The “Other Voice”: Life Stories of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Malta

Emphasizing the voices and power of migrants to detail their agency

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Abstract

In a time where new borders and frontiers are set up and policed by states based on the categorization of desirable and undesirables, migrants are increasingly seen as Others, but apart from only being subjected to it they can also actively partake in the process of Othering themselves. Agency however is often missing in the existing literature in relation of forced migration. This thesis researches how the Sub-Saharan African migrant becomes the “Other” of Maltese society and to what extent this othering is conditioning their identity formation. In I will do so by examining how they react to the othering they are subject to and how this is met with agency. There has been little interview based research on the experiences and life stories of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in Malta which include their point of view. This thesis places forced migrants at the centre of the study and as such makes them experts and owners of knowledge, providing a missing angle of the Other’s knowledge. This thesis aims to broaden our understanding of Otherness by highlighting different narratives of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in Malta which reflect their agency and voices, thereby reworking the notions of the “Other”. It are these stories that allow for alternative voices to be heard and can bring out the diversity behind overly generalised constructions.

Key notes: irregular migration, Malta, refugee crisis, borders, boundaries, othering, agency

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List of Content

List of symbols, abbreviations and words

Below is a list of all symbols, words and abbreviations used. Words borrowed from languages other than English are italicised in the text.

[ ] Text between block brackets is added or altered from the original transcription in order to increase clarity

( ) Text between rounded brackets is added text to explain where or what participants are referring to

(...) Deleted text from the transcript to increase clarity

EU-	European Union
IDP’s-	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM-	International Organisation for Migration
JSR-	Jesuit Refugee Service
NGO-	Non Governmental Organisation
UNHCR-	United Nations Refugee Agency

1. Introduction

1.1 Securitizing Migration

We live at a time of enormous displacements of people and of forced migration. Indeed, more than 65 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR, Global Trends 2016). People are seeking a safe haven but are increasingly facing closed borders. European immigration and asylum law make it increasingly difficult to migrate to Europe through legal pathways (Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman, 2005; 516). These measures reduce the possibilities of legal migration and lead to increasing irregular movements (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011; 347), something which has partly been responsible for the development of a discourse where asylum-seekers and irregular migrants are constructed as criminals. (Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman, 2005; 516). In Western Europe, post-9/11, in particular those who are Muslim. They are perceived as threatening hostile strangers whose culture and ways of life are seen as incompatible with or undesirable within Western societies, accompanied with the fear of unrest and possible social breakdown linked to these (Anthias, 2009; 6). The response to irregular migration in Europe has been characterized by harsh exclusionary rhetoric and increasingly hard line migration policies accompanied by a general lack of political will to accept these people. (Wilson and Mavelli, 2016; 3). Such responses are fuelled by assumptions about the nature of religion, Islam in particular, and its assumed relationships with “violence” and “refugees” (Wilson and Mavelli, 2016; 4). The perceived incompatibility between European secular political values and Islamic values makes that ultimately they are seen as a cultural threat (Meuleman, Koenraad, Slootmaeckers & Meeusen, 2017; 12).

The above points to an increased focus on identity issues, more particularly religious identity, from states who consider the incorporation of diverse identities as problematic in terms of social cohesion and integration (Anthias, 2009; 6). New borders and frontiers are set up and policed by states based on the categorization of desirable and undesirable persons and groupings (Anthias, 2009; 6), a logic of alterity. This thesis focuses specifically on the case of Malta with the central question to this research: How do Sub-Saharan African migrants in Malta negotiate circuits of power as sites of resistance to decentre Otherness in their everyday lives?

Irregular migration, in particular, challenges national borders and dominant notions of citizenship. As a result, irregular migrants and migrant “illegality” has become more prominent as a “problem” in political debates as well as a matter of stricter border policing strategies for states around the world (Chimienti & Solomos, 2011; 344). Migration has developed into a security issue. Pointing to a group of people as a threat to society, allows for the introduction of processes of othering. Nations, as noted by Benedict Anderson can be viewed as “imagined communities” (Smith & Watson, 1998; 38). Forming part of such a community makes you relate to the rest which altogether can be referred to as a “we”, resulting in a reproduction of “us” which is often juxtaposed against some “them”. What it then means to form part of such a nation is based upon the discourses of “the Other”, those who are “alien” (Smith & Watson, 1998; 38).

Two tendencies seem to prevail in the othering of refugees: either refugees are constructed as an object of charity or as a threat to the host society (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016). In the former, refugees are seen to be experiencing prolonged suffering, trapped in political and geographic limbo and thus the assumption is that they need to be removed from their situation, which is something they cannot do themselves (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016). Refugees stop being specific persons and instead become pure victims (Malkki, 1996; 378).

Such a construction of helplessness makes it difficult to understand that a refugee has agency and can represent him or herself (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016; 61). Interestingly, in the latter, those who do exercise agency in terms of their arrival are met with mistrust as it becomes clear that this runs contrary to the view of a “genuine” refugee. As such, it seems that they can only be positioned in one of these two ways: as victims of poverty and conflict or victims of criminal bands such as traffickers, or -when this is not the case- they must be criminals who take advantage of such victims (Agustín, 2003; 61). Hence, the victims are in need of a saviour and the criminals need to be punished (Agustín, 2003; 71). Falling outside of the category of an un-empowered victim, they are viewed as bogus. As goes the reasoning, “*anyone who tries to exploit the system must not be a refugee, for refugees are imagined to be those hapless, vulnerable individuals who are exploited by the system*.” (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016; 60).

1.2 Lack of Agency

Neither of those are entirely true as these are essentialized constructions of refugees as troublesome, dependent and vulnerable (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016; 59). A far-reaching consequence of these standardized discursive ways of handling and talking about refugees is the systematic silencing of individuals who find themselves in the classification of “refugee” (Malkki, 1996; 386). These individuals are all human beings, but also more than just that. Apart from acknowledging the human suffering that these people go through, so too should we acknowledge the fact that they are political subjects with narrative authority, historical agency and political memory (Williams, 2014; 127). They are complex in their own ways and more importantly; they make their own decisions. Being a refugee does not mean that they lose their ability to think through their options or to make decisions (Agustín, 2003; 63). They all have agency and this level of agency is often missing.

The above highlights the complexity of terms we use and the meaning they carry. “The refugee” becomes a label of exclusion (Kumsa, 2006; 241). But “*nobody is ever just a refugee*,” said novelist and non-fiction writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies. “*Nobody is ever just a single thing. And yet, in the public discourse today, we often speak of people as a single thing. Refugee. Immigrant”* (Quartz, 2016). A lose definition of a refugee are those “*people that have crossed international borders in order to flee human rights abuses and conflicts*” (Betts & Loescher, G. (Eds) 2011; 1). This definition has been broadened by including climate change refugees as well as deepened by including IDP’s. Over the years, as world politics have changed, so too has the common understanding of who is considered to be a refugee changed. The current genuine refugee/economic migrant debate speaks volumes. Even though in theory these categories might make sense, making such distinctions in reality is hard. Not to say ambiguous. I choose to use the term forced migrants as opposed to refugees, as this will include those that have some form of international protection as well as those that were not recognized as such by the system but still consider themselves forced to flee. In my view, forced migrants should be seen as agents and purposive actors. In short, I will refer to them as sub-Saharan African migrants rather than sub-Saharan African forced migrants.

Even though there is a great volume of literature on the topic of irregular migration and the othering of migrants, it is not their voices, experiences, lives and feelings that are usually being talked about. They are not the central subject but rather the object of studies. Often they are viewed simply as “bare life” (Agamben, 1995), removed from political life, which only reproduces the standardized and apolitical constructions of migrants. On the contrary, they are political subjects themselves, whose subjectivities are influenced and shaped by the social environments in which they live and take part (Williams, 2014; 117). It is therefore important to realise that migrants are not only being subjected to but can also actively partake in the process of Othering themselves. This moving between “being” subjected to and partaking in the process of Othering suggests that the “Other” is not a homogenous or a static group (de Gama & McKenna, 2013; 20).

1.3 My Research

This study aims to broaden our understanding of Otherness. I have sought to avoid generalized portrayals of migrants, by placing the subject central and highlight narratives of Sub-Saharan African migrants themselves that reflect their agency and articulation of their voices, thereby reworking notions of the “Other”. Reaffirming the centrality of the “subject” by placing it at the centre of the study was part of a new approach also known as “the biographical turn” Avila-Tàpies & Domínguez-Mujica, 2014; 138).

Biography was rediscovered and seen as a valuable source, providing information about “*personal accounts of life experiences, thoughts and values that shape people’s understandings and choices, as well as adjustments and personal transformative processes*.” Personal stories and narratives can in a way be corrective to the silencing of individuals and allows for alternative voices to be heard (Avila-Tàpies & Domínguez-Mujica, 2014; 138).

Furthermore, in-depth interviews have the potential to gather descriptions of “*deep meaning of experience in the participants’ own words*”. The added value of this methodological approach is that it allows for a more personalized account of the participants’ experiences (de Gama & McKenna, 2013; 12) and are better suited to fostering a narrative and developing a contextual understanding of these experiences (Gerard & Pickering, 2012; 518). Especially in the field of forced migration, narratives are important ways of knowing about life in places and times where there is little other access. Furthermore, personal accounts may also expose the diversity behind overly generalized constructions of “the refugee experience”. This fits

well with the focus of this study on participants’ lived experiences. Furthermore, qualitative methods are a preferred format for exploring attitudes, and particularly when dealing with sensitive issues, as is the case in this study. Undertaking in-depth investigation of the biographies of migrants is a time consuming practice. However, this study is more after understanding and explanation rather than gathering quantitative data on migration.

Due to its geographical location, Malta plays a particular role in the European refugee crisis. In the early 2000s, Malta saw an increase in arrivals, reflecting changing migration patterns along the southern border of Europe. Since 2002, the number of people reaching Maltese shores increased from 520 in 2003 to 2,775 in 2008. Since 2015 statistics show a downtrend in arrivals (UNHCR ‘Malta Asylum Trends’, 2003-2016). Largely, these were Sub-Saharan asylum seekers departing from the North-African coast. As a result of the turmoil surrounding the Arab Spring, Malta has also been receiving increasing asylum applications from Syrian and Libyan nationals. However, the predominant mode of entry by boat, along with a vast variety of ethnic backgrounds among the migrant population and related physical features has put asylum and irregular migration at the forefront of the migration debate in Malta, both in public as well as in political discourse (IOM, Country Profile 2015; Mainwaring, 2008; Muscat-Moulton, 2013; Falzon, 2012). Migratory patterns and flows from and to Malta are diverse, dynamic and complex. Nevertheless, popular belief has a rather simplified version and tends to portray sub-Saharan asylum seekers as the majority of migrants living in Malta, partly due to the focus of the political, public and academic realm on arriving asylum seekers (IOM, Country Profile 2015; 2). For all the above reasons, Malta lends itself as a valuable case study in the context of the migration crisis.

1.4 Chapter Overview

The first chapter of this thesis will briefly touch upon the dominant discourses that are present in Europe and more specifically those that are present in Malta. It will do so by analysing how Malta is actively constructing the idea of transitoriness as a response against the perceived threat of migration, thereby constructing “the Other”. Characteristics of one’s identity can become elements of exclusion and marginalization and as such can function as elements of othering. By means of desk research, I will analyse national newspapers, official statements of politicians and secondary literature to explore how Sub-Saharan African migrants are constructed as “the Other” in Maltese society, which identity characteristics become most

significant in this process and how these are pointed out. By doing so, I seek to acknowledge intersections that are key to understanding migrants’ experiences in the Maltese context.

Chapter two will lay out the theoretical framework. Identity formation is very much socially constructed as is the view of this thesis that they are agents who are embedded in a particular social, political and historical situation. When looking at processes of selfing and othering we cannot overlook the part of subordination and power. This is where feminism is helpful alongside social constructivism, since that way of looking at power makes it possible to show the systematic forces of subordination lined up along axes such as race, gender, and other statuses. This not only makes it possible to investigate for instance gendered power, but more importantly for this study, it makes it possible to examine the way in which agents participate in challenging or reproducing it.

The third chapter will be dedicated to explore how such processes of othering play out in the lived experiences of these individuals. I will address to what extent othering is conditioning their identity formation by examining how they react to the othering they are subject to. As well as to empirically analyse how othering is met with agency. The chapter will do so by asking how Sub-Saharan African migrants respond to “feeling” and “being” the “Other”? What is their agency in resisting this Otherness? And how might they actively engage in Othering processes themselves? Listening requires paying attention to how “Others” narrate themselves vis-à-vis powerful discourses (Williams, 2014; 128), which allows me to reflect on tensions that exist and how these are negotiated by them. Selecting stories that are exemplary in negotiating Otherness allows me to respect their stories to be told in their own words while at the same time enabling me to draw parallels with the rest of the stories.

I will use biographical narrative interviews, which are aimed at drawing out migrants’ daily lived experiences of their migrant being in Malta. These personal stories are a valuable source as they provide unique insights from the individuals point of view. The fourth and final chapter will analyse how “being on” Malta as a migrant being is affecting them and how this is reflected in their everyday lives. Most migrant projects change and adapt to opportunities as well as constraints that they encounter. “Going through” or “being on” an island can therefore never be seen as a momentary stop that does not affect the migrant project in any way.

In today’s world where migrants are increasingly less seen as unique individuals and where their stories are met with distrust, not deemed as relevant or not even heard at all, there is the

need to continue to listen. Their stories allow for alternative voices to be heard and can bring out the diversity behind overly generalized constructions.

2 The EU Refugee Crisis and Malta: Dominant Discourses

The link between security concerns on the one hand and migration and asylum policy on the other became more prominent in the EU since the events of 9/11 up to a point that we could say that the topic of migration has developed into a security issue (Huysmans, 2006; xii). As a result of the securitization of migration, borders have become something of a spectacle (de Genova 2002; 436) It becomes something we are watching and it is something very watchable. One could speak of a proliferation of borders in which then migration is “managed”. Borders have become intensified and have extended in various way (Bendixsen, 2016; 542) How a border is constructed is ultimately linked to how irregular migrants are treated. Even though large numbers of refugees have entered Europe in the past, the current number of arrivals came to be represented as well as experienced as a “crisis”. After the 9/11 tragedy, the movement of people across borders is viewed as inseparable from the threat (Eagly, 2013; 7). The undocumented have come to be seen as criminal solely by the act of migration itself. Thus, in order to mitigate the dangers that “illegal” migrants pose, the country must be protected from these people (Eagly, 2013; 7).

One can then only wonder for whom it was eventually a crisis and who experiences it as such? This phenomenon of “crisis” and its current events entered into the daily media, catching international attention, producing a diverse range of responses and discourses. (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; 13) The frames and representation used by the media, politicians and popular narratives can give us insights about how fears are mobilized and how some are turned into “Others”, making visible how boundaries of social categories are made. (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; 12) The place where these boundaries are made are at the border. In short, forced migrants are not considered to exercise agency and when agency is exercised this is seen as a threat. In particular, those migrants who have used illegal routes out of choice are portrayed as a threat to society and easily criminalized (Bakewell, 2010; 2).

This chapter will argue that in its crisis scenario, Malta is actively constructing the idea of transitoriness as a response against the perceived threat of migration. But “going through” or “being on” an island can never be seen as a momentary stop that does not affect the migrant project in any way. Malta can therefore never be simply a place of transit but should rather be seen as a territory interfering and intervening in the work-in-progress trajectory of migrants, according to the developments in local and international economic and political contexts (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014; 49). As a result of this response, distinctions are

constructed between the desirables and undesirables, ultimately constructing “the Other”. This can be seen in the many concepts that are used to describe migrants exercising agency in terms of arrivals such as “bogus”, “skipping the line”, which sets them apart from the “genuine” ones (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016; 61).

2.1 Maltese Victimhood

The history of mobility to and from Malta is complex and long, but one could say that Malta transitioned from a country of emigration to that of immigration (Mainwaring, 2008; 20). In the early 20th century, when Malta was still a British colony, many tried their luck elsewhere as a means to cope with rising unemployment. First in countries like Egypt, modern day Libya, Algeria and Tunis as the Maltese felt they had customary and linguistic connections with these countries (Cassar, 2013; 11). And later, in the period after the Second World War, they started to move to more distant land such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States as colonial links existed with these. Emigration became a more organized process with the establishment of an Emigration Committee (Cassar, 2013; 11). A good illustration of this outward mobility was when the Emigrants’ Commission came into being in 1950 as a result of “*the huge exodus of Maltese to foreign lands because of over population and unemployment*.” Its purpose was to offer help to those who wished to settle abroad ("Emigrants Commission", 2017) This trend is reflected in Malta’s legislation, as the only policy on the topic of immigration was the Immigration Act of 1970, which was only implemented in 2001 for Malta to be aligned with EU legislation upon acceptance (Mainwaring, 2008; 25). The end of the twentieth century however brought different kinds of immigration patterns and realities for the island, especially in the new role of member on the external EU border (Mainwaring, 2008; 20).

Malta sits at the crossroads between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, strategically placed and in a position to either divide or function as a bridge in the Mediterranean region (Mainwaring, 2012; 20). The state of Malta is made up of three inhabited islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino respectively, as well as some uninhabited islets. The total land area amounts to 320km2 ("World Bank", 2017) with a population of 417,432. This makes Malta by far the most densely populated among all EU member states, with an average of 1,325 persons km2 (NSO 2011). On a global scale, Malta ranks among the top ten of the most densely populated countries. (Falzon, 2012; 1662). In terms of geography, Malta is placed between Libya (approximately 350 km South), Lampedusa (160 km South-West), as well as

Sicily (100 km North) and Tunisia (300 km West) (Falzon, 2012; 1662) Joining the EU in 2004, Malta is now on the front line of securing Europe’s Central Mediterranean borders to irregular arrivals (Klepp, 2010; 15). Indeed, as a new EU member, the island has had its borders redefined in need of fortification and control. With its location on the Southern rim of the EU, sometimes portrayed as the “soft, vulnerable underbelly of Fortress Europe” (Mainwaring, 2008; 20), Maltese borders were no longer solely the frontiers of the island but have transformed into the external EU borders, turning Malta into a gatekeeper of Europe. This redefinition from national into regional borders plays a crucial role in the construction of the crisis scenario. In proclaiming Maltese victimhood, it is implied that Malta cannot be of any help to the forced migrants nor itself but needs assistance from others and in particular the EU to overcome such impotence (Muscat Moulton, 2013; 11).

Due to the history of emigration, migration was not a topic of much debate. With the new migration reality, however, the debate came to the political forefront in 2002 and has mainly been concentrated on “boat people”. This term refers to those individuals who arrived on the island from the North of Africa, usually departing from the Libyan coast. Since 2002, the number of such arrivals increased from 520 in 2003 to 2,775 in 2008 (UNHCR “Malta Asylum Trends”). The figure remained between 1,500 and 2,000 arrivals, with 2003 being an exception where numbers dropped to 503 (Mainwaring, 2008; 26). After 2008, statistics show a downtrend in arrivals only to rise up again to 1,579 arrivals in 2011. Up to 2,008 in 2013 after numbers drop to a low of 104 in 2015 and only 25 in 2016 (UNHCR “Malta Asylum Trends”). The Mare Nostrum Operation could be one possible explanation of the sudden drop in arrivals for Malta as under Italian control all rescued persons were disembarked on Italian territory. Even though this operation only lasted for a year, most if not all rescue boats in the area, even those under other European flags, still disembark the migrants in Italy today. The question why Malta has not taking any migrants over the past years has been asked many times without any real answer and has been subject to speculations about a secret deal between Italy and Malta, especially after people were rescued near Malta but were taken to Sicily instead (The Malta Independent, 2017).

Most of the individuals who arrive by boat in Malta come from Sub-Saharan Africa, with the largest number of arrivals coming from Somalia (6,840), Eritrea (2,755), Egypt (1,220), Nigeria (1,050) and Sudan (850) over the course of 2003- 2015 (UNHCR “Malta Asylum Trends”). To put these numbers of arrivals in perspective, Malta receives thousands of

migrants who arrive by plane and overstay their visa. These people from outside of the European Union who overstay their visa and thereby become irregular are not taken to detention centres while by contrast black irregular migrants are (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 96). Or in the words of Paul Pace, head of the JSR: "We get 1.2 million tourists each year -more than three times our population- and have no fear of foreigners (…) But the Maltese like them as long as they aren't black" (The New York Times, 2006). This shows that the issue is not purely a numerical one, but also one of race and class (Times of Malta, 2011). There is clearly a bigger concern with arrivals from Sub-Saharan Africa than there is with visa over stayers.

Thus, notwithstanding the diverse flows of migration, those arriving by boat from the North of Africa turned into the highest profile public sphere issue in Malta. From all those people coming to Malta, the Sub-Saharan African boat immigrants are constructed as the number one unwanted guests. (Falzon, 2012; 1676) Soon after their arrival, forced migrants turned into illegal immigrants, and besides being labelled as a problem, the whole situation was furthermore classified as a burden on Maltese society (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 2). Rather than seeing migrants in terms of their humanitarian needs they were associated with crime, terrorism and unemployment, resulting in an increase of prejudice against those perceived as "the Other" (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 2). The Maltese government has set itself the task to promote among the local population an understanding of the culture, homeland situation and psycho-social difficulties of irregular immigrants, in as far as that is possible (Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs; 29). Instead, it is actively constructing the idea of transitoriness as a response against their perceived threat of migration.

2.2 Malta as a Place of Transit

The crisis scenario is based on a mix of geographical location, vulnerability, limited resources and a condition of so-called islandness. Islandness is defined as "*a complex expression of identity that attaches to places smaller than continents and surrounded entirely by water*…[it] *might be described as a particular (and inevitably contingent) sense of being in place, although no inference is made here about that sense being necessarily harmonious"* (Falzon, 2012; 1676). Boundaries then are a crucial aspect of such islandness and its particular emotional geography (Falzon, 2012; 1665). A well working device within this context is the idea of transitoriness; to consider Malta only as a place of transit. "*'Immigrants' are invariably portrayed as people who are somehow 'passing through Malta': a temporary situation that will one day magically 'go back to normal"* (Malta Today, 2017). Often, islands

are seen as stepping stones to mainland Europe, notwithstanding the settlement that takes places even though not generally recognized as such (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014; 90). This is something actively constructed by the state and other actors as a response against the perceived threat of migration.

From the total number that is granted protection, the majority by far consist of subsidiary protection (54,5%) followed by other forms of protection such as temporary humanitarian protection (THP). That of refugee status amounts to the smallest (4,3%) (UNHCR, Malta Asylum Trends). The former type is a form of complimentary protection for those individuals who cannot be returned to their country of origin due to fear of serious harm. Even though the Maltese government claims one of the highest rates of granting protection to asylum seekers, a shift can be observed towards the granting of temporary protection. That is for those who are permitted to remain in Malta temporarily due to risks they otherwise would face in their country of origin, rather than being given formal refugee status (Lutterbeck, 2009; 125). This development reinforces the idea of transitoriness. Once again, the island is constructed merely as a place for migrants to stay temporarily rather than a place where they would settle permanently (Mainwaring, 2008; 27). After all, it is quite convenient to represent “boat immigrants” as transients rather than as settlers (Falzon, 2012; 1676). What this logic brings is that it helps to portray Malta as the victim in the refugee crisis and EU legislation (Mainwaring, 2008; 26), instead of those fleeing from war and violence, as well as cast the focus away from thinking about long term measures such as integration. Overall, the response on the issue of irregular migration has been more one of emergency rather than of responsibility (Xuereb, 2012; 267). In general, being supportive for the human rights of irregular migrants is more considered as an act of charity, driven by individual altruism rather than a large community spirit (Debono, 2011; 156).

As a result, the focus is almost exclusively on the point of origin when it comes to this issue. “*We talk about ‘arrivals’, but rarely look beyond that stage to take in the fact that many of these ‘arrivals’ are now here to stay. Some have been here for well over 10 years”* (Malta Today, 2017). Indeed, according to estimates of the UNHCR, less than 30% of to the total of 19,000 who arrived since 2002 will remain in Malta, which could still be a number up to 3,000 for who Malta is in fact a final destination (UNHCR, Malta Asylum Trends).

A great deal of responsibility lies with how the government reacts to a phenomenon such as irregular migration as well as how it is portrayed by them. Terms such as “invasion” are

continuously emphasized when it comes to the arrival of irregular migrants and is conveniently used to portray the country being in a crisis (Times of Malta, 2011). To construct such a crisis, numbers of arrivals are being compared to population size. For example, Justice and Home Affairs minister, Tonio Borg, said in 2007 that "*For Malta, the smallest country in the European Union and one of the most densely and built* (Malta, 2005)*up in the world irregular immigration poses challenges of the most serious magnitude* (…) *since 2002 almost nine thousand irregular immigrants have landed in Malta. This is the equivalent over the same period of about 1.3 million reaching the United Kingdom or almost 1.9 million entering Germany*" (Malta Today, 2007). These numbers then are said to be a huge burden and unbearable, as explained by the Prime Minister Joseph Muscat: "*Right now we cannot cope with these numbers, they are unsustainable. Malta is the smallest state in the EU, and we are carrying a burden that is much bigger than any other country*" (Telegraph, 2013). Such a comparison demonstrates that Malta is indeed the country faced with the biggest immigration burden. This is, of course, only one way to portray the situation.

Another method to analyse a country's burden would be to compare it against the country's GDP. In that case, the situation looks completely different, as Malta would drop significantly to below a 20th position. We should be careful however when using such numbers. Numbers are political and used as a legitimisation for a certain type of policy and certain political agendas. From the perspective of the Maltese government, it is more convenient to portray the situation in a discourse of impotence, emphasizing the size and population density as well as being "caught in the middle", as it were, due to its geographical location, as this sounds all the more appealing.

The government as well as numerous studies have presented Malta as a place of transit for Sub-Saharan African migrants on their way to mainland Europe. However, when Malta became a member state of the EU, its role and function within the migration flows has been more complex than that. Malta can indeed function as a place of transit for those who opt for a voluntary return, resettlement or relocation. Some migrants have in fact already travelled to European countries and have returned voluntarily. Others are returned following the Dublin agreements.[1] In this case Malta is at the heart of a circulatory system. But it should not be

[1] The "Dublin" regulation states that EU member states can choose to return asylum seekers to their country of first entry to process their asylum claim, so long as that country has an effective asylum system. See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en

overlooked that Malta is indeed also a place to settle down, against generally accepted ideas, as the number of migrants who stay permanently is on the rise (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014; 51). But as the Maltese government is conveniently portraying Malta to be just a place of transit, "going through" or "being on" an island can never be seen as a momentary stop that does not affect the migrant project in any way. As most migrant projects are so-called "work in progress", they change and adapt to opportunities as well as constraints that migrants encounter along their journey. From this perspective, Malta can therefore never be simply a place of transit but should rather be seen as a territory interfering and intervening in such a work in progress trajectory of migrants, according to the developments in local and international economic and political contexts. Thus, "*less that a link in a chain, the island appears as a land of resources and constraints, which is traversed, lived and even appropriated*" (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014; 49).

With a constant emphasis on an invasion, irregular migration is presented by the political system as a phenomenon from which the island needs to be protected. Sub-Saharan African migrants are then identified as a threat and a mandatory detention policy is necessary in order to protect the Maltese citizens (Lemaire, 2014; 150). Such an identification however has its impact on Maltese society and the way Maltese people perceive them. Exclusionary practices like detention are not only expensive (Mainwaring, 2008; 28) but also partially ineffective. (Mainwaring, 2008; 40)

2.3 Sub-Saharan African Migrants as "the Other" in Maltese Society

"Have we joined Europe to be invaded by Africa?" (Times of Malta, 2005)

Following the 1951 Refugee Convention, it should be impossible for states to penalize asylum seekers and refugees just because of their unauthorized entry (UNHCR, 2010; 3). This is acknowledged by Malta and thus entry without proper documentation was decriminalized in 2002, defining it as an administrative offence, with migrants being labelled as "prohibited" (Cassar, 2013; 14). Nonetheless, irregular migrants are still kept in detention centres upon arrival until their claims are examined and verified. The adoption of a detention policy is done "*in the interest of national security and public order*" (National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, 2005; 11). and more specifically, "*for reasons concerning employment* [and] *accommodation*" (National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, 2005; 6) Even though the aims and objectives of the closed centres are different from actual correctional facilities

(National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, 2005; 11), this does not take away the fact that these centres still restrict the independence of people, whether or not the Maltese government tell us not to consider them as such. Thus, an administrative requirement or not, detention itself is still very real for the people being detained. Feelings of despair, hopelessness and suicidal behaviour are frequently reported for those being detained (Silverman & Massa, 2012: 677).

How detention in Malta has a negative impact on migrants’ physical and mental health has been documented in the report *Becoming Vulnerable in Detention* (Amaral, 2010). A vast literature supports these findings. (Silverman & Massa, 2012; 677; Lietaert, Broekaert & Derluyn, 2014; 569). This policy received heavy criticism from human rights groups within the country, as well as within Europe and around the world. (Mainwaring, 2008; 28) Besides arbitrary detention and the deprivation of their liberty, many complaints were directed at the sub-standard conditions (Xuereb, 2012; 264). Only at the end of 2015 did the government issue a new strategy concerning the reception of irregular migrants and asylum seekers, thereby ending mandatory and automatic detention for all (UNHCR, Malta Asylum Trends 2015). Even though the policy is not in place any longer, it is still relevant to take it into account as most of them did experience detention. Separating migrants from society in the form of detention sends of a message to broader society that these people are unwanted guests (Mainwaring, 2008; 39). As such, the policy left a lasting impact on Maltese society and how they viewed these individuals.

When individuals who arrive in Malta by boat are apprehended by the Armed forces, they are immediately transferred to one of the detention centres. The detention facilities are located on compounds operated by the Armed Forces of Malta (The Global Detention Project, 2017; 15). It is from this place where most of them apply for asylum. Asylum seekers could be detained for a period of up to 12 months. This could be lengthened to a total of 18 months in the case of an irregular migrant who is not an asylum seeker (Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, 2016; 7). An irregular migrant is defined in the strategy report as “*those who have not applied for international protection or been definitely rejected*” (Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, 2016; 19). After spending their months in the closed centre**,** recognized refugees, failed asylum seekers, those with temporary protection as well as those that did not make a claim for asylum are released. Until these individuals find alternative accommodation, proceed to a third country or return to their country of origin, open centres

become their ordinary residence on the island (Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, 2016; 23). Even though those residing in open centres are free to enter and leave, the centre is still surrounded by a wire fence (Falzon, 2012; 1673).

Detention and related practices serve to criminalize migrants and refugees and construct a category of "black and illegal" which ultimately results in suspicious attitudes and a negative perception of those individuals. (Lemaire, 2014; 150) It sends off an image of them as dangerous and unwanted. This aspect of security is further emphasized by the role that the Armed Forces play in detention (Furman, Epps, Lamphear (Eds.), 2016; 121) as well as routine practices such as handcuffing them when they are outside of the detention centre. Furthermore, detention isolates migrants from the Maltese community. Even when moved to the open centres, locations are often on the outskirts or in industrial areas. Such exclusionary procedures and practices have social consequences and influences the way the local society views the migration phenomenon, which leads to increasing levels of discrimination and xenophobia (Mainwaring, 2008; 40). Indeed, the sympathetic response in the beginning for the case of irregular migrants gave way to an increasingly hostile, racist and xenophobic one (Mainwaring, 2012; 695). This was reflected in the 2009 European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, where Sub-Saharans face the highest discrimination in Malta (Lemaire, 2014; 150). Examples of the exercise of control of black people include refusing them access to public places such as the bus, a bar or a nightclub (Lemaire, 2014; 150). There are also examples of hostility against those supporting their plight. Several employees of the Jesuit Refugee Service, one of the main NGO's in this field, saw their cars set on fire. Two journalist who condemned racism in their articles had their houses attacked (Durick, 2012; 25). Even though nobody got injured, it sketches the situation.

As mentioned earlier, supporting the plight of Sub-Saharan African migrants is viewed as an act of charity of individuals. Maltese people feel more comfortable in a charitable approach when it comes to those seen as vulnerable. A Maltese employee for an international NGO says the following about it:

> Yes, we feel very happy to be charitable because it makes us feel good as human beings, but if we recognize ourselves as superior, we do not recognise their right to work. '*Jahasra*' (poor thing). It still remains an issue of power. It is one thing if I willingly give you something, because it's nice to do this kind of thing, but as soon as you start demanding rights that's a totally different matter. A lot of people have this kind of attitude… I'll help you, of course, I'll surely help you. But don't come

> speaking about rights. Rights then are a different issue altogether. It puts peoples’ backs up (Debono 2011: 156).

A Somalian woman can confirm this view:

> they use ‘clandestine’, ‘illegal immigration’, ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘refugees’—there is no differentiation. Pardon the pun, but they are put in the same boat literally. I get the general idea that if you are African then you are Muslim and if you are Muslim then you are a terrorist and that’s the way things go. And you are HIV positive as well. That is the general public view. But then they will say, ‘poor things’—there is this other charity feel to it (Gerard & Pickering, 2012; 521).

Different from other groups that are perceived as vulnerable in Maltese society, the case with Sub-Saharan African migrants brings no feelings of shame and guilt. As their reasoning goes, these migrants put themselves deliberately at risk in international waters in a boat which is clearly unseaworthy. For these reasons, they should not expect from any country to take the trouble and efforts of “rescuing” them from something they inflicted on themselves (Times of Malta, 2005). This partially explains why in general the detention policy was accepted. If, however people are treated as criminals, people start to view them as such. This becomes clear in the following description from a local mayor:

> They come to our village and scare people when they escape. When some of them escape, they start searching for places to hide, and every place where there is a corner where they can hide; they have even jumped into people’s gardens (..) They are like cats. I have seen them jumping (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 74).

This sounds very much as the fear for a criminal fugitive, even more so because of the hunting down of the army. Helicopters fly low over the area as well as soldiers who follow the escaped by car and on foot (Times of Malta, 2009). Besides that, there is the association of migrants with animals which effectively dehumanises them. When we come see the other as something less than human it makes it more difficult to recognize that we all form part of a shared humanity (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 74). It makes it harder to identify with that person, to see him or her one of us, as a potential member of our community. When we dehumanise, we stop seeing that person as a purposive actor who has agency which makes it more difficult to see that person as an ordinary person, thereby making the distance between an “us” and “them” even larger.

Even when migrants live in the community and have left behind the closed and open centres, they still feel controlled and restricted. As one Ethiopian migrant explains: "*Inside and outside detention, it's the same. We are locked up here. Malta is a prison*" (Lemaire, 2014; 149). Such a prison-like feeling is strengthened by the so-called Europeanization of migration policies, which results in the fact that migrants are not allowed to settle anywhere else in Europe once they live in Malta (Lemaire, 2014; 150). But apart from feeling "stuck" on the island, the total institution setting that is in place in Malta brings such feelings into being. Throughout the reception process in Malta from procedures of incarceration, to detention to placements in open centres, the primary experiences that migrants have from Malta are police-related. Firstly, there is the Army Patrol or the Immigration Police department upon arrival followed by the Detention Service staff and subsequently by those managing the open centres. Control and surveillance are central facets in these procedures, creating an environment that can lead them to experience such prison-like situation. There is often this feeling of always being pointed out or identified, something that has emerged from the beginning (Lemaire, 2014; 146-149).

An added factor is that the policing of migrants does not solely take place upon arrival at state borders but is also carried out internally through identity checks (Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman, 2005; 515). In particular they are directed against young men who visibly look different. (Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman, 2005; 515). On April 12, 2017 a similar check was conducted in the locality of Marsa, known to be housing many migrants due to the location of a migrant open centre, which saw the presence of the immigration police, the district police and members from the Rapid Intervention Unit (Malta Today, 2017). The reason to carry out the raid, according to the police was "*to identify migrants, to verify their documents and to ensure they are in Malta legally*" (Times of Malta, 2017). The Home Affairs Minister Abela claimed the raid was not an act of racial profiling, even though they were not conducted indiscriminately on all persons, irrespective of skin colour, country of origin etc. (Malta Today, 2017) and could therefore be seen as based on visibility and differentiation.

2.4 Fear of "the Other"

A recurring theme in Malta is that of fear. Maltese people are scared of Sub-Saharan African migrants simply because they do not know where they come from and could therefore not be fully trusted:

> We need to really investigate from where these people are coming and their backgrounds. Did they escape because of persecutions or because of financial problems? Are they fugitives? Are they escaping from the law? Are they army deserters or, more bluntly, terrorists? I believe that the majority are honest people, but who can tell? Are we safe? Have you been to Marsa near Albert Town lately? [Where the open centre for immigrants is located] Do you know how many crimes these people are committing? Are our soldiers and police safe from health problems? Are we safe? (Sammut, 2007; 5).

This piece was written in a Maltese local newspaper and is reflecting some of the fears that Maltese society holds about Sub-Saharan African migrants. In fact, the idea exists that “they” are different from “us”. These differences are based on skin colour, religion, culture and ethnicity. In general, Sub-Saharan African migrants differ from the general population in physical appearance and their religious identity, meaning that they are usually non-white and non-Catholic. How these characteristics are significant can be shown by a common Maltese expression used when someone feels excluded from the rest: “*Mela jien iswed*?” which means “Am I black?” (van Hooren, 2015; 81). There is a fear, or as once Joseph Muscat, currently the Prime Minister of Malta, said: "The risk is that the Africans will stay here and become part of us” (The New York Times, 2006 This fear can also be traced back in the several anti-immigration protests that have been held over the years. On one of them in 2015, Alex Pisano, the president of the self-declared Organisation of Maltese Patriots (Ghaqda Patrijotti Maltin) said the following:

> Malta could become a Muslim state within the next 20 years (…) The people don’t yet know what integration means, it is like giving people full citizenship rights, these people will then also be able to bring their family members over. At this rate, we expect Malta to become an African or Muslim state within the next 20 years. Islam is slowly taking over Europe, but we have one religion- Catholicism, and we are proud of it (Malta Today, 2014).

But Maltese people are not afraid of every stranger that is different. Plenty of tourists from all over the world come to Malta every year. Among them are those with different ethnicities, religions and culture, but this does not hold Maltese people back from enjoying interacting with them (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 76). They do not seem to be afraid of them. The difference lies in how they are portrayed by the media and politicians. Tourists are defined as something good and positive; they bring money into the economy and at the same time the tourism industry creates a lot of jobs (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 76). On the other hand, Sub-Saharan African migrants who arrive by boat are seen as a threat and detained upon arrival,

thereby separating them from broader society. According to the Director of JSR the fear comes with the volume and what this will do to their identity: “*Will we all become black? It is something that extreme. But I think that is where it comes from. We are an island; we have a history of being invaded time after time. So there is this view towards outsiders as invaders*” (van Hooren, 2015; 83).

Another fear that Maltese people have of forced migrants is that they are afraid that they are carriers of disease: “[They] *bring… diseases. If you read, HIV originated from there, from these countries. They say it was a disease that came from monkeys, HIV. They bring a lot of disease, there were cases of tuberculosis”* (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 74). This fear seems legitimate when one of the first encounters that these migrants have upon arrival is with medics, performing medical checks upon the spot, while wearing surgical gloves and facial masks. This practice conveys an understanding of irregular migrants coming by boats from Africa, imagined to be a continent overwhelmed by exotic diseases, as a potential health risk (Falzon, 2012; 1669).

Maltese people do not differentiate between the status of a black person, unless they personally know them. As such, there is a constant reminder of their racial difference and as a consequence, their non-belonging. Whether black people are regularly established and legal in Malta or not, automatically because of their appearance they are lumped together and classified as illegal migrants (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 91). The idea that black people can also be Maltese is something the average Maltese cannot recognize (Muscat-Moulton, 2013; 29).

An explanation of the above fears can be found in how Malta constructs it Self. The Maltese identify the self strongly with a Maltese European. Even though Malta is as close to the African as it is to the European continent, they say they have resemble more with the Sicilians as opposed to Tunisians. *Malti*, their language is clearly a language from the Arab school, but is often said to be more similar to Italian and English. Malta has a long history of rulers, but they mostly they have been European which has been accepted. However: “*When these people from Africa started coming from the coast, there has always been a lack of acceptance of colored people, people with different cultures and roots*” This indicates a strong identification with Christian Europe (van Hooren, 2015; 82). With Catholicism as their national religion, it plays an important role in everyday life Malta:

To be Maltese means to be Catholic. It is woven into everything: graduation, school, the assembly. There is nothing in Malta that has nothing to do with Catholicism. When you are born, you are baptized. You celebrate Easter with your family. There is the blessing of your house. It is everywhere! Parliament before it starts, university before it starts, and religion is in your life every day (van Hooren, 2015; 81).

Against the backdrop of a Maltese European, who are generally proudly Catholic, the Sub-Saharan African migrant is constructed as an invader. By actively constructing the idea of transitoriness as a response against the perceived threat of migration, a reality of settlers is ignored and resisted. Proclaiming a crisis situation allows the government of Malta to stay in an emergency response rather than focusing on the long term which is detrimental to the integration for those who end up settling. For a long period, the detention policy has been one of their main tools to convey an image to their society that the Sub-Saharan African migrants are the number one unwanted guests. The detention policy was a very effective means to separate them from Maltese society while simultaneous it criminalized and dehumanized them in the process. Rather than just a numerical issue, this was much more a racial one as well, since the detention policy did not detain any other irregulars in the country. The most identified references pointed out in the process of Othering are that they are black African male Muslims. Their means of arriving at the shore by boats in an irregular way, makes that Maltese people identify them as being illegals themselves. The majority does not feel a humanitarian response is needed as they chose to take on a trip in an unseaworthy boat and they therefore do not need to trouble Malta in order to get “rescued”. From all strangers coming to Malta, the African “Other” seems to be the strangest among all.

The next chapter will lay out the theoretical framework and goes deeper into the matter of choice in relation to migration and how this is influencing meanings of what a refugee or migrant is or is perceived to be.

3. Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism and Feminism Combined

The matter of choice is part of a bigger debate within migration theory about the complex relationship between agency and structure. It is not in the interest nor the scope of this paper to open up the whole debate, but these concepts are widely used across the literature, often without any definition and it is therefore important to clarify the meaning of these terms as they will reflect a particular position (Bakewell, 2010; 6). Given the focus of this paper on agency, I will explain what I understand by the use of the term as best as I can. Furthermore, this chapter gives insights in the ways of thinking that influences my research, where I am coming from and which directions it will go to. The topic is a complex one, and I also believe one paradigm does not suffice to capture this complexity. Rather, what is needed is a multi-dimensional and inter-disciplinary approach which ultimately allows for a more nuanced analysis.

3.1 Agency in Migration

The agency of migrants is important for the study of migration in particular since it continues to play a central role in shaping policy responses to the movements of people. However, even though forced migration is a topic of interest, this is not the case when it comes to individual decision making. Once recognized as refugees they fall outside the scope of migration theory as arrivals do not need to be explained in terms of their exercising agency. Indeed, one needs to be careful when ascribing agency to them as this may in fact undermine their case for the status of refugee (Bakewell, 2010; 2).

In many theories of migration, the assumption goes that migrants have a significant level of choice. However, the distinction is generally made between forced and voluntary migration. One such example is the matrix developed by Anthony Richmond (1994, p. 59) where he makes the distinction between individuals and collectives who are proactive at one end and reactive at the other end of a continuum. Another example is the framework presented by Nick van Hear. His continuum runs from voluntary (meaning more options, more choice) to involuntary (meaning less options, less choice). What both of these frameworks have in common is separating out categories of migrants along a continuum of choice, free at one and closed at the other. In the case of Richmond, people are classified as those with agency (proactive) and those without agency (reactive), where forced migrants are considered as having little to no agency. But could one close off people from having agency? Or categorize

them as reactive? One could possibly do so when assigning passivity to a person. Harrel-Bond (1986) argues that a priori refugees are not dependent and passive, but rather political and humanitarian institutions create such dependency ((Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long & Sigona, 2014; 6). The consequence of reducing a human being to a passive receptacle reversibly gives a primary role and therefore power to donors and providers of assistance (M. Agustín, 2003; 61).[2]

What this separation ignores is one of the most important quality of all human beings, including migrants: their agency. Indeed, as said by Bandura: *"People are proactive, aspiring organism who have a hand in shaping their own lives".* (Crockett, 2002; 1) Even in the most dire or constrained situations, it is known that human beings struggle to maintain some level of individual decision-making, be it within a narrower range of possibilities. They may have choices not only about whether to move, since some choose to stay rather than to leave, but also where, when and how to move. In other words, they have a hand in shaping their own lives.

This capacity of human beings to influence their lives has long been of interest within Western literature (Crockett, 2002; 1). Agency, as mentioned earlier, is in some form regarded as an attribute of all human beings. The concept of agency is a slippery one. Albeit widely used, there is no agreed definition as to what it means (Campbell, 2009; 407). Broadly spoken, agency refers to something that causes something else. Agency can be about the capacity for social actors and the power they possess to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve desires and realize their personal goals. (Bakewell, 2010; 7) (Campbell, 2009; 408). Pursuing such goals can be seen as an expression of agency as in order to reach a desired outcome, one needs to believe in the capacity to take action. As such, by having such goals, this acknowledges oneself as an agent (Crockett, 2002; 12).

Emphasizing action is sufficient for those whose view on agency is that of autonomous actors who exercise their power over the world. There is also a somewhat more relational view on agency, where being an agent means that one is capable of exercising some degree of control

[2] A broader debate on this topic is unfortunately out of the scope of this thesis. For some further information I suggest: Olivius, E. (2015). Constructing Humanitarian Selves and Refugee Others. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *18*(2), 270-290 and Rajaram, P. (2002). Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *15*(3), 247-264.

over the *social* relations in which one is entangled. The concern then is with “*socia*l actors who exercise agency to process *social* experience and to devise ways of coping with life, under the most extreme forms of coercion” (Bakewell, 2010; 7). This is one tendency of looking at agency, where it is mainly understood as something the individual possesses. Another tendency looks at agency more in relation to structure. Agency then refers to the power or capability of individuals to act *independently* from social structures, the environment in which one finds oneself or any kind of structural constrains (Campbell, 2009; 408). Here the emphasis is not so much on the action or power of the individual any longer but rather on the fact that they operate *independently* and *separate* from the social environment.

I reject the view where agency is seen as simple individualism as well as the view where agency is carried out in isolation. Rather, in line with constructivism, I hold that the world is socially constructed. It is a world in process of becoming, rather than something that is “out there”. Life is social and social phenomena such as language, rules and norms, institutions and productions mediate agency and structure (Locher, & Prugl, 2001; 114). The latter two are not mutually exclusive as they do not operate in isolation from each other. On the opposite, each operates to create and give meaning to the other, as such they shape each other. In this sense, I agree more with the relational view of agency. Specifically, in relation to migration, agency then refers to the biographical choices people make to live a good life. The capacity for social actors to formulate and pursue life plans by reflecting on their position, devise strategies and to take action to achieve and realize their goals. How one copes and responds to threats and challenges that put one’s life plan at risk is also a part of agency.

What constitutes a “good life” and the choices that are made to formulate and pursue that life are shaped by personal beliefs, ideals and dispositions of how one’s desires to see him\herself as well as social, economic, cultural and historical factors that impact their life worlds (Buitelaar, 2014; 31). However, it is important to note that these are not separate from the environment in which one finds oneself, all these aspect of agency are shaped and supported by the social world. Ultimately, “*the goals we select and the choices we make are conditioned by cultural values and by norms and models available in our social environment*.” They are dependent upon perceived opportunities and obstacles, both in the present as on those we assume to be prevalent in the future (Crockett, 2002; 18).

Instead of lumping people into categories of the amount of choice available to them, we should focus on the different migrants who have different areas of choice and alternatives depending on several factors. This means that in order to understand which factors limit choice and in which ways decisions are made in the light of those limiting factors, we should focus on the point of view and experiences of those people who decide to move and try to understand this. We have to view them as agents, who are embedded in a particular social, political and historical situation (Turton, 2003; 12).

Then how does it happen that forced migrants are so often portrayed as lacking this capacity? One reason can be found in the usage of the term. The term in itself implies that there is a form of unforced migration as well, though this term is hardly used. Commonly, forced migration is opposed to voluntary migration, meaning, that forced migration is therefore seen as synonymous with involuntary migration. This is where the awkwardness of the term comes from, since there is no sense in speaking about migration as involuntary. After all, to migrate implies at least some degree of agency as it is something we as human beings do, not something that is done to us. Or as David Turton says: “*you can move people and displace people, but you can’t migrate them*” (Turton, 2003; 11).

Displacement and migration may sound rather similar but there are some important distinctions. One could look at both as a process, a category or a condition –meaning a “state of being” (Koser & Martin, 2011; 19). I will only elaborate shortly on the latter as this is where the difference is relevant; the difference lies in the conditions that endure when the process finishes. Migration refers to a movement and can be considered a phase of someone’s life. But being a migrant is not a continuous flexible state as it is related to a past event (or period of movement). It can seemingly simple be verified by asking: did he/she move? Therefore, it is fixed as an historical fact which cannot be changed; once a migrant always a migrant.

Displacement as a condition is related to a process of physical displacement that may come to an end, like migration, but results in a continuous state of being displaced that can be maintained over time and reproduced through generations. Unlike migration, the condition of displacement does not become fixed with the end of the movement (Koser & Martin, 2011; 22). Rather, it remains an ongoing condition which is concerned with a separation from home. As such, it is not about being where one wants to be but more often it is described in terms of exile, being cut off from one’s roots (Malkki, 1995; 508). Furthermore, the condition of

displacement can be separated from a personal experience of movement (migration). As a result of the reproduction through generations, the displaced can then include people who themselves have never moved. Apart from that, displacement can also be reversed when people return, or regain their sense of home (Koser & Martin, 2011; 23).

Apart from the level of agency that is often missing, so are their voices. In the debates about migration, much focus lies on the receiving states, which becomes clear when we look at the metaphorical language used when speaking about (forced) migration. Arrivals are compared to influxes of animal species such as jellyfish plaguing beaches in Malta, as they are commonly thought of as seasonal and very much dependent on weather conditions (Falzon, 2012; 1662). We speak of waves, flows and streams of migrants and of being flooded and swamped (Turton, 2003; 4) (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; 18). This is not the language that the migrants use themselves, but that of the states that host them. The language of migration, thus, is spoken from a state-centric perspective. In other words, *we* use this language to speak about *them* (Turton, 2003; 4). A similar argument can be made when it comes to othering of migrants by broader society, since the aspects of identity that are emphasized in processes of othering are not those selected by the migrants themselves (van Houtum, & van Naerssen, 2002). What this language does furthermore is stripping them from seeing them as individuals, they are seen as a swamp a flood a flow, a mass, but not as unique beings anymore, and this introduces processes of selfing and othering.

Othering describes how certain groups are marginalized and set apart from mainstream society (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman & Brunger, 2016; 60) Othering is a multidimensional process as it touches upon several different forms of social differentiation. A person can both be subjected to and complicit in the process of Othering. The idea of the movement between “being” and partaking in, is reinforced by Gramsci (1971):

> he never reduces subordination to a single relation but rather conceives subalternity as an intersectionality of the variations of race, class, gender, culture, religion, nationalism, and colonialism functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations (Green, 2011; 400).

As such, the experience of “being” the “Other” may not only be ascribed to one factor, such as race or gender, but could also include an individual’s status in a given country (McKenna, & da Gama, 2013; 16). One can therefore speak of intersectional Othering, or interlocking systems of oppression as coined in feminist theory. The process then is concerned with the

consequences of one of those factors or a combination thereof in terms of symbolic degradation. In these processes, the other is constructed as inferior. Those who are subordinated are assigned to subject positions as the Other by those who have the power to describe (Jensen, 2011; 65). Far from being an explicit process, Othering is much more implicit as it is embedded in social discourses and beliefs. Because this Othering is implicit, it is basically invisible and therefore it largely goes uncontested. Pierre Bourdieu referred to this as *doxa*:

> Systems of classification which reproduce, in their own specific logic, the objective classes, i.e. the divisions by sex, age, or position in the relations of production, make their specific contribution to the reproduction of the power relations of which they are the product, by securing the misrecognition, and hence the recognition, of the arbitrariness on which they are based: in the extreme case… the natural and social world appears as self-evident. This experience we shall call doxa (Bourdieu, 1977; 164).

In other words, refugee policies and migrant classifications that are present in developed countries and which create distinctions between "us" and "them", (re)produce this othering of migrants as an established order which is undisputable and taken for granted (Olsen, El-Bialy, Mckelvie, Rauman, & Brunger, 2016; 60). Migrants and refugees are no longer spoken of as individuals or as men, women and children but rather as something different; they are "refugees", "refugee women" or "refugee children" (Nhanha, 2004). We speak about the refugee experience and the refugee voice, but there are just the voices and experiences of refugees and migrants:

> There is no intrinsic paradigmatic refugee figure to be at once recognized and registered regardless of historical contingencies. Instead…there are a thousand multifarious refugee experiences and a thousand refugee figures whose meanings and identities are negotiated in the process of displacement in time and place (Soguk, 1999; Turton, 2003; 7).

This constant feature of their "refugeeness" sets them apart and constructs them as a collective that exists within our boundaries, but whereto they do not belong (Kumsa, 2006; 247). Taken altogether, refugees stop being specific individuals (Malkki, 1996; 378). Othering, then, can be defined as the "*discursive processes by which the powerful group define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm*

the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate." (Jensen, 2011; 65). As such, it is well suited for understanding power relations.

3.2 The Issue of Power

"*what is perhaps rather surprising is that while the concept of agency is often referred to in discussions of power, the concept of power is only rarely referred to in discussions of agency*" (Campbell, 2009; 409).

The processes of Othering as they are often used are somewhat problematic in terms of agency. It seems to be a one-way process, where those who are subjected to Othering are not seen as active subject, but rather the object of something that is done to them by the powerful. As such, social power works to marginalize and exclude those who are different whereas social power does not always need to be power in the form of domination. It can also be a form of reconstruction and social empowerment (Crenshaw, 1991; 1242). Even though Western characterizations and perceptions of the "Other" may have a considerable impact on the way the "Other" perceives itself, this does not automatically mean that such a relationship takes the form of simple acceptance. Discourses, albeit powerful, never fully determine one's identity. It is not as if individuals "*simply step into 'prepackaged selves', nor are* [they] *mechanically put into them by others once and for all*" (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2009; 6). On the contrary, the images or characteristics which are assigned to the "Other" does not necessarily disadvantage them (Pio, & Essers, 2014; 255). In spite of the subordinate positions they might be in, individuals -as agents- will keep engaging in identity work. They will continue to construct, disrupt and/or maintain identities which are favourable to them and by doing so challenge inequalities (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2009; 6). So, even though these images and stigmas represent the backdrop against which migrants attempt to construct a positive sense of self, they do so by engaging with and actively resisting the negative meanings which are being ascribed to them (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, & Abdulrahim, 2012; 2101).

These images can be used to shift power positions with the dominant group, something called "strategic interest of internal imaging". Here it is the "Other" who is gazing back at the powerful, changing the power relations and reworking notions of the "Other" (Pio, & Essers, 2014; 255). This side has been less researched but is relevant as it allows for highlighting social empowerment and reconstruction. Apart from examining how Sub-Saharan African migrants are constructed as the "Other" in Maltese society and how they respond to "feeling"

and “being” the “Other” in Malta, I also want to focus on how they may actively engage in the process of Othering themselves. This moving between “being” subjected to and partaking in the process of Othering suggests that the “Other” is not a homogenous or a static group. Rather, the construction of the “Other” is never static but fluid and changes based on relational and contextual influences (McKenna, & da Gama, 2013; 22).

As mentioned before, language, norms, rules, discourses are all social constructs. These constructions are not always innocent as can be shown by the language of forced migration and its consequences. They have power. Even though social constructivist dealt with power in different ways, often the analysis of power does not go as far as feminists have taken it. Power, as seen in social constructivism is understood as a quality that some actors have while others do not. But this tells us little about the ways power is constructed, how it is reproduced and why some are more powerful than others. Power, as viewed by feminist theorists who are concerned with identities, is something that both constrains and enables (Locher, & Prugl, 2001; 117). There exists a systematic distribution of privilege that creates patterns of subordination. Such a way of looking at power makes it possible to show the systematic forces of subordination lined up along axes such as race, gender, and other statuses. This not only makes it possible to investigate for instance gendered power, but more importantly for this study, it makes it possible to examine the way in which agents participate in challenging or reproducing it (Locher, & Prugl, 2001; 118).

Such negotiations of power through zones of inclusion and exclusion in the host country as sites of resistance are termed circuits of power in organization studies. Nevertheless, I believe the term can be very much relevant when dealing with processes of Othering and resisting such powerful discourses in society. The circuits of power used in organization studies represent the power relations between an organization and its stakeholders. The social relationships that exist between the two are a result of previous power relationships. However, when the organization holds power over the stakeholders this can be met with resistance. When the rules of practice are changed in some way, be it by the organization itself or by exogenous external events, this can lead to changing power relations. The rules which are fixing relations of membership and meaning are altered and this changes the way in which social relations take place. It is therefore very much about the distributions of power and changing social relations as the one who is in a subordinate position can also resist such a position which in turn can lead to changing power relations (Davenport & Leitch, 2005; 6).

Above all, the term “circuits of power” shows that such relations are dialectic instead of static.

3.3 Methodology

Letting migrants tell their own stories in their own words, rather than academics allows for alternative voices to be heard and could therefore already provide alternative images of the “Other”. Such stories, told through the eyes of an often marginalized groups, could shed light on power relationships to the “Other”. Migrant voices and their agency is often absent or to say the least not strongly represented in academic research. This research places migrants at the centre of the study and as such makes them experts and owners of knowledge which may create new states of power, control and resistance. It breaks down the binary of expert/migrant and constructs them as subjects in their own inquiry, providing a missing angle of the Other’s knowledge. This thesis is therefore aiming to address the imbalance in the literature and contributing to more embedded anthropological research.

In order to produce knowledge a biographical narrative approach was applied. Undertaking an in-depth investigation into the biographies of migrants is very much a time consuming practice but ultimately such an approach provides a way to study how migrants, in their daily lives, relate and respond to the discourses on Otherness and at the same time give them a voice to develop sites to resist such discourses. Applying such an approach thus provides these migrants with a platform to “speak back” as it were. My motivation for using biographical narrative approach does not mean that my task as a researcher is to simply write up their stories, word for word. Rather, in line with social constructivism’s epistemology, this study is after the understanding of meaning and interpretation (Pio, & Essers, 2014; 256). Meaning, here, is not something that is given or fixed but rather the result of cultural and social conventions. Ultimately, it is something we make, we construct (Turton, 2003; 3). In many social sciences research publications which made use of biographical materials, interpretation is abundantly present. Embedded in social constructivism, narrative research recognizes multiple realities which are situated in a specific time and place and the way stories can reveal people’s worlds. Here I follow the thinking of Tom Wengraf who argues that: “*in order to understand the voice of the Other as fully as possible, we must explicitly go beyond simply recycling of the verbatim text, and even beyond sophisticated formal text analysis*” (Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf, 2000).

Understanding is to be achieved when personal stories are contextualized. The historical context is one dimension. To achieve understanding for a present situation or perspective of an individual, there needs to be knowledge about the history of that individual and the location of that within the historical context. Without such a context, a personal story would merely be a recycling of words and does not enable understanding. (Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf, 2000) Thus, in order to understand the personal stories of Sub-Saharan migrants about their migrant being in Malta, I will first provide a background chapter which will serve as the backdrop against which they construct themselves. Describing the environment in which the migrants live will provide the context in which the stories take place. This will place them in the larger context of the European refugee crisis, the existing discourses in Malta, both in current affairs as well as where these discourses can be traced back to. As such, the personal stories of migrants are better understood.

Over a period of two months, I gathered 7 life-stories of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Malta. Living in Malta for over a year, I was aware of the places and locations where most migrants were residing or gathering. The original idea was to go to an African restaurant and bar where many of them ate, talked and just met up and where I have been twice before due to their delicious menu. The restaurant is a start-up of the migrants themselves and a meeting place for many and therefore a place where they would feel comfortable, all of which motivated my choice for this specific location.

Against my expectations, it was rather hard to find interviewees there and on top of that; the music was rather loud to make it a good place to record. With this fallen plan, I found myself struggling to find people or even to make a move to ask people. I was afraid that I somehow would offend people, not knowing how I could best approach them. I did not want to make the same mistake by thinking that all black people would be irregular migrants. I could have gone to the location where the open centre is located and where many of them are residing, but I was aware that most researchers in Malta would go to this place, whereas many are also living on their own and for my research I was more interested in the latter somewhat “invisible” group. After all, these people are living their lives like any one of us and are presumably longer in Malta then the former group, which meant that they could tell me more about how it is to live here and how things might have changed or not.

Eventually realizing that I had to overcome my fear which only led to inaction, I started to approach people on any place. Some were willing to sit down right away whereas for others we scheduled an appropriate time. I realized soon enough that just handing over the information sheet for them to contact me was not going to work, as I ran out of sheets pretty soon with nobody contacting me back. To avoid being completely dependent upon them to contact me back, I took on a more proactive strategy by asking for their contact details so I would be able to get in touch as well.

It gave me courage to see that they were so open to talk about their personal experiences and willing to give me their time. Some participants were a bit hesitant and shy as it was the first time ever that someone stopped them and asked about their life in Malta. Or, in Issah’s case for example, he repeatedly told me he did not have any problems, which got him even more confused why I was still interested. This striked me, as if a story would only be interested if there were somehow problems involved or perhaps he thought I was only after hearing such stories.

This cold approach led me to a diverse group of individuals, coming from Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Senegal, and Eritrea. Five of them are Muslim and one is Christian. Even though they are all male, the diverse backgrounds also lead them to have different personal experiences from one to another. Nevertheless, they also have things in common. It is not that I specifically targeted only males but these were the only ones I came across, be it on the streets or in the working sectors. I also knew from my period of interning for a Maltese organisation that even when you find women they less often manage to speak English. On top of that, this migration flow is very much gendered in the sense that statistics show that the number of males is predominantly higher than that of females arriving between 2001-2014 (See Figure 1).

The interview questions were purposely open and broad so that the actual experiences emerged with little direction on my part. Most of them were more a real conversation than an actual interview. I felt it was helpful that I was living in Malta for over a year so I could recognize places, circumstances and it allowed them to ask me about Malta as well. As a result, they did not see me as someone who just came to Malta to ask about them but that it was rather coming from a growing interest of living there as well and knowing the situation.

All the interviews were conducted in English and related to the daily lived experiences of being a migrant in Malta, including their challenges, opportunities and how they view the future. The interviews were recorded and transcribed where possible. Interviews ranged from half an hour to up to two hours. At first I was wondering to what extend speaking in English would be limiting them to express their thoughts and feelings. I have to say it went surprisingly well. Part had to do with the good level of English, some African countries have their schooling systems in English. The other part had to do with the inventive and creative ways of coming up with sayings or metaphors that would leave little to the imagination.

Acknowledging that this research is located within a specific historical and geographical timeframe, defined by the context within which it occurred, I do not claim to provide any truth on migrant’s experiences more broadly. The conclusions made in this thesis are based on and restricted to the 7 people I interviewed. If I would have interviewed 8, 10 or 15 people, or if women were also included, the experiences would most probably be different and subsequently the conclusions as well. For these reasons, I am aware that this this research cannot be generalized to the experiences of all migrants. Nevertheless, it is of value in broadening our understanding of Otherness by making visible the Other’s knowledge.

4. Lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Malta

While listening to my participants I could pay attention to how they narrate themselves vis-à-vis powerful discourses which allows me to reflect on tensions that exist and how these are negotiated by them. These stories are unique and a valuable source as they are personal accounts of their life experiences, emphasizing their power and voices. It is here where we can find answers to questions such as how is it to live in Malta being a Sub-Saharan African migrant? How is their everyday life shaped by practice and policy? In so much as they respond to “feeling” and “being” the “Other” in Maltese society, what is their agency in resisting such otherness and how may they actively engage in othering themselves? The following stories will give an insight in everyday life situations of Sub-Saharan African migrants, all having their own experiences and story to tell coming from different backgrounds whether being new on the island or having spent years here. As a result, these accounts of personal and positive stories of migrants detail their agency in a changing context.

4.1 Abdiwali

I saw Abdiwali walking on the street with a friend and I approached him. He was very interested to tell me his story but was too tired from the work at that moment so we scheduled to meet each other a couple of days later.

Abdiwali comes from Somalia and firstly arrived in Lampedusa on the 24th of December 2015. He ended up in the city of Vicenza:

> In this place I spent more than one and a half year. In the beginning I received help, such as social housing etc. But when I received my document, all of that stopped. Just like that. Now we had to stand on our own feet, we had to do it ourselves. They just told us “good luck”. I tried but didn’t succeed.
>
> I was told that you would not have a chance to find a job if you could not speak Italian. Cause everywhere they are speaking in Italian. So I learned the language. Now that I could speak Italian I started to look for jobs, but still I couldn’t get anything. And there I was with no job, no house and no friends.
>
> So yes in Italy I have the refugee status. I have the protection, I have the actual paper, but that was the only thing I had. How can I have a life with just a paper? There is no house, no job, nothing. That is why I came to Malta. In Malta I can work, they accept

> me. They just hang a paper on the door with “looking for staff”. I walk inside, they let me do a trial of some days and then you get the job. It is not like this in Italy.
>
> In Italy you need to prove your CV, you need to have certificates. In Somalia I was working in editing, journalism, filming, but I don’t have a certificate of that. When I came there they gave us a training of three months and after that I got a contract. In total I worked there for five years, but I never thought about how important it would be for my future to have a proof of that. I never thought I would leave my country. I didn’t think about it that I would ever need that for my future.

It is interesting to see that even though he has his protection in Italy, he deliberately chose to move and live in Malta as there was no way to find a living in Italy. In Malta he could get a job which would make it possible for him to start his life again. Finding a job in Malta is easier for him he tells me:

> I moved to Malta a month ago. I am staying at my friend’s place at the moment. My friend has two jobs and now I am working there as well. Here it is much better, because they believe your story. My boss is a good man, he believes us and helped me by giving me a job. He understands us.

Every day is scheduled with work, but he does not mind that he is busy, rather the opposite:

> I don’t allow myself to rest or relax now. I’m 22 years old. I wasted 1,5 years of my life doing nothing. Just gone! Even though I did learn a language and now that I am in Malta a lot of people speak Italian too. So it was still helpful in a way that it was not completely wasted but it still feels that way. I had enough rest, now it’s time to work and build up my life, work on my future. Maybe later I can rest when everything is more stable, but now is not the time.
>
> You hear from people that Malta is a country of work. Everybody is in a rush, so I have to rush too. We mainly do physical jobs like construction, cleaning, dishwashing. Not the jobs that I did before in my own country, but it’s okay for now. At least I earn some money. And I can start to take steps for my future.
>
> In the morning I do community cleaning in Msida. It is an outside job, cleaning the streets and parks etc. Then I come home at 10:30/11:30, depends on how much needs to be done. At 12 o’clock I have to go to my other job again. I wash the dishes, clean the kitchen and help the chefs till around 1 a.m. I only sleep around 5 or 6 hours a night, but its oke. Now it is the time to work.

Abdiwali managed to take on two jobs which generate income, which is for him the most important thing at this moment. Even though he is working in a sector where he did not study

for and which does not have his first preference, he eagerly takes it knowing the alternative in Italy. His working ethos seems to be related to the experience he had when he was in Italy:

> One day in Italy I was sitting on a bench like this in a park and I was talking on the phone. A man came towards me and asked if he could sit down. “Yes of course take a seat”, I said to him. After a while he started to talk to me; “what are you doing here with your phone, I saw you sitting here 2 hours ago when I passed by and now you are still here with your phone, still talking. Why is that?” So I explained him, I said: “I don’t have a job, I don’t have school, I don’t study, I have nothing to do. So at least I wake up at 8 or 9 to get out of my bed and come outside to get some fresh new air, to breath. You have a job a family here, or a car. Everything you have is here but I am alone. I don’t have anything. Nobody is greeting me, nobody to talk to. So this (and he was waving with a paper to show as if it was his phone) is my life, it’s my everything. These are my friends, my family, I talk to this phone because it is the only thing I have. I talk to my family to see if they are oke, to my friends, because I have nothing else to do all day”.

In this instance he felt people had bad ideas about him, sitting in a park all day doing nothing but making phone calls. He is stressing that now in Malta there is no time for that, no time to even relax. He is doing all efforts to not be viewed like a lazy migrant again, rather the opposite he is actively trying to become a perfect assimilated one. But the jobs he is doing now it is not something he wants to do his whole life, therefore he is already thinking about making steps for his future:

> In Malta I found my home. Malta is like Africa my friends say. The way of life, the language, it is a bit similar. It is close to me so it is easy to adapt. But even now when I would go back to Italy I can adapt, I learned the language and the way of life of how people do. I am like them now if I am there. The first step for my future here is to learn the Maltese language. It is important for me. I am in this country and English alone is not enough if I want to get something better later. Then maybe in the future I can get better jobs than the ones that I’m doing now. I also want to improve my English, cause when I was learning Italian I forgot a bit since it is so different. So I want to work on that too.

Abdiwali is actively showing that he can easily adapt do different cultures, that he can become one of them. He is very eager in trying to fit in, taking the effort of learning the languages and taken on the Italian and Maltese way of life. He is remarking that Malta is like Africa, constructing the island as something close to him, something he knows and where he can belong. Malta had a period when they felt closer to Africa and many migrated there, but

since the membership of the EU this outlook changed as described by Schembri, Coordinator of the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta states:

> “... we promise to mediate dialogue between two cultures when we are only interested in one. Despite all our declarations in good faith about our diverse Mediterranean elements that make us Maltese, our aspirations remain European, our models come from Brussels, we all look up north” (Durick, 2012; 23)

While Malta is constructing the island as belonging to Europe, pointing to all the differences, Abdiwali still sees the many connections with Africa and uses that to make him feel home. As once Joseph Muscat, currently the Prime Minister of Malta, said: "The risk is that the Africans will stay here and become part of us” (The New York Times, 2006). Abdiwali is doing many efforts to become so-called one of them, resisting being seen as different, thereby actively telling pointing out the things Malta has in common.

4.2 Issah

Issah is a Senegalese thirty- one-year-old who had been in Malta for seven months. He came by plane from Italy. A friend of his who was already in Malta for 3 years told him to come over. He tells me about his reasons to come to Malta, which show a lot of similarities with Abdiwali’s story:

> I have the papers in Italy, the humanitarian protection but in Italy I didn't have a job, it’s not easy. I was there for more than 3 years, I learned the language but you need many documents. They ask you “do you have a certificate; do you have a curriculum?” You know. I don't have it, I have just the experience. But they ask you if you have this and that. My friend told me that here in Malta it is better. And it is different in Malta, they don't ask you nothing.
>
> Two days after I arrived here, I started checking for work. In Marsa, there is a roundabout where the black people are waiting. When I go there, the Maltese people come by car and they stop. They ask you: “do you have experience in this? Or “which work are you doing?” I said I am doing the tiles. They ask: “are you good, do you know your job well?” I said yes and they told me tomorrow you can come. No problem.
>
> When I came on my first day of work, they gave me some small things to do for me to see if I understand the job or not. And me, I did ta-tat-ta-ta to show I could do it. And now it has been 7 months already that I work here. I don't have a contract there; I work day by day. But I know my work, I don't have a problem. It’s good. In Senegal I also did the tiles. Its more than 13 years now that I’m doing my job. My friend told me that

> in Malta they don't have too much black men to do the tiles. They need me. Because now my boss is making me like this (he laughs while folding his arms strongly around, holding on to himself). He wants to keep me.

Issah knows he is good at what he is doing and he is also aware of the fact that his boss needs him. Nonetheless, he does not work via a contract which makes that this particular need for him is the only reason that gives him some feeling of security with regards to keeping his job. Apart from that, he very much likes to do it as this is something he actually did all his life and he is proud of it. He showed me pictures of him at work and the end results of the bathrooms he tiled, in several styles full of beautiful mosaic. Even though he likes his current position, he made it very clear that he only works there because he is respected by his boss:

> I like my boss because he does not talk too much, you know. Because for me I don't work with all the talk. When I work for instance with you and you tell me this and that, I leave my work. I know myself, nobody can disturb me. For what would I stay, the money? No, I respect myself. I am not young anymore. You don't work like that with what your boss is telling you. Mine, he respects me and I respect my boss. There are no problems.

As a result of the before mentioned commodity of black African migrants working on construction sites, Issah experiences feelings of being looked down on:

> I work hard and I am doing a good job but some people pass and they look at me and they make this sound of *tssss*. And then I think by myself why I cannot do this job? It gives me this feeling of not being happy here (pointing to his heart).

Even though he is proud of what he is doing and very skilled in it as well, for the Maltese he is like any other. Because of the commodity of black Africans working on construction sites, the Maltese do not see the difference between him and others who only took those jobs because they were the only ones available. Resisting being positioned as an obedient migrant working in a sector against his will, he stresses the point that it is him who is in charge in the job as well, Instead, he is showing that he is a man who knows his craft and is not afraid to speak up to others:

> And it’s even me who is commanding sometimes the Maltese! They don't like that by the way (he says with a smile). When you tell them sometimes: “don't do this” or “this is not good” They say to me “oh Madonna” and they start to complain. They know exactly that I am right but they need to tell me something.

He is referring to him being in control and he did so in terms of his active role in clarifying for them what and how they should do the job. He is also telling me that as soon as he finishes his work, it is time to relax and forget about everything. He is someone who generally avoids problems:

> Everybody has problems but I forget any problem. I only look for the better. When somebody wants to put me in problems, me I run. I don't want problems you know. Every time I am relaxed. For me it seems the Maltese don't have any problems, they don't talk with you nothing. Just work.

It seems that the Issah’s strategy is to not give any space for negativity and problems. He does not give his mind space to even think about it. In a very literal sense he is running away from it, actively avoiding and ignoring. As in the fight or flight example, he clearly choses the latter option to deal with problems. It may also be a way for him to resist the image that exist about Sub-Saharan African migrants who come to create problems.

While working with and alongside Maltese people, Issah makes clear that apart from being at the workplace he does not really have any connections with them. Being a colleague is the minimum contact that he has with them. Obviously living in Malta makes that you will have encounters. He recalls one of those moments with me on an average day:

> When you go in the bus, you sit down and it’s finished. Sometimes you see things, maybe you feel something, but when I see something I don't have a problem with it. For instance, sometimes I go in the bus and then you see the empty seat and you sit down next to that person. And then I see them closing their nose with their fingers like this (pulling a dirty face) Things do happen, but it is not my problem. It doesn’t affect me.

He is laughing while he tells me this, saying that he cannot be bothered. When I ask how come this does not affect him, he gives the example of his mother: “*like me, even my family they want the best for me, they don’t worry*.” In this case the people in the bus who are sitting next to him are Maltese and position him as someone who is dirty or either smelly as they make the gesture. Even though Issah sees this, and it is quite a personal, he stays put. In these instances, stoicism can be observed as a strategy when analysing how Issah is coping. He is carrying on as the best he can while trying to look on the bright sight.

The most dominant strategy throughout the interview is Issah referring to the importance of him being in control. Without a contract and guarantee that he can keep his job, he reversibly

tells me that it is him who is deciding whether to keep working for his boss or not depending on the respect he receives. As well as in the moment of actively telling his Maltese colleagues how to do their job. He is constructing a Self who is not young anymore, thereby distancing himself from other younger African migrants. An adult who decides where to work depending on where he is respected, and who is an experienced crafts man. As such he is regaining some form of agency as he actively constructing himself as independent from others, while Maltese society is putting that label on him. He also introduces himself by saying that he was asked to come to Malta, because Malta needed *him*. He is special because there are not many black people with his skills. Resisting thereby the dominant discourse of helpless “boat people” taking away the jobs.

Abdiwali on the other hand, is actively constructing Malta as a place close to home which makes him feel he can belong. Despite the differences that are there, he rather focuses on those things familiar to him such as language and culture. As such, he decentring the Otherness, actively showing that the “Other” is in fact quite similar to the Maltese Self.

Apart from the ways my participants resisted being seen as the “Other” in Maltese society, their reality of being in Malta can still affect them in other ways. The last and final chapter will discuss this topic, as well touch upon the fact that Othering is not a one-way process.

5 “Malta is not Europe”: Europe as the positive “Other”

Most migrant projects change and adapt to opportunities as well as constraints that they encounter. To understand in what ways the island of Malta appears as a land of resources and constraints and how it is interfering and intervening in the trajectories of migrants, this chapter will analyse how “being on” Malta as a migrant being is affecting them and how this is reflected in their everyday lives, thereby looking for ways they actively partake in processes of Othering themselves.

5.1 Malta: A Country of Work Choice

That Malta is more than just a country of transit became clear after speaking to several migrants. Both Abdiwali and Issah chose to come to Malta due to their hardship in finding a job in Italy and hearing that Malta was better in this regard. Both are happy to be here, being able to work, but there is an important difference between the two. Issah is doing what he has always been doing, working with tiles. Even though he did not have the proof, his experience was enough to get him the position he wanted. Abdiwali on the other hand does not have the chance to do what he studied for in Malta and is doing what he says most African migrants end up doing:

> We mainly do physical jobs like construction, cleaning, dishwashing. Not the jobs that I did before in my own country, but it’s oke for now. At least I earn some money. And I can start to take steps for my future.

Even though they mention the hard life in Malta, or that they don’t have time to relax or sit down, still the fact that they can work and thereby finance themselves makes them able to take their life in their own hands. Building up as they all told me, finally after all that waiting and wasting of time they feel they can make themselves useful and be independent. Still one should wonder to what extent their bosses are really helping them as they told me, they still get a lower pay and usually work without contract, there is some ambiguity between helping them or taking advantage of them. Nevertheless, for them the job is one of the most important things. With that, they can pay their rent and start to send some money back to their families.

5.2 Papers and Prints

It is worthwhile noting that both Issah and Abdiwali speak about their humanitarian protection or their papers in connection to a meaningful life. They felt they could not live like

anyone else can in the community they were in. They are included but excluded at the same time ((Khosravi, 2010; 98). Included through legal and political processes, having a refugee status, or included in media coverage and academic studies, but without thereby being recognized as a member of the community they are living in. The Greeks had two terms for what “life” meant to them; Zoê: “living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods) and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group.” (Agamben, 1995; 9). As Abdiwali was mentioning: How can I have a life with just a paper? When an individual is excluded from the political community this results in a bare life condition where the way of living is grounded merely on the biological existence shared with other living species.

That papers play an important part in their life can also be traced back in the life story of Regen, a twenty-one-year-old from Eritrea. He has been living in Malta for over four years and received a subsidiary protection from the Maltese government. This very fact that he got a lower status than the refugee status, making it impossible to have family reunification, makes him feel excluded from taking part in the community. He tells me that if he would get the refugee status he would feel accepted, then Malta would be his home, but now it doesn't feel like that. He is never able to feel at home in a country that does not accept him. On top of that, the subsidiary protection means that he lives day by day. “*Tomorrow can be different, I could be sent away if they change it*”, he tells me. “*That is my fear*”. He heard that some Ethiopian people for instance don't receive any documents. As the governments says that the country is safe enough to return. “*I’m afraid they will do the same to me, even when this is not the case*”. It makes life insecure for him. Especially since it happened before that Malta changed their temporary protection program. As a result of feeling out of place he is finding ways to belong. Every Sunday he goes to church an Ethiopian/Eritrean church in Valletta where they do the sermon in Tigrinya. He says he feels more close to Ethiopians as “*they are like us*”. Furthermore, he is looking beyond Malta and prefers to focus on improving his English instead of learning Maltese “*as Malta will not be my home. I prefer to focus on the English as that is an international language which you can use everywhere. It is more important. One day I hope I can leave, but for now I am stuck because of the European system.”*

Regen hoped to apply for the America program, but because of the Trump administration this deal is put on hold for now:

> Trump messed up my life. What can I do now, I don’t want to stay here but the European system doesn't allow me to leave. I have a cousin in Sweden, she is married to a Swedish man so she can stay there. I travelled to them and stayed for 2 months but when I asked if I could stay there. They informed on me and realized I had my fingerprints in Malta. They told me you have a Maltese document so that’s where you need to go to. I didn’t want to because there is no life for me there but I realized it was better to return voluntarily so I took the plane back.

That feeling of being stuck or the feeling of a prison-like environment on the island is shared among others as well. So too in the experience of Adam when he starts to tell about how it was when he just came to Malta:

> I come here, I look at the life, the small area and I thought alright, no problem. You can leave me out like this. I don’t know where I can go, because Malta is like a prison, and then they put me in detention, where can I go even if you let me out?

Unlike the others, Abdiwali and Issah do have the refugee status. I asked about it what that status means for them and Abdiwali made the point that it was indeed just that, a status:

> I don’t tell myself I am a refugee, but I am. I didn’t choose to be one and it’s not that I’m proud to be one.
>
> A refugee is someone who left his country because he had to and went to another and that is what I did. So yes I am a refugee but that is not all that I am. It is only a part of me, something that I did not choose for but is just the reality. I came in that situation.

Abdiwaly is saying that he cannot deny the reality of having the refugee status and thus being a refugee, but it is something he says he is not proud of. But why is such distancing necessary of saying I am not proud to be a refugee? It is as he is almost saying he did not use this as an excuse to come to Europe, it rather just happened to be his reality. In the case of Issah, he expresses this even more:

> I don’t think of myself as a refugee, I just think of me. Tell me everything what you want but I am Issah. What is a refugee? A refugee is a refugee. It’s not as if you look at me and you see refugee written here [pointing to his forehead].

He does not think of himself as a refugee even though he received the status of one. He is wondering out loud what a refugee actually is, pointing out that surely it is not something you can see when you look at a person, like a label on his forehead. A gesture which could be

understood that he believes it is quite ridicule to think one can filter out ‘the refugee” by looking at a person.

This has to do with the image of “the refugee” and its changed negative meaning in the current context of securitization of migration. Abdiwali is repeating the exact words as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies, mentioned in the beginning of this thesis: “*Nobody is ever just a single thing. And yet, in the public discourse today, we often speak of people as a single thing. Refugee. Immigrant”.* Even though that might be the dominant discourse, both men actively resist the negative meanings which are being ascribed to them by distance themselves from these negative images of the refugee and therefore do not want to be associated with it as such. They lay the focus on them, the individual, rather than on a essentialized construction of ‘the refugee’. For them too, the “refugee becomes a label of exclusion.

5.3 The Myth of Transit

The trajectories of migrants are not necessarily linear or structured. What becomes clear from the stories is that most of them did not necessarily intend to head for Europe. Rather their plans changed, opportunities arose or options became available (Mainwaring, 2012) This is a common misunderstanding. Social networks are what connects them with people all over the different continents and via that way they receive information, whether rightfully or not. These information flows can influence their decisions, and in Adam’s case it creates an idea of Europe as heaven on earth, which on arrival feels immediately quite different:

I went to a lot of countries; Cameroon, then Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Libya. There I was for a long time, like 6 years, and after that I ended up in Malta. Now I’m here. Someone who was talking about Europe, talked like it was heaven. Like when you die you go to heaven, Europe is heaven. A lot of people are making a good life, and it makes you think about it.

> So yes, I also thought Europe was heaven. I have a friend who is in Holland now. He told me: “Adam, Europe is a nice life. When you come, sometimes you don't want to help, some people will help you with no force. When you come here, and have some experience in school. They give you help, like buying a house, a car, what I can tell you like a lot of things. Everybody will help you.” Are you joking I asked? “No.” never I could understand. He said to me; “Adam, I'm not going to tell lies. Listen when you arrive in any country in Europe call me I come to you, I see you there and I will show you my house, my wife, my car.” I am here and I know now. I am going to

> follow. The first time, they put me in the detention. Now this friend does not answer my phone anymore, because he knows what I am going to tell him and because he doesn't have nothing. Sometimes people tell you things. and now I am here. You lose the family, having nothing and the problem is that it’s not good. Someone who calls you they need to tell the truth.

This shows very much that their journey is not a direct one but more often takes months up to several years, before even deciding whether to opt for Europe or not. Critiques of transit migration have pointed to the pre-existing migration flows that we seem to forget: North-Africa has long been an area of settlement. Particularly so in the case of Sub-Saharan migrants who did not intend to go to Europe. According to De Haas, “*it is a misconception that all or most migrants crossing the Sahara are “in transit” to Europe. There are possibly more sub-Saharan Africans living in the Maghreb than in Europe (…) While Libya is an important destination country in its own right, many migrants failing or not venturing to enter Europe prefer to stay in North Africa as a second-best option*” (IOM, 2008; 9; de Haas, 2008; 1308). The same misconception about transit migrants or transit countries can be said to apply to the Southern European countries. It took decades to realize that migrants who were thought of as simply “birds of passage” were actually patterns of migrant settlements (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014; 93).

Europe is also not for everybody the end station; the journey is not per se finished there. Many are thinking about America and in the future they hope to return to their country of origin. Even when in Europe, their migration trajectory does not stop, internal movements back and forth are a reality. As a result of a Europe which has still many differences among each and every country. Even though Malta is part of the EU, the majority feels it is not like Europe.

5.4 Europe as the positive “Other”

When it comes to Othering, little attention has been paid to the functioning of positive “Others”. Making references to positive “Others” may serve an identity function where that person sees him or herself as part of it and as such uses it to develop and strengthen extra-European identities (Vogel & Leiprecht, 2011; 23). The participants I interviewed all have looked at Europe from the outside but now being in Malta they also experience it from the inside.

> I need to go outside, to Europe, I don’t know exactly where, but somewhere far away from here. When everything is really nice, or at least there is something nice you feel something good, but here I don't feel anything of that. Here it’s like Sudan, I left it but it’s the same.

These are the words of Achmed. Even though he has freedom in Malta, without documentation it still feels the same as Sudan for him. While Malta is part of the EU, Achmed does not see it that way as his expectations of Europe are different from the real life experiences he has in Malta. For him there is still another Europe out there, where that exactly is he does not know, but Malta is certainly not Europe for him. “*Its better in Europe than in Malta. Everyday I’m going to kill my dreams everyday if I stay here*.” Adam agrees with him and explains what Europe meant to him before he came:

> Someone who was talking about Europe, talked like it was heaven. Like when you die you go to heaven, Europe is heaven. A lot of people are making a good life, and it makes you think about it. So yes, I also thought Europe was heaven (..) Everybody will help you.

This came back in other instances with other interviews such as with Regen: *“Compared to all the countries I have been Malta is better than those because the situation is different. I am Christian so I feel safe here, not like when I was in Libya (…) But still, Malta is not like Europe.”* Bashir, from Somalia, says that his future lies in Europe as there is no future in Malta. This would suggest that he does not consider Malta in his view of Europe, as they are two separate things. What can be traced in almost all of them is that they hold a view of “Europe” as something positive and good as there are many references to positive features of Europe. There where the life is better, and since their view of Europe does not resonance with their experiences of Malta, they do not see Malta forming a part of that Europe. They have constructed Europe as positive “Other”.

While all share some feelings of disillusion they do not correct the idealised image of Europe with their experiences of European reality. Rather, they see them as separate and ascribed those feelings to the Maltese reality, while “Europe” is still out there. This image is also reproduced when they speak to family members or friends who are still in Africa. Such as in the case with Abdiwali:

> I always tell them that everything is oke and fine with me, I cannot be soft cause they already have enough problems. I don’t want them to know mine cause than they have another one. So I just tell them everything is oke.

In some way, from the perspective of those that stayed behind, they belong to or are a part of Europe now as well and they also want to believe themselves that they are a part of it, which makes them want to keep the image intact.

With regards to finding jobs, Malta seems to be a good place. Almost all participants agreed that is was easy to find one and some even have more than one. Being able to work gives them back some agency as they feel they can earn their own money and work on their future. Whether they really see their future in Malta depends heavily on what type of protection, if any, they received from the government. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two participant with the refugee status are positive about their future in Malta. This contrast sharply with hose having a humanitarian protection or none. They share feelings of not being accepted by Malta and therefore feel not at home. They cannot see how they will ever be possible to have a future in Malta as they always feel as not fully having the rights that other citizens enjoy. They feel excluded from the political community, resulting in a bare life condition where the way of living is grounded merely on the biological existence shared with other living species. They cannot live there forever, not being able to unite with their family. They therefore see their stay in Malta day by day, hoping for an opportunity to leave. Because of these experiences they prefer to move on to the “real” Europe as they do not see Malta as part of the EU because of how the government is dealing with them.

6. Conclusion

When it comes to the topic of forced migration in Malta: “*We talk about ‘arrivals’, but rarely look beyond that stage to take in the fact that many of these ‘arrivals’ are now here to stay*. Such a focus on arrivals allows to focus on the mass, the numbers. It is then convenient for the government of Malta to portray a discourse of impotence, emphasizing the size and population density as well as being “caught” in the middle as it were due to its geographical location. This allows them to effectively claim victimhood and thus a national crisis. As such the government is casting away from thinking about long term measures such as integration and handles the issue of forced migration from an emergency situation.

In order to respond to such a crisis, measures like detention are needed out of interest for national security. Detention and related practices serve to criminalize migrants and refugees and construct a category of “black and illegal” which ultimately results in suspicious attitudes and a negative perception of those individuals. It also conveniently sets them apart from Maltese society. This sends off an image of them as dangerous and unwanted with a consequence of increasing levels of discrimination and xenophobia. Without differentiation, these individuals are referred to as “clandestine”, “illegal immigration”, “asylum seekers” and “refugees”. In general, there exist an idea that when you are African then you are Muslim and if you are Muslim then you are a terrorist. And you are HIV positive as well. There is little compassion as Maltese generally reason that these migrants put themselves deliberately at risk in international waters in a boat which is clearly unseaworthy. They should therefore not expect from Malta or any country to take the trouble and efforts of “rescuing” them from something they inflicted on themselves.

A characteristic that Maltese people often refer to is that Sub-Saharan Africans are black, and that they are overwhelmingly Muslim. The fears that Islam will take over and will turn all Maltese black is reason for anti-immigration protests. That they are seen as different is reflected in the many ways Sub-Saharan African migrants feel identified and pointed out and are socially controlled; by racially motivated police checks to verify documents to ensure they are in Malta legally, and denials in clubs and buses. Such practices are based on visibility and differentiation. Being different, makes strange and together with the non-existing integration policies in Malta it allows for misinformation and separation.

Malta has a history as a proud defender of Catholicism and this is something reflected in everyday life. They like to look up North and identify strongly with Christian Europe. They downplay the fact that their language is clearly from an Arab school and argue they are more similar to Sicilians than Tunisians, thereby distancing themselves from Africa. As such, they construct the Sub-Saharan African as the “Other” to their society to reinforce their Self as Christian European. Among all strangers that come and stay in Malta the Sub-Saharan African “Other” is the strangest of them all.

Even though these images and stigmas represent the backdrop against which the migrants attempt to construct a positive sense of Self, they do so by engaging with and actively resisting the negative meanings which are being ascribed to them. It can be argued that the participants actively challenge dominant discourses and negative meanings that are attached to the construction of the “Other”, thereby decentring Otherness in their everyday lives.

This can be traced back in the way Abdiwali is decentring his Otherness by resisting the negative meanings which are being ascribed to the African “Other”. He is actively constructing Malta as a place close to home which makes him feel he can belong. Despite the differences that are there, he rather focuses on those things familiar to him such as language and culture. As such, he decentring the Otherness, actively showing that the “Other” is in fact quite similar to the Maltese Self.

Another strategy to construct a positive Self can be observed in the story of Issah. Since the focus is exclusively on boat arrivals, he is decentring this by laying the focus on how he came to Malta. He tells me that he was asked to come to Malta, because Malta needed *him*. He is special because there are not many black people with his skills. Resisting thereby the dominant discourse. Besides that, he is constantly referring to the importance of him being in control. Without a contract and guarantee that he can keep his job, he reversibly tells me that it is him who is deciding whether to keep working for his boss or not depending on the respect he receives. As well as in the moment of actively telling his Maltese colleagues how to do their job. He is constructing a Self who is not young anymore, thereby distancing himself from other younger African migrants. An adult who decides where to work depending on where he is respected, and who is an experienced crafts man. As such he is regaining some form of agency as he actively constructing himself as independent from others.

When it comes to the label of “the refugee” the participants actively resist the negative meanings which are being ascribed to them by distancing themselves from these negative images of the refugee and therefore do not want to be associated with it as such. Here we can see a literal decentring where they put aside and refuse the dominant discourse and instead put themselves central. They lay the focus on them, the individual, rather than on a essentialized construction of “the refugee”. For them too, “the refugee” becomes a label of exclusion.

Nevertheless, being on the island does have its influences. The strategy of Malta to construct itself merely as a place for migrants to stay temporarily rather than a place where they would settle permanently is mostly felt in the lived realities of those having humanitarian protection or no protection at all. A direct consequence of granting temporary humanitarian protection and subsidiary protection rather than being given formal refugee status is that the migrants feel not accepted. They feel stuck in a place where they cannot build their future. They cannot imagine themselves having a future whereby they feel like second-class citizens, impossible to ever unite with their family and restricted to travel. It is mainly for these reasons that they prefer not to settle in Malta, which shows that it is more a direct consequence of the government policy rather than an *a priori* wish.

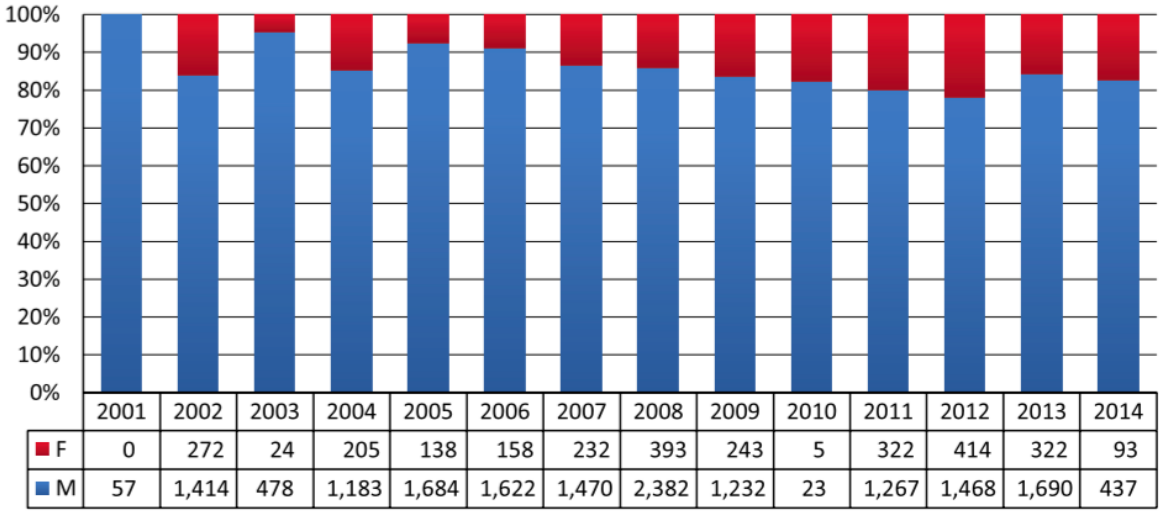
That those that are perceived as the “Other” can also actively engage in Othering themselves was reflected in the perceptions they held about Europe. The experiences they have in Malta only contributed and reinforced Europe as their positive “Other”. While all share some feelings of disillusion they did not correct the idealised image of Europe with their experiences of European reality. Rather, they see them as separate and ascribed those feelings to the Maltese reality, while “Europe” is still out there.

It is interesting to further investigate this line of thinking and to explore what Europe means to them from an outside perspective and how this might change when “being” on the inside. This thesis placed forced migrants at the centre of the study and as such makes them experts and owners of knowledge, providing a missing angle of the Other’s knowledge. More research is needed to fill the gap of the Other’s knowledge by putting them centre stage. Highlighting different narratives of which reflect their agency and voices, contributes to rework notions of the “Other”. It are these stories that allow for alternative voices to be heard and can bring out the diversity behind overly generalised constructions, thereby avoiding

turning people into a single story. I would like to conclude in the words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies: “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

Appendix 1

Figure 1: Flow data: Boat arrivals by gender, 2001-2014



	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
F	0	272	24	205	138	158	232	393	243	5	322	414	322	93
M	57	1,414	478	1,183	1,684	1,622	1,470	2,382	1,232	23	1,267	1,468	1,690	437

Source: UNHCR Malta, 2015.

Appendix 2

Information Sheet

Research Title: “The Other Voice: Life Stories of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Malta”
Researcher: Berthine de Ruiter

I am a student from the University of Groningen and I am undertaking this research as part of my Master program.

Irregular migration and migrant ‘illegality” has become more prominent as a problem. Migrants are seen as others; either as victims or viewed as a threat. Neither of those are entirely true as they are essentialized construction of migrants as troublesome, dependent and vulnerable. On the contrary, they all have agency and this level is often missing.

There has been little interview based research on the experiences and life stories of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in Malta which include their point of view. Refugees and migrants are often reduced to one single thing, but nobody is never just a migrant or refugee. This study aims to broaden our understanding of Otherness by highlighting different narratives of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in Malta which reflect their agency and voices, thereby reworking the notions of the Other.

It is my hope that this research project will open up greater debate and criticize dominant discourses based on overly generalised construction such as “the refugee/migrant voice” or “the refugee/migrant experience”. These stories allow for alternative voices to be heard and can bring out the diversity behind such constructions.

I invite you to participate in this research project as an interviewee because voices and stories of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in Malta are often missing. There are no criteria for being included or excluded. If you agree to contribute you will be asked to be interviewed about your story and the daily experiences you have of being in Malta. The length of the interview will vary but you can decide how long it should be. If you agree, I will record the interview on an audio file and/or written notes. If at any time during the interview you would want certain information withdrawn from these records, I will delete that information. You will be able to access these records at any time following the interview by contacting me. Your privacy will be protected in any publication resulting from this research. Your name and other information will only be included with your consent. If you do not agree to be identified I will use a pseudonym in any written work resulting from the interview.

Thus your participation in this research project is **strictly voluntary.** You are free to withdraw from this research at any stage without giving any reason.

I am not aware of any risks associated with your participation in this research, although some might find it destressing to share their personal experiences.

The results will be presented in my Master Thesis at the University of Groningen. Recorded material and raw material will only be used by me and if requested by my supervisor in the Netherlands.

If you have read and understood this information sheet, any questions you had have been answered, and you would like to participate; please read the consent form.

Yours sincerely,

Berthine de Ruiter

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Appendix 3

Consent Form

“The Other Voice: Life Stories of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Malta”

1. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which have been explained to me.

2. I authorize the researcher to interview me

3. I give permission to be audio recorded

4. I give my permission for my name or identity to be used

5. I consent having interview data stored on a closed data base available for analysis by the researcher

6. I acknowledge that,

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this study.

I agree to being interviewed and to be recorded. I have been informed that I have the right to stop the interview and ask to have the recording erased. Also can I withdraw from this study at any stage without giving any reason.

I understand that the contents of the interview will be used for a Master Thesis submitted to the University of Groningen. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. Any information which may be used to identify me will not be used unless I have given my permission (see point 4).

Name of participant: ……..

Signature of participant: ……..

Signature of researcher: ……
Date:

Contact details of researcher

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