies feel too judged or ashamed to utilize the parentcraft classes and other services offered by the healthcare institutions in Gozo, their health and wellbeing and the health and wellbeing of their child is placed at risk.

But when women with unsanctioned pregnancies do take advantage of institutionally offered aid from the government, they still receive social condemnation. There is a common stereotype of these women, similar to the stereotype of the "Welfare Queen" in the United States: a single woman who has children to take advantage of government aid instead of working, thus living like a "queen" without contributing to society. Two women with whom I talked on the beach in Xlendi, Marie and Christine, had a very negative view of single mothers, especially those who receive support from government benefits. The older of the two women, Marie, spoke about how "those girls" who would "get themselves pregnant" and refuse to marry the father, just so they could get money from the government. Both women contributed secondhand stories of what these women actually did with the money: buying iPhones, spending it on getting their nails done, anything to pamper themselves while neglecting their children. These mothers had reputations for sending their children to school without lunches or for not knowing where their children were after school or

whether they were getting into trouble on the streets. This was subtly blamed on the reluctance to marry, and to have a man's influence in the household. These behaviors were the opposite of what a Maltese woman and mother is supposed to present. Marie and Christine agreed that there is a strong association between a woman who gets pregnant young or out of wedlock and a woman who will take advantage of government benefits in a way "hardworking" people would never do. Marie felt that giving up the child was an option that not enough of "those girls" thought about today, because "orphanages on Malta aren't bad places like they used to be." Run by the church, these orphanages have apartment-like complexes with a nun and another woman there to care for the children. Christine joined her aunt here, saying that "they have PlayStations and go to school with uniforms and lunches, unlike some of the welfare kids. It's a better life." In this way, the children could be rehabilitated, in a sense, saved from the sins of their mother. They would have the good influence of the nuns, and not live with the "bad" woman who had them just to spend the government money on themselves. (Field notes 23.6.15).

Personal anecdotes from informants were usually about women in their age group getting pregnant as teenagers, so they are temporally distributed. Marie spoke about girls she had known when she was a teenager in the 1990's who had gotten pregnant. As she described it, the two options for the pregnant teenager would have been to marry, no matter how young she was, or to have the baby and give it up for adoption, preferably both occurring in a different country (Field notes 23.6.15). She even mentioned a popular mid-2000's television program called "Tista' tkun int!" (It Could Be You!) about young adults from all over the world finding their birth parents in Malta (Field notes 23.6.15). She said that many young women, in order to avoid the shame, would visit relatives in Australia, give birth there, and return without the child (Field notes 23.6.15). Christine remembered two of her classmates getting pregnant when she was twelve, two when she was thirteen, and three when she was fifteen, and the girls leaving school, which would have been in the mid-2000s. However, Christine did not think that there was as great a sense of shame for the expectant mother (Field notes 18.6.15). When I spoke to Crista and Francine, they remembered girls hiding or leaving for the extent of their pregnancies (Field notes 17.6.15). Francine also commented on unsanctioned pregnancies today: she said that unlike in her youth forty years ago, "those girls

still go out," and did not hide that they were pregnant, which was similar to what Christine had said (Field notes 17.6.15). The only person I spoke with who had direct contact with a woman with an unsanctioned pregnancy was one woman named Elise. Elise described how embarrassed and ashamed she was when her daughter had a son out of wedlock (Field notes 16.6.15). She openly shared with me that she had been so sad she had cried for days because of the shame, but now she openly "loves her grandson anyway" (Field notes 16.6.15). These conflicting accounts seem to show that individual response is indeed very individual, and depends greatly on age and perhaps even class, considering the disregard for unsanctioned pregnancies as a ploy to get government benefits.

## Discussion

The reactions of institutions and individuals in Gozo did follow what I expected to see from Turner's analysis of social drama, but in different forms over different time periods. There were different reactions to the social 'crisis' that was the unsanctioned pregnancy, some of which tried to mend the social breach and others which expanded to reveal larger social issues (Turner 1974, 38). For example, what Marie described as the older response to unsanctioned pregnancies, sending the woman to a different country to give birth before she returned as if nothing had happened, was an attempt to mend the breach and stop the spread of social crisis by hiding the issue. However, the negative reaction of individuals, such as subtle social disapproval concerning use of government benefits by women with children from unsanctioned pregnancies, reveals more than just attitudes toward teenaged or unwed mothers. It reveals greater issues in Gozitan society concerning stigma associated with accessing government aid, conceptions of what makes a 'good' versus a 'bad' mother, and even just the relations of Gozitans to other Gozitans and Maltese citizens as colored by class and social status. The next step in Turner's social drama consists of leading members of the community head some sort of redressive action (Turner 1974, 39). The clearest example of this in Gozo entailed the reaction of the Catholic Church. When the Gozitan diocese makes the decision to withhold public baptism and acceptance of the infant into the community, they make a very strong statement about their stance on socially unsanctioned pregnancies. They push back against the social beach by asking that the parents get

married – or lose social standing within the church. The act of marriage serves to socially recognize and therefore sanction the pregnancy, the parents, and the child.

This social drama of Turner's ends in one of two ways: either the violator of the social norm is reintegrated back into society, or there is a separation between society and those who break the norms that is irreparable (Turner 1974, 41). However, this is not what I see in Gozo – I would put forth that while the social response to socially unsanctioned pregnancies is still far from positive, Gozitan society is slowly moving more toward acceptance – not outright integration, but still acceptance. At the very least, teenaged pregnancy is being recognized as something that is happening on the island of Gozo, rather than being hidden. The only institution that seemed to have a clearly identified goal concerning socially unsanctioned pregnancies was the Catholic Church – they wanted to bring their congregation together, and to encourage young people to follow the social precepts of their religion.

Malta and Gozo are becoming more and more involved in the world outside of their archipelago – with their entrance to the European Union in 2004, steadily increasing tourism economy, and the access to media from all over the world, there are increasing opportunities for cultural exchange, for better or for worse. It is no longer the case that teenagers do not know about sex before they are married – they know about sex, and they are having sex with or without contraception. For the duration of their pregnancies and, if they do decide to keep the child, motherhood, these women face social disapproval from all sides that can prevent them from being accepted in their communities, or even prevent them from accessing health information that they need.

Of course, this research had several limitations, from the low number of male informants, lack of contact with any women who did have socially unsanctioned pregnancies in Gozo, and a small sample of participants and interviews. Additionally, because I found the path of my research so late, I was not able to interview a variety of people from different socioeconomic statuses, genders, and life experiences. In the future, I would pursue three major avenues of investigation that were hinted at during the last interviews I conducted. The first would be the men involved in this situation: I heard almost nothing about the fathers of these children. Who are they? Is there an age gap between the men and the women who have premarital sex resulting in a socially unsanctioned

pregnancy? How does Maltese society view the men involved? The second topic is sex education. I heard one story about sex education being dramatically lacking in any sort of practical information, but I doubt that it was typical for all of Gozo. Therefore, what does sex education in Gozo look like? What information on contraception is given, considering that the Catholic Church holds a great deal of social power and has an anti-contraception stance? Is contraception easily attainable? Finally, I would also pursue research that involves the women with socially unsanctioned pregnancies themselves. Although I reached out to Dar Guzeppa Debono, a shelter for pregnant teenagers and victims of domestic violence, I was not able to continue that line of inquiry. Still, I wish I could have interviewed women who were experiencing these socially unsanctioned pregnancies, so that I could have included their opinions and experiences in this paper. As it stands, I can only offer the conclusions I reached from a short time in Gozo and interviews with people willing to talk to me.

### Acknowledgements

*This research was partially supported by the Leyburn Fund of the Anthropology Department of Washington and Lee University. It is based on fieldwork done in June 2015 with the Expeditions Off the Beaten Track Summer Field School. I am grateful to the Expeditions staff and mentors for their support, advice, and encouragement during my first fieldwork experience. I would like to thank Dr. Alison Bell, Dr. David Novack, and Dr. Lynny Chin of Washington and Lee's Department of Sociology and Anthropology for their insights and advice on both the ethnography and the writing of this paper. Finally, I thank family and friends, as well as my informants for giving me their time and their thoughts.*

### References

- Azzopardi, Anthony E., and Marilyn Clark (2005). "Malta." In: Teen Life in Europe edited by Shirley R. Steinberg, 149-68. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Chetcuti, Paul. 2015. "Young People Don't Go to Church Anymore..." *Times of Malta*, May 3. Accessed January 2, 2017.
- Cefai, Carmel, and Paul Cooper. 2006. "Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Malta: An Educational Perspective." *Journal of Maltese Education and Research* 4:18-36. Accessed October 12, 2015.
- Diacono, Tom. 2015. "WHO Criticises Malta's High Caesarean Birth Rate." *Malta Today*, May 26. Accessed October 12, 2015.
- Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment, Guidelines on Sexuality and Relationships Education in Maltese Schools, by Stephen Camilleri. Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2013. Accessed October 12, 2015.
- Neville, Gwen Kennedy. 1994. "Baptism Revisited: An Anthropological Perspective." *Word & World* 14: 12-20.
- Turner, Victor W. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors; Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- United States Department of State. 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom – Malta. 2016. Accessed November 15, 2016.
- Zarb, Tarcisio. 1998. *Folklore of an Island: Maltese Threshold Customs*. San Gwann, Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group.