

THE TAIL THAT WAGGED THE DOG

**The life and struggles of
Dom Mintoff**

1916 – 2012

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Malta – 2021

CHAPTER 1
SURVIVAL
(1916–1923)

The pitiless sun had set at last. As with every other summer beating over this flat, barren rock which someone long lost in time had named Malta perhaps for its once famed black honey, the heat was stifling. Though bad enough during the sweltering day—all sweaty, sticky and smelly—when even the shade tanned the skin, it was perhaps worse during the heavy, sleepless night. In Valletta, Malta’s bastioned three-hundred-year-old capital city almost completely surrounded by sea, most of the dusty streets were beginning to regain their stillness. The only people still roaming about were the ones ambling back home having watched the last sparks of the fireworks in honour of their Madonna exhaust themselves. They were as always chatting relentlessly, perhaps a bit much too loud on this festive eve, and, above all, gossiping. Over this dismal hundred-year-old British colony the only whiff of a fresh respite came from across the sea, one of the few God-given blessings that were free for all, even for the poorest of the poor, and there was an inordinate abundance of it.

At this particular moment, we’re deep within a notorious slum called Mandraġġ on the city’s north-western side, at the bottom end of Saint John Street. This narrow road with a sharp incline was far enough from the city’s main thoroughfare, called Kingsway, to be completely overlooked—together with the whole squalid Mandraġġ—by the pretentious gentry that by day strolled along the road sniffing political goings-on, though deep enough within the slum’s over-crowded hub to share in the full glory of its seediness.

Within a spotless but rough-and-ready dwelling on the first floor of a three-storeyed tenement, the three impish boys were about to have their dinner.¹ They had just arrived from running about with their pals.² Today their mother was especially sharp with her lads since they had a guest younger than most of them. She would have very much liked all at home to put on their best behaviour at least for appearance’s sake but also

for propriety. Their guest was an extremely shy five-year-old boy over from what seemed to them a town very far indeed, one called Bormla, further than Valletta and way beyond its southern seaport called the Grand Harbour. But that was not only it. The smart lad was an altar boy, serving mass in Latin. Only last Christmas, most admiringly indeed, he had delivered the traditional midnight sermon to a full congregation back at his town. Yet more upsetting than all of this was that he hailed from a rigorously religious family, staunchly Catholic, and one, to boot, not to be trifled with.

All the same, boys will be boys; and this particular mother's mischievous trio was as puckish as one might possibly get from Valletta's backstreets, especially at the Mandraġġ. Left to themselves to get ready for their supper, all four boys went into an adjoining room. Without a second thought, all glee and giggles, Liżew, the elder, stripped stark naked, and his brothers were on the point of doing so too.

Their little guest was stunned. Back home he was constantly surrounded by a horde of women—mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters, mostly all clad in black—with saints and holy relics all around. Never, ever, would he think of stripping naked in front of anyone. It would have been considered more than unbecoming; greatly sinful. Scandalised, the boy simply stood there frozen, glued to the ground, watching his carefree friends wide-eyed. He was, nevertheless, also utterly fascinated by their happy-go-lucky conduct, their sheer lack of self-consciousness, their unscrupulousness and, above all, ... their happiness.

He was almost beginning to reconcile himself to the mesmerising situation he found himself in when he was jolted out of his stupor by the shrill voice of the boys' mother. She had unexpectedly moved into the little room and screeched at her sons, chiding them severely, a tad theatrically, for being so unthoughtful and disrespectful. Many a time, she yelled, had she cautioned them not to strip when outsiders were present. Liżew swiftly grabbed his underwear and unrepentantly put it on while his brothers looked on completely surprised, unable to fathom what the fuss was all about.

Their embarrassed friend felt humiliated rather than gratified by their mother's snappy reaction. The way he had been set apart as some sort of finicky child, or a freak even, almost brought him to tears. It was the last thing he needed. His friends' bearing was nothing less than a revelation to him. Deep down he wished he could have been like them. As yet he certainly didn't know how to.

THIS BOY'S NAME WAS Dominic Mintoff, then known as Dumink by one and all. The year: 1922. He was spending his first weekend ever away from home, hosted by his mother's very close friend, Margarita Cremona, known as Gita (pronounced *ghee-ta*), on the occasion of one of Valletta's annual parish feasts, that of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Except for the fireworks, little more of the festivities seem to have impressed the boy;³ he knew them well enough from his own far-off district anyway. This experience with Gita's sons, however, was never forgotten. Three-quarters of a century later he could recall it with the same vividness as if it had happened the day before,⁴ and, usually quite reticent about himself,⁵ he went on to narrate it to close friends along the years.⁶ It seems to have made a powerful impression upon his mind and soul. One can perhaps understand *why* if one were to explore the development of the boy's childhood until then and afterwards within the setting of his family and social environment. In so doing, we might be able to get a glimpse into his then-budding personality, one made richer, not poorer, by the limitations and shortcomings encountered all around. A mere chronology of events will not suffice; this would be just scraping the surface of things. What is rather needed is a deeper look—a soul-searching look, so to say—into the hints which the discernible line of events tips off; joining the dots which apparently seem unrelated, and attempt to inspect the pattern that transpires. This is what biography should be all about. In the story we began with, the little boy still had a long way to go before he could overcome his inhibitions, grow out of his shell and begin to make a splash of his own. Yet the perplexing experience seems to have been nonetheless a kind of initiation; it appears to have fostered deeper meanings as time rolled on while ample confusion was trounced, great reserve conquered and miles upon miles traversed.

FOR STARTERS, IT SEEMS to have drawn him closer to the Mandraġġ district in a romantic sort of way. This three-hundred-year old, infamous slum would have put London's East End, so immortalised by Dickens, to shame. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of British scholars called it a 'den, vile beyond belief'.⁷ They went on to describe it as 'a quasi-subterranean district, mostly below sea-level, where the houses are often without windows and conveniences even more important; so that there is an unconscious

grimness in the prophetic humour which has dubbed this quarter of Valletta “the place of cattle”.’ Here were huddled more than 2,500 people in a space no bigger than just a tenth of a square kilometre (one twenty-fifth of a square mile).⁸ Grimy buildings, stacked one on top of another, rose from a pit to two to five storeys high around an impossible maze of dark and grubby passageways, lanes and blind alleys none of them wider than two to three metres (7 to 10 ft.). The social and moral depravity of the place was proverbial as much as dreaded. Years later Mintoff drew upon that notoriety of the Mandraġġ by always referring to it as ‘that filthy place’.⁹ In so doing he could highlight with greater starkness his own contrast with such a blighted background.

Dumink was not from the Mandraġġ. He hailed from the Cottonera district on the southern flank of the Grand Harbour. This district was made up of three overbuilt towns, pretentiously called cities, spread over a footprint of some 30 square kilometres (11 sq. miles) through a labyrinth of narrow pathways, blind alleys and cramped winding streets, many of them steeply stepped from end to end. The towns—called Bormla, Birgu and Isla—were crowded around an inlet with a shipyard at its farthest end belonging to the British Royal Navy. Some thirty thousand people were jam-packed in this district, almost half of them at Bormla alone.¹⁰ The ‘Three Cities’, as they are collectively termed, still stand today, and are alternatively called Cospicua (Bormla), Vittoriosa (Birgu) and Senglea (Isla). The entire territory is hemmed in within an impressive line of fortifications built in the 17th and 18th centuries, known as the Cottonera Lines, which create a distinct sense of enclosure.

Though the Mandraġġ was not Dumink’s territory, in many ways it was very similar to his own hometown slum, and perhaps much worse. It simply loomed as his first outpost; a foretaste of what was beyond the confines of his then small and stifling world. It savoured of freedom even if he certainly knew not how to articulate it at the time. When decades later he discovered Malta’s revered early-20th century social reformer, Manuel Dimech, it was with the Mandraġġ that he closely associated him,¹¹ going as far as to firmly hold, blindly and erroneously, that this free spirit was born and bred there.¹² Blindly because up till then it was still unidentified where exactly in Valletta Dimech had been born,¹³ and erroneously because Mintoff, following some false rumour, assumed that Dimech had been born

at the Mandraġġ. He was not, and had very little to do with it.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Mintoff proclaims in a mawkish romantic vein: ‘Out of the Mandraġġ thorn sprung the loveliest Maltese rose.’¹⁵ The subtext being that the Mandraġġ linked Dimech to Mintoff, and vice versa, in a direct line of symbolic kinship. Simply for this reason, if not for others, while dubiously nominating Dimech as the first Maltese socialist,¹⁶ Mintoff crowned the Mandraġġ as the place that ‘gave birth to Malta’s socialist movement’,¹⁷ a startling claim which can be safely dismissed as tosh.¹⁸ For the bedrock of Malta’s working class, from where, surely, the core of Labour’s support always hailed, was not the Mandraġġ, but Mintoff’s own district, Cottonera, where the greater part of the tens of thousands of dockyard workers and their families toiled and lived. It is surprising that Mintoff felt no compunction in denying Cottonera so splendid a trophy. He knew better. Perhaps when, in his old age, recalling his fascination with the fireworks at that momentous weekend of his childhood, Mintoff confided that ‘to this day the word Mandraġġ evokes [in me] a brightly lit fast-moving ship sputtering little explosions and splashing rays of many-coloured light’,¹⁹ it was the thrill of his childhood epiphany, alight with espied novelty, that the name conjured up.

This effervescent newness was not inconsequential to the boy. Henceforth, ‘breaking loose’, as he had to christen his latent longing many years later,²⁰ became his battle cry for the rest of his boyhood and youth, steadily growing in earnest and defiance as he made more sense of his feelings. What he yearned to break loose of was the fate to which the circumstances of his birth doomed him. It was a fate cast by his hideous Bormla slum, his uncouth Cottonera habits, his low social class, his family’s blinkered if devout Catholicism and, perhaps the most perturbing, his overbearing mother and his relationship with her. Eventually, bolt he did, and the spot where the first spark revealed the route to his exit was never forgotten; indeed, it was fetishized. The Mandraġġ—not the Cottonera district; not Bormla—took the fair face that launched his thousand ships.

BACKYARD BORMLA, DUMINK’S HOMETOWN, was a homely booby trap. Being the hindermost part of the district, its constraint behind the Cottonera Lines created a distinct sense of enclosure. This encirclement is made up of a number of gargantuan bastions, some

rising to some fifty metres (164 ft.), mostly named after Catholic saints. The place where Dumink's family lived was within the confines of one of these outer bulkier constructions, called The Big Bastion of Saint Helen (*Il-Bastjun ta' Santa Liena*) or, for short, simply Bastjun, The Big Bastion, or *Santa Liena*, Saint Helen. The inhabitants there, notorious for their raucousness even by slum standards, were dubbed simply Bastjunajri, the Big-bastion horde. Though in his adulthood Mintoff tended to emphasise the district's wildness to better highlight his initial drawbacks ('Lewdness and obscenities were the seamy component of my Bastjun upbringing'),²¹ as slums go this was a veritable nadir of a place. It was greatly improved following the slum's reconstruction after the Second World War. 'Grimy, vulgar, self-centred,' is how Mintoff would later describe it;²² a place with 'very low standards'.²³ Succinctly put, 'in the Bastjun [...] life was raw'.²⁴

Yet the neighbourhood also had its plus points of course. *Esprit de corps* was one of them, at least in certain circumstances and up to a point. 'The evil undergrowth of jungle-like individualism,' Mintoff would explain, 'sprouted side by side with the delicate yet robust plants of solidarity.'²⁵ Camaraderie, though strong, certainly did not push self-interest aside completely. Bigheartedness too. A vigorous sense of generosity was up and running there, but not so much as to do away with stinginess or even meanness. Though most of the hoi polloi there had 'brains the size of a pin [*size*],' Mintoff would jauntily say in an attempt to dismiss the callousness, they also had 'hearts as big as footballs'.²⁶ Widespread poverty and a shared stake in the Royal Dockyards and the Navy knitted together the big-bastion horde. Their invasive propinquity, however, bred all the depravities and flaws befitting any massive throng of human souls. The morality afforded by their vastly religious, even superstitious, lives was enthrallingly loose, allowing much leeway to better accommodate their foibles and strictures. '[At] the bubbling life of Santa Liena,' Mintoff would concede, 'all the virtues and vices of Bastjun converged.'²⁷ Delightfully outrageous!

Young Dumink, cradled and reared in this environment, took it all in ... and loved it, even to the point of being *proud* of it. 'As a child I was enamoured with life in the slums of Bastjun,' he confessed later, 'and was proud to be one of its many grimy street urchins.'²⁸ That may be understandable when one considers that Mintoff, barely

knowing any better, more or less lived there for the first twenty-three years of his life. However, though its crude traits, among other things, appreciatively moulded much of his personality, they could not be exactly suitable or a great deal gratifying beyond the slum confines. Though Mintoff would candidly avow that ‘I have always been ostentatiously proud of my Bastjun origin’,²⁹ he always felt its sting. The bitter fact was that, despite subsequent sophistication, such protracted acclimatisation could seldom ever be shaken off completely, even if one wanted to. It showed, and Mintoff was agonisingly well aware of it. However much he might have tried, he could never conceal his crude Bastjun heritage for too long before it tenaciously surfaced. Putting it up front in society, even portraying it with ostensible pride, was sometimes his preferred if the unavoidable way of easing its evident repugnance or even forestalling its embarrassment. It was only many years later when his self-confidence could tolerate it, that such pride would be less feigned. Yet by then, the ignominy of it all had lost its damaging encumbrance to his self-image or his professional career.

The issue of Mintoff’s working-class origin was a different matter. Considering ‘the stress I made on my working-class origin and the pride I took in it’,³⁰ as Mintoff would categorically say, one would think twice before contradicting him on this point. The only problem is that, though his family was unquestionably part of the lower-class, it never relied exclusively upon the earnings from wage labour as working-class labourers do. As a matter of fact, none of his closest kinsfolk hailed from the working-class. Some, like his grandparents on both sides, even held land titles.³¹ So much so that, in relative terms, the family was actually better off when compared to the pitiful hand-to-mouth multitude around it, as Mintoff himself sometimes confessed in private conversations.³² Nevertheless, though he had no working-class origin to speak of, he steadily ‘underscored [it] proudly’ whenever he felt like it.³³ He undoubtedly had the first-hand experience of the toils and troubles of working-class people with whom he came in contact every single day throughout his boyhood and youth, even amongst his close friends, but he had personally seldom gone through their privations and stomach-growls in any protracted way. Frequently introducing or presenting himself by ‘divulg[ing] fully my working-class background’,³⁴ Mintoff banked on the aura of deference which the

image of a working-class origin conjured, at least with some people and in certain quarters. That it was not really so did not seem to be too much of a concern.

GITA'S BOYS, WHO SO strikingly impressed young Dumink, were very similar to him in many ways. Yet, it must not have been their low-class status that stupefied him most, nor their non-working-class family, but rather their loose and care-free conduct despite being (as anyone else in the Maltese Islands, after all) practising Catholics. Their practice, indeed, manifestly differed from what he was used to at home as standard and proper Catholic behaviour. 'My home environment,' Mintoff could not help recall, 'was totally conventional and rigidly strait-laced.' Nudity was certainly not part of it. 'These boys,' Mintoff would explain off many years later, 'were not brought up with the fastidious avoidance of exposure of their private parts. They did not have instilled in them by precept and custom [such] prudish self-discipline.'³⁵ And adds rather mildly: 'Unfamiliar with such a prolonged exposure of a fully-developed male figure, I must have blushed.'³⁶

He must have done more than that; perhaps thrusting his first coy kick, with lots to follow (and not so coy), against Catholic 'precept and custom', not to mention prudishness. Down on native soil at Bormla, the Mintoff clan—or rather the Farrugia one, his mother's side—were paragons of the community in this respect. John Mary Farrugia, Dumink's grandfather—known as Paġann by family members,³⁷ and *Ix-Xib* (The Elder) by the rest³⁸—was the barrijo's foremost missionary³⁹ and the one who set the pace in religious matters within the family. This self-made man with a swarthy face was an illiterate burly and gruff six-footer.⁴⁰ In his younger days, he worked as a coal-backer, carrying coal from barges to the coal wagons on his back.⁴¹ After retirement, before Dumink's birth, his wife and he opened a small wine-tavern close to the family's dwelling.⁴² It was a sort of gent's extension of the little grocery run from a home porch by his wife, Mananni, for the entire Bastjun neighbourhood.⁴³ The spacious home⁴⁴ (in Irish Street)⁴⁵ and the small tavern (in Hanover Street)⁴⁶ were within a few metres of each other. More importantly, Paġann was a member of the tertiary confraternity of the Discalced Carmelites at Bormla's Saint Theresa friary.⁴⁷ So was his son, Ġanni, Dumink's uncle.⁴⁸ The confraternity was a lay branch of the friars'

order. Short of religious vows, both father and son were quite fanatical in their pious duties.⁴⁹ With a squint-eyed underling always in tow, appropriately known as 'The Little Lamb (*Harufu*), in or out of his shop Pağann enforced Catholic 'precept and custom' upon the Bastjunajri with inflexible rigour; his family included. Dumink was particularly close to him in boyhood.⁵⁰ Priests or nuns rarely, if ever, ventured into the slum.⁵¹ Every evening, Pağann's daily pastoral works ended with the recitation of the rosary in the street for one and all. Perched on a shallow stool, Pağann's deep and most vigorous baritone voice would be audible from streets away.⁵² 'In this brief half-hour,' Mintoff would flippantly recount decades later, 'the Virgin's rosary drove out all the demons possessing [Bastjun's] pimps, prostitutes, thieves and loafers for the rest of the night and day!'⁵³

Though Pağann's offspring all seemed to be very religious, only some did take to his missionary zeal. Apart from Ġanni, two of them, Karmena and Sunta, took it upon themselves to instil the fear of God in young Dumink. For a time, they made headway. Dumink's mother was of a different ilk. However religious she might have been, she was, like her mother and younger sister Esther, more level-headed. Her religiosity was, as Dumink became convinced afterwards, by sheer dint of her father's fervour; something of a 'spiritual heritage of Pağann',⁵⁴ which was in itself considerable nonetheless.⁵⁵ That of her sisters Karmena and Sunta, on the other hand, oozed with ardour. They were, in Mintoff's later words, 'fanatically religious [and] obsessively churchgoing'.⁵⁶ From among their six children, Pağann and Mananni clearly favoured Karmena and Ġanni for one reason alone, at least according to what Dumink observed: 'their genuine and absolute devotion to the established authority of their parents and their Church.'⁵⁷ For the same reason, they actually disowned their other son, Ġuži (Joe),⁵⁸ and left his later widow and two sons rot in abject poverty.⁵⁹ Not even Sunta, who later even joined a cloistered nunnery in Valletta for life,⁶⁰ carried her parents' partiality; she even disowned Mintoff when a year later he ran into trouble with the Church, charitably informing him that his 'anti-clerical ways were plunging me headlong into hell'.⁶¹ With Grandfather Pağann and Uncle Ġanni, Dumink fell out much earlier, when barely a teenager.⁶² He actually ended up 'despis[ing] them as fanatical hypocrites', and for years did not even speak with

them.⁶³ They reciprocated accordingly, for they considered him ‘a lost sheep’.⁶⁴

Young Dumink’s slow but sure estrangement from the Catholic Church, if not from the Christian faith of his forebears, was not due, as he firmly and categorically averred as a grownup, to ‘[some] rotten way I was treated in my childhood’.⁶⁵ It was rather the Church’s ‘hypocrisy [which] had driven me into spiritual wilderness’.⁶⁶ This ingenious, though heartfelt, vindication perhaps betrays the more sophisticated insights of later times. During Dumink’s boyhood, it might not have sufficed to push Catholic ‘precept and custom’ on to a razor’s edge. What rather seems to have mattered at the time, from a jaunty boy’s perspective, was crudely the overpowering and stifling mindscape they suggested, or even their possibly thwarting effect on so sensitive a temperament as he had. It was at least enough to make the boy flinch.

AS FAR AS IMAGINATION and sensitivity went, matters were not eased by that boy’s relationship with his parents, especially his mother. Maria Concetta née Farrugia, known as Cetta, born in 1892,⁶⁷ was a Bastjunajra through and through by pedigree, breeding and disposition. Notwithstanding the ‘spiritual heritage’ of her father, it was by far to her mother that she mostly took. Both were of pure Cottonera stock. Mananni, the mother, née Burlò, hailed from a well-heeled Isla family.⁶⁸ She was her own woman ‘with a mind of her own’, as Mintoff could not help observing.⁶⁹ Her husband Pağann may have had some sway with the onerous Bastjunajri, but not at home. ‘Though [he was] the terror of the scruffy toughs of our poverty-stricken neighbourhood,’ Mintoff piped off years afterwards, ‘he followed his wife’s discreet [*sic*] lead like a lamb.’⁷⁰ And amusingly adds: ‘When he raised his roaring voice, he made sure that granny was not within earshot.’ This goes a long way toward disclosing her fibre. Mintoff recalled affectionately how his plump grandmother, ‘not more than four feet ten inches [1.5 metres] tall, ruled our roost with the silent authority of a female dinosaur’.⁷¹ None of this was lost on her daughter Cetta, who was almost a split image of her mother both physically and in character. They both had what Mintoff would kindly round off as a ‘commanding personality’.⁷² Perhaps it was precisely this temperament which attracted acquiescent types like Pağann and Wenzu, Dumink’s

father, to their respective wives. There must have been more to it, though. For Mananni and Ćetta, despite being both illiterate,⁷³ seem to have been very matter-of-fact women possessing what Mintoff would tentatively call ‘superior intellectual charms’,⁷⁴ whatever that meant. Apart from the land capital Paġann possessed and steadily negotiated,⁷⁵ it possibly also had something to do with the ingeniousness with which he busily ran both large families while steadily bringing in supplementary income for their families.⁷⁶

For starters, they both kept modest grocery shops at the front rooms of their respective homes,⁷⁷ with Mananni also contributing in money and supplies for the tavern run by her husband.⁷⁸ Ćetta even bought and sold gold at a profit.⁷⁹ But their business ventures went further. They were both money-lenders operating with an interest-rate cheaper than certified pawnbrokers.⁸⁰ Quite a number of better-off women around Cottonera did this if they had the stomach for it.⁸¹ Such activity could not have been licensed since lending on a regular or habitual basis was always strictly regulated and could only be done by a company authorised as a financial institution.⁸² It also must have been done surreptitiously, for Dumink only discovered it in his early adulthood at the onset of his political career. When he did, he appears to have wanted it stopped,⁸³ perhaps because it could damage his political aspirations. He might not have relished the idea that his mother could have been more feared than loved, at least by some who might have been pinched by her credit services when hard-pressed.⁸⁴ These services were also extended to yet another commercial activity she ran, that of buying and selling clothing material at Bormla through dealings with Valletta wholesale merchants.⁸⁵ This business venture was introduced to her by Gita,⁸⁶ her bosom Mandraġġ friend, with whom she also ran this trade.⁸⁷ Ćetta, however, according to what Dumink later ascertained, ‘sold cloth by the yard on the never-never system against the surety of a deposited ring or some other nuptial heirloom’. She even involved her unwitting young son in this by having him carry messages to her customers, ‘exploiting’, Mintoff later recalled tactlessly, ‘my good memory’.⁸⁸

Gita, it seems, was never too far behind Ćetta in those days, physically and in Dumink’s mental scenario. Apart from both having ‘a Jewish-Mediterranean talent for business’,⁸⁹ as Mintoff had reckoned with a dash of racist prejudice, what influenced their

endurable comradeship was possibly the circumstances of their first meeting when Ćetta was going through one of the lowest points of her life. This was in England, at Portsmouth,⁹⁰ in the winter of 1910.⁹¹ Ćetta and her Wenzu had been married for less than a year, since December 1909,⁹² and it seems that she had permitted her new husband, a cook with the Royal Navy, to talk her into having a stab at settling down in England for good. The bid misfired horribly.⁹³ Ćetta had not been there but for a few months when Gita arrived with her brother at Portsmouth to spend a fortnight with her sailor-husband, Ćjambu,⁹⁴ who, incidentally, was Wenzu's kitchen mate and right-hand man.⁹⁵ At the time Wenzu and Ćjambu were onshore between ship engagements.⁹⁶ Gita found Ćetta utterly frustrated,⁹⁷ unable to pick a word of English,⁹⁸ impeded from socialising at all,⁹⁹ and depressed by the perpetual drizzle of the northern climate.¹⁰⁰ Alas, all of this, as Mintoff would gather later, 'paralysed my mother's brain and dried all other sentiment in her heart. It was the main cause that [in England] brought her life to a standstill'.¹⁰¹ There must have been more to this despondency, however. Quite unlike her husband, Ćetta had never left her family—or Cottonera, for that matter, let alone Malta—for any prolonged period of time; the sharp severance must have been too much for her. As her son gathered later, 'she had been struggling unsuccessfully to fight her homesickness'.¹⁰² The only part of this harrowing experience which she recalled with some relish in later years was her thrill of travelling by train through several cities in Italy, visiting the Vatican, and the luxury of sleeping and dining in stylish hotels along the way.¹⁰³

The England debacle ended with Ćetta permanently returning to Malta. Wenzu, for the time being left behind licking his wounds,¹⁰⁴ had to ditch his pipedream of ever getting both of them and their family away from the dreaded slum life. Gita and Ćetta's closeness gathered in strength to such an extent that young Dumink's mind almost merged the two. 'Gita resembled my mother in the warmth of her character, the way she combed her glossy black hair, her Phoenician sturdiness and statuesque poise, the gaiety in her large luminous eyes, and her unalluring yet attractive sexiness of subdued femininity,' he would recall many years later.¹⁰⁵ 'Five years older than my mother, she could have been easily mistaken for her sister. Their aspect differed only in two particulars: whilst Gita flashed large blue eyes against a snow-white complexion, Ćetta's green, almond

[-shaped] eyes shone with brilliance in their tanned setting.’ Years later, in the late nineteen sixties, they passed away almost at the same time,¹⁰⁶ reinforcing in Mintoff’s mind their affinity. Ġjambu, on the other hand, could not have been more unlike Wenzu. He was a slum man; Wenzu was as far from it as far could get. While, like Dumink’s mother, Gita ‘always looked fresh and spotless[ly] clean,’ Mintoff recollected,¹⁰⁷ ‘everything about [Ġjambu] was loud and verging on vulgarity’. Notwithstanding his ‘good nature and noble spirit’, ‘dirt clung to his skin and tiredness to his eyelids’. On retirement from the Royal Navy, ever close to Wenzu and, according to Mintoff, ‘the most dependable in an emergency’,¹⁰⁸ he and his sons opened a bargain-counter diner on the seafront (at Sliema) overlooking Valletta.¹⁰⁹ Those were the same naughty sons who so stood out in Mintoff’s mind, as did their mother and father, permanently associated to those ‘wonderful holidays’,¹¹⁰ as he would describe them decades later, when at the Mandraġġ he took the first timid bite of Eden’s forbidden fruit.

BACK AT BORMLA’S DARK cloistered slum, Ċetta and Wenzu’s marriage was certainly not short of due love and respect.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the couple needed to seriously roll with the punches to make it come through. Theirs was a mismatch which had to it more than caught the eye, and young Dumink bore its grind. To get a more comprehensive idea of the picture we need to get closer to Wenzu’s personality and take some time to understand him better.

Before meeting Ċetta, Wenzu had been braving the high seas with the Royal Navy for some eleven years, since 1898, with almost double still to go.¹¹² Not that he saw much of the sea since he worked below deck in the kitchens, mostly in the rank of Class I Officers’ Cook.¹¹³ He was born at one of Valletta’s sea-shore suburbs, Msida, in 1883.¹¹⁴ His entire family, however, was from Gozo, Malta’s smaller sister-island. Since time immemorial this family’s surname was known in Gozo’s dialect as Mintuf, and spelt this way in all official documents (going back to 1486).¹¹⁵ Most likely this was not a different surname from the Mintoff one but a mere misspelling, as Mintoff too believed, construed by bureaucrats based on pronunciation.¹¹⁶ Others suggest that Mintoff, with roots in classical Arabic, is a mere learned form of the original.¹¹⁷ In local parlance Mintuf suggests plucking (of feathers, hair or a beard),

with possible demeaning innuendoes.¹¹⁸ ‘It was a ridiculous Maltese adjective never applied to human beings,’ Mintoff would carp years later.¹¹⁹ Whatever the case, newspapermen, such as Herbert Ganado, and politicians, like Mabel Strickland, could not resist doing exactly that to taunt Mintoff.¹²⁰ The surname began to be officially modified to its present form two centuries before Mintoff’s birth (around 1719),¹²¹ but was still sporadically used as late as the early 1950s,¹²² particularly in Gozo, when it was then dropped completely.¹²³

Out of all this entire Gozitan family, it was Mintoff’s grandfather, Danjeli, who seems to have first registered *all* of his offspring with the surname’s latter spelling.¹²⁴ Born in a hamlet of Gozo, Għasri,¹²⁵ in 1849,¹²⁶ his parents originally hailed from San Lawrenz, a village close-by.¹²⁷ He married Mary Refalo, known as Mari, in 1867 when only seventeen years of age,¹²⁸ and she a year younger.¹²⁹ She was from Xagħra, one of Gozo’s larger towns.¹³⁰ Though both came from farming families, compared to Danjeli’s hers, known as *Tal-Lagrua*,¹³¹ was wealthier and land-owning.¹³² ‘What Danjeli lacked in family wealth,’ Mintoff had gathered from family lore, ‘he made up in good health, love, and enterprise.’¹³³ The couple first tried to make their living at Għasri.¹³⁴ In the meantime, however, Danjeli tried his luck in Algeria, working in partnership with his wife’s more prosperous relations.¹³⁵ Mari, being quite headstrong,¹³⁶ refused to accompany him.¹³⁷ He travelled to Bona (today’s Annaba), via Sfax, in Tunisia,¹³⁸ for the first time in 1871, just four years into his marriage.¹³⁹ He was of course absent from Malta for months on end,¹⁴⁰ sending hard-earned money to his wife from Algeria to make ends meet,¹⁴¹ and sailing home for a few days every year.¹⁴² In due course his wife packed up her children and left Gozo for good and migrated to Malta,¹⁴³ settling at Msida,¹⁴⁴ and working on a farm which promised better prospects.¹⁴⁵ She was encouraged in doing so by Danjeli’s sister, Ġuditta, who had made the move before her.¹⁴⁶ Mari’s three boys left home pretty quickly. Johnny, her firstborn son, went to Algeria to join his father for good;¹⁴⁷ then her second son, Wiġi (Louis),¹⁴⁸ left to serve with the Royal Navy;¹⁴⁹ finally, her youngest, Wenzu, also took to sea. While their mother was left with two young daughters at home,¹⁵⁰ their father, at one with his son Johnny, ran a farm in Saint Antoine (today’s El Hedaïek), some seven kilometres (four miles) south of Philippeville (today’s Skikda), a town on the Mediterranean coast.¹⁵¹ Eventually, he died there at

seventy years of age in 1919.¹⁵² Given Mari's one-parent family, it is no surprise that she turned out to be a matriarch of a mother within her household.¹⁵³ Known at Msida simply as *L-Ghawdxija* (The Gozitan),¹⁵⁴ she was 'wise and educated',¹⁵⁵ as Mintoff would attest, adding that she had 'a refinement of taste and manners'.¹⁵⁶ A widow for twenty-three years, she ended her days as a WW2 refugee in a small village called Siggiewi at the ripe age of ninety-two.¹⁵⁷

Wenzu ran off to sea at only fifteen years of age in 1898.¹⁵⁸ In collusion with his brother Wigi, he got a working passage as a stowaway on his brother's own boat,¹⁵⁹ which must have been the Eclipse-class protected cruiser H.M.S. *Venus*, on which Wigi was a Class III Domestic up till December 1898 ... his very first assignment in the Royal Navy!¹⁶⁰ Wenzu's flight, it seems, was more of a fluke than any desire to serve Her Majesty. In his boyish way he must have been thrilled to bits about the briny exploits of his father, his brothers and other countless Gozitans. This was an enduring hunch which had to win him much satisfaction ... but also, eventually, when it became frustrated, much chagrin. At first, fresh away from home, the runaway teenager landed up in England as a farm hand at the river-town of Kingston upon Hull, near Grimsby, the seaport in North East Lincolnshire.¹⁶¹ Comprehensibly, this was not what he wanted, and he just bided his time, working hard, brooding over his intent of joining, like his brother, Britain's imperial navy. After a year, in 1899, he could stand it no longer. Helped by the friendships he had forged, off he travelled to the port city of Portsmouth, more than four hundred kilometres (270 miles) south of Hull, to brave the waves.¹⁶² Here, he managed to get employed as a hand on the SS *Rokeby Hall*,¹⁶³ a barque belonging to the Merchant Navy,¹⁶⁴ getting his first whiff of the sea. Small though it was, the sailing vessel stole his heart, becoming everlastingly enshrined in his mind as the ensign of his seafaring. So much so that, somehow acquiring a pretty painting of the sailing boat, it hung proudly at his mother's home forever after.¹⁶⁵ Then came the Royal Navy. He was not of age yet.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, calling himself 'Lorenzo Mifsud', and advancing his date of birth by a year and a few days,¹⁶⁷ probably to elude detection, seventeen-year-old Wenzu joined Her Majesty's service at Portsmouth in the autumn of 1900 as a non-combatant Class III Domestic on H.M.S. *Andromeda*,¹⁶⁸ a huge 16-gun Diadem-class protected cruiser. That set the waves rolling. Like

his brother Wigi—at the time serving on the second-class cruiser H.M.S. *Astræa*—he embarked from the start on a carrier in the naval kitchens, ending up, as Mintoff first described him to his future wife many years later, ‘the best chef in the Mediterranean Navy’.¹⁶⁹ This might deceive us in thinking that Wenzu loved his culinary job. He *loathed* it.¹⁷⁰ His immense passion for the sea was certainly not equalled, perhaps even dampened, with his tie-in to pots and pans, especially in naval kitchens stationed on land. He even went to the extent of portraying himself in the galleys as ‘a respected slave’.¹⁷¹ Years later, despite his entire working life at it, or rather because of it, he adamantly dissuaded his sons from choosing cooking as a profession.¹⁷²

As a matter of fact, unlike his sons Wenzu had little choice in the matter of his employment. He was, after all, an unskilled illiterate with no specialised training to his name.¹⁷³ Back in Gozo as a boy of six after a childhood at Msida,¹⁷⁴ he only attended school for one single day! Having had his surname—Mintuf—read out loudly, he was so ashamed by the hullabaloo the other children stirred that he punched the first who dared tweak at him to drive home the feeling of being plucked. After that he hopped out mad with rage,¹⁷⁵ refusing to ever return again, even when older.¹⁷⁶ Instead, he was chased off to his grandmother’s at Xagħra to be at least useful on the farm,¹⁷⁷ only returning to Għasri four years later, when ten years of age, to be employed as a baker’s street-vendor.¹⁷⁸ Five years later he fled to navigate the world, serving far and wide across the globe. Over a twenty-five year career, between 1900 and 1925—a period which included the latter part of the Boer War, and World War I¹⁷⁹—Number 358912, his official navy roll-call, was employed in at least thirty-one different kitchens distributed among twenty-seven battle-ships and four land naval establishments, including Malta’s massive, 17th-century fort at the tip of Cottonera, called Fort Saint Angelo.¹⁸⁰ In 1921, for his efforts he was awarded four medals which, surprisingly enough, none of his family, including Mintoff, ever made mention of. One of the decorations was the Naval Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (no. 2220).¹⁸¹ The others, with which he received a gratuity,¹⁸² were for his service in the First World War, namely, the 1914-15 Star, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.¹⁸³ These he received together with his brother Wigi and many others.¹⁸⁴

Except when he was stationed at Fort Saint Angelo (referred to by the Navy as H.M.S. *Egmont* between 1912 and 1933),¹⁸⁵ during his workload Wenzu's brief spells at shore in Malta were of course intermittent. All the same, on prolonged leave during his bachelor days he still found quality time for his Xaghra swashbuckling cronies over at Gozo,¹⁸⁶ who together engaged in some risky exploits with the lasses,¹⁸⁷ and meandered about 'to sow their wild oats', as Mintoff daintily put it many years later.¹⁸⁸ On the serious side, out of his savings he had built a modern, two-storeyed, terraced house at Msida for his mother and sister Ġuditta.¹⁸⁹ His 'bachelor exuberances', as his son saw fit to call them afterwards,¹⁹⁰ were all in line with what one would expect from any light-hearted sailor set loose.

All that had to change when he tied the knot. Surely no slum featured in his picture of the future. Ominously, it must have sounded like being trapped. As many a man before and after him, his plan, however improbable it might have been, was that he would have his new wife shape up to his design rather than *he* being cut down to size by circumstances so uncongenial to his character and social environment. His first, and maybe his last, stalwart attempt at this was by trying to implant the seed of his incipient family in British soil as far away from Bormla as expediently possible.¹⁹¹ Even in those early days he knew the Cottonera district quite well. For, when stuck with short overnight leave from his Navy duties down at the harbour, he shared a shack over at Bastjun, which was cheap and conveniently close at hand.¹⁹² That's how he came to meet his Ġetta and, probably through the services of a matchmaker,¹⁹³ as was the custom, take it over from there. Local junior petty officers would have been in all quarters during those colonial days, usually in groups of two or three, jauntily carrying their carefree, tomorrow-never-comes *joie de vivre* around with them ... and, understandably, followed by many fluttering girlish eyes. The twenty-five-year-old Wenzu, with his rolling gait,¹⁹⁴ so dashing in his dark blue frock coat with Navy buttons complete with peaked cap and badge—a uniform he wore on shore, though never in Gozo for sheer discomfiture¹⁹⁵—must have swept the sixteen-year-old Ġetta off her feet. He too was instantly bewitched¹⁹⁶ ... unlike his mother, who took a prompt perspicacious disliking of the lass. The toxic feeling was mutual. Perhaps because both were similarly strong-willed and domineering

women, none of them ever gave each other the time of day, and never did they visit each other's house.¹⁹⁷ Their reciprocated 'permanent antagonism', as Mintoff candidly conceded,¹⁹⁸ might have been one other reason for which young Wenzu was so intent on carrying his darling three thousand kilometres (some 1,900 miles) safely away. Whatever the promptings, while marriage preparations were being made, he was busy orchestrating 'careful and costly arrangements', as his firstborn son later learnt,¹⁹⁹ to pull off the deal. This was not a 'sudden resolve', as Mintoff had decided cursorily.²⁰⁰ Not only was it a decision that, back in 1909, Wenzu would not have taken lightly, but it seems to have been something that gnawed at his vitals. From the onset, by laying a precarious wager to preclude his marriage from 'stamping out all his life's projects', as Mintoff gathered later,²⁰¹ he must have had a hunch of what could be in store for him. Still, throwing his unwary new wife so starkly in at the deep end was probably as daring and august as much as preposterous. As his son could not help notice years later, his father would never fathom why his bid had failed.²⁰²

As a young adult, Dumink came to know his middle-aged father mainly as a composed,²⁰³ laconic,²⁰⁴ reticent²⁰⁵ perfectionist²⁰⁶ with seemingly stoic fortitude.²⁰⁷ However realistic the impression, it was a far cry from the high-spirited, exuberant Wenzu of yore, as even his son suspected while feebly marking it down as a mere upshot of his father's presumed shyness.²⁰⁸ Perhaps it was not that simple. Dumink could evoke a more jovial side of his father's character, like when, as a four-year old child, his father took the entire family for a memorable day's outing at a sandy bay to celebrate his homecoming after a particularly long bout in the Far East. 'My father was fun to be with and dashed hither and thither with me on his shoulders,' Mintoff cheered many years later. 'That holiday gave me a very great pleasure and stuck in my memory as a red-letter day of my childhood.'²⁰⁹ But later on along the line not only were there fewer if any red-letter days when dad was at home on leave, but it seemed that some kind of wearisome humdrum had settled in. Not even gifts from far-off lands seemed to do the trick any more.²¹⁰ He sometimes seemed to be more at his mother's at Msida than at Bormla.²¹¹ To make matter worse, his mother, not his wife, took care of all his laundering,²¹² and he consistently gave his mother money for her upkeep.²¹³ Bit by bit, cracks in the marital bond recognisably

showed up. To begin with, having no friends on shore Wenzu seems to have been always on tenterhooks to get away. ‘He waited and fretted impatiently, longing to be afloat in his kitchen,’ his young son observed sharply.²¹⁴ Then, there was the more serious fact that he had not a hope in hell of being master in his own house. Despite his gallant attempts, he could not but feel degraded by not ‘making any real headway to rule the roost’, as his son aloofly recalled afterwards. ‘In spite of his rowdy disapprovals,’ Mintoff affirmed, ‘*that* was his wife’s prerogative.’²¹⁵ She ‘always had the final say in running [...] the family roost,’ he needlessly adds.²¹⁶ To all intents and purposes, she was the big cheese.²¹⁷ Sometimes, however, the discontent seems to have surfaced more forcefully. ‘Father [used] to belt us when he was around,’ Mintoff recalled tersely many decades later.²¹⁸ On one occasion amongst others, he became ‘explosively disgusted’ with Dumink when but a child for merely biting his nails.²¹⁹ Usually self-possessed and not easily ruffled, it was not unheard-of that, as Dumink knew all too well, ‘father had lost his temper and gone mad with rage’.²²⁰ Wenzu ‘had a strong personality in a quiet way,’ one of his grandchildren recalled fondly. ‘He could be very, very bad tempered. He could lose his temper, but not very frequently. When he did, apparently it was quite something.’²²¹

These storms would seem to have been long in coming, gathered from little bits and pieces of unsolicited mortifications. Perhaps they also were a peep beyond a volcanic neck. Be that as it may, the perceptive young son could not help observing that with his father ‘the *navy* had become his home’,²²² and, more pungently: ‘Alongside all the evidence showing my father to have been a good sailor and a good husband, there is ample proof of his having failed to keep his periods of rest at home in fine tune with his life on board.’²²³ Perhaps, however, it was not simply a question of keeping things in tune. It *might* have been, indeed, had not this lack of adjustment persisted well *after* his sailing days, as did his recurring periods of short spells at home. As it happened, shortly after his retirement from the Royal Navy in 1925,²²⁴ for the next fifteen years or so Wenzu accepted to work as a civilian messman-caterer-cook at a place called Auberge de Castille (*Berġa ta’ Kastilja*) in Valletta.²²⁵ This was an extravagant, mid-18th-century baroque palace which served as the British Naval Wireless and Signal Station (and is today the Office of the Prime Minister). Wenzu worked on the rooftop of this

huge palace together with his staff. An obvious reason for accepting this employment was to incur an extra income to supplement a skimpy pension which never seemed sufficient enough to support a family.²²⁶ The income was actually higher than the pension.²²⁷ There seems, however, to have been also another reason, a tacit one, which might have been weightier than the other one. This is indicated by the fact that Wenzu not only worked at Castille; he actually *resided* there on a permanent basis!²²⁸ He left Bormla and his family and, as if on an improvised basis which became ever more permanent, essentially moved to the Valletta palace. Put in another way, money would not have seemed to be the only consideration made in this opportune arrangement, and perhaps not even the most important one. At Castille, at least, with the British officers addressing him as ‘Chief’, and the local staff as ‘Boss’,²²⁹ Wenzu must have relished the respect he seemed to lack at home. Here he was king of his castle, and nobody’s back-seater. His distance from home was regrettable but endured, more willingly than not, as inevitable. All things considered, like Wenzu’s own boyhood family, Dumink’s too was more or less a one-parent family, as Mintoff never failed to concede.²³⁰ Dumink and his siblings looked up more to grandfather Paġann as their father figure rather than to Wenzu.²³¹

Nonetheless, their father was unquestionably giving his fair share for the family’s upkeep to the best of his abilities. As a Maltese First-Class Petty Officer in the navy, his monthly pay would have been—most absurdly—less than *half* the salary of his British counterpart.²³² Anyway, it was not much; indeed, very little. To supplement this official remuneration with other earnings Wenzu saw it fit to engage himself in ‘additional undertakings’, as Mintoff so deftly called them.²³³ One of these, as messman and head cook, was getting rid of extra kitchen grub. Whenever in Malta, or when working at Castille, Wenzu ‘picked the choicest food and brought it home,’ his son diligently observed while questionably believing that ‘he owned it and could dispose of it at will’.²³⁴ The food included ham, roast beef, cocoa, pudding and what have you.²³⁵ Even clothes came with the clearance.²³⁶ Whatever the case, more seriously he engaged in what his son credited as ‘smuggling’, pure and simple.²³⁷ Wenzu, together with other shipmates, ‘carried out a lucrative trade buying and selling goods in the foreign ports they visited,’ his son discovered.²³⁸ ‘Being the messman he would buy goods in one port and store them

along with the food supplies needed at sea, [having them] sold and collected in the next port they visited.’ For this, in 1914 Wenzu was accosted by Turkish police in Constantinople but he luckily managed to give them the slip.²³⁹ ‘The smuggled articles [could have been] silver, gold, diamonds or some other heavily-taxed luxury’, his son guessed.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he still was unable to shake off completely the suspicion that, as he intimates, ‘drug-trafficking’ could have been involved.²⁴¹ That would have been serious enough. Anyway, all of this came closely before Wenzu’s ‘additional undertaking’ in 1916, in the middle of the First World War, to foolishly invest in pre-revolution Tsarist Russia’s short-term state war bonds.²⁴² This was six years into his marriage, just about when Dumink was due to be born. Charmed by hoopla stories abroad, Wenzu convinced his wife to follow millions in Russia, France and Great Britain, and hundreds in Malta, to capitalise on the supposedly strong Russian rouble which guaranteed a 5½ percent interest rate.²⁴³ The whole thing was a washout. In less than a year the real value of the rouble, together with the war bonds, plummeted to nil, and all of Wenzu and Cetta’s dear savings went down the drain.²⁴⁴ The fiasco, Mintoff unambiguously acknowledged, was ‘mother’s pet lamentation’ forever after,²⁴⁵ apparently qualifying as her most glaring proof of her husband’s ineptitude.

Lamentations and recriminations apart, the marriage never really seemed to be on the rocks, at least not overtly. We should not doubt Mintoff when he assures us that his mother loved her husband ‘with a passion equal to his own’,²⁴⁶ or that ‘their love and devotion for each other were above dispute’.²⁴⁷ In Wenzu’s regular and long absences Cetta never stopped alluding to him,²⁴⁸ frequently reminding her children that in this risky mariner job they ‘have a heroic father’.²⁴⁹ Explicably, however, love and devotion between couples is one thing, fulfilment another. This marriage, indeed, seems to have had a consistent strain on it ... as understandably it would with all those of home-returning husbands who, for months and sometimes years on end, time and time again are away from their families for employment or other reasons. Understandable though alerting. Wenzu’s absenteeism and actual separation, both when on the high seas and when not, could have been a convenient way on his part of avoiding any direct confrontation vis-à-vis his marital relationship, not to mention his personal demons. Considering the

stringent Catholic ethics then in force he really had no other options. A formal divorce was out of the question, and any adulterous accommodation of some sort would have been regarded as highly reprehensible. If these routes were at all possible—which they were not—the ball game might have been totally different. As it stood, short of braving perilous waters, it was much easier and simpler to stay in the dry. Such a state of affairs could not but affect family roles quite deeply through a process which some, borrowing a term from physiology, would call ‘family homeostasis’. This indicates a way by which a family member willingly or unwillingly attunes to preserve some kind of balance within the family structure as when a vacuum is left by an absentee parent.²⁵⁰

Quite distinct of the issue of actual physical distance, there appears to have been more at stake here. As his son detected, Wenzu seems to have been particularly miffed by ‘backward Bastjun society’ as a whole,²⁵¹ by its ‘savage herd’ habits,²⁵² and by ‘Bastjun ignorance’,²⁵³ all of which he could clearly see visited on his wife ... and was not so laconic when chiding her for such attributes.²⁵⁴ However much he must have tried, Wenzu could never seem to adapt himself enough to these Bormla traits,²⁵⁵ or to any form of slum life, at that. Fighting them was like tilting at windmills. More forlornly, they appear to have taken the wind out of his sails. They ‘dampened’ and ‘stamped’ his will to live or at least to be happy, as his son attests;²⁵⁶ who more resignedly bears out that his father succumbed to ‘many defeats when the Bastjun way of life was arraigned against him’.²⁵⁷ Wenzu and Ćetta were, as the child Dumink could barely fail to notice, from ‘opposite poles of civilization’.²⁵⁸ ‘Mother’s tastes,’ he assures us, ‘differed from father’s as fish from fowl’.²⁵⁹ This, sensibly enough, made feathers fly. ‘They quarrelled [...] many times,’ Mintoff informs us without beating around the bush, ‘and my father, always on the losing side, would vent his frustration and anger in rowdy, fulminating, diatribes that hurt both deeply, drove them temporarily apart, and took them days to get over’; and continues: ‘I came to recognize these alarming signs of trenchant discord at an early age.’ Out of Wenzu’s earshot, distressed by his mother’s tears, young Dumink would be consoled by Ćetta with a shot at her husband by a common patronising Maltese idiom, ‘As mute as a socket, he hides his horns in his pocket’, meaning that he might look as gentle as a lamb, all right, but is brutal underneath.²⁶⁰

ĈETTA, LIKE WENZU, WAS all too human. Like all of us, both of them had their personalities fostered and fashioned by circumstances. He the idealist, she the realist, they made choices, risks aside, to the best of their ability and knowledge, very often without—as in the case of any one of us—being able to control most of the given circumstances or tolerably forestalling the adverse effects of their decisions. Young Dumink, insentiently taking in the stark contrast between his hardy mother and his feeble father, backed as she was by his stalwart grandparents Paĝann and Mananni, could hardly start to have a choice as to whom he should be emulating when it came to better adaptability to life in the slums. His mother was tough as old boots. She had made up for her lack of any academic qualifications with her sharp wits and by always being on top of things, as her progeny had to appreciate much later.²⁶¹ She grew into a resilient woman well-adjusted to the Spartan life of her parents and the chancy quagmire of her slum.²⁶² She had had very little proper schooling. Though at the age of five she attended for some time a private Catholic kindergarten run by nuns at Bormla,²⁶³ she seems to have learnt next to nothing, at least as far as literacy goes.²⁶⁴ She was admitted free of charge,²⁶⁵ in exchange for cleaning up the little school premises.²⁶⁶ Till then her father had been an indigent coal-back labourer.²⁶⁷ She probably even had to drop out quite early in order to pull her weight in the family's income, thus being denied any further formal education.²⁶⁸

Amid other odd jobs she might have had, together with her domestic chores,²⁶⁹ Ĉetta worked at home rolling cigars for a Bormla tobacconist.²⁷⁰ When her father picked up in his financial affairs he was loaded enough to be called a businessman.²⁷¹ This was around 1903, when Ĉetta was eleven years of age.²⁷² Her mother opened the grocery shop, soon to be followed by the wine-tavern, and Ĉetta gave a hand in these enterprises together with her elder sister Karmena.²⁷³ From her father and mother Ĉetta learnt the 'inventiveness in facing her family's adversities', as her eldest son observed,²⁷⁴ but also religious to the point of superstition,²⁷⁵ disciplined to the point of autocracy,²⁷⁶ and thrifty to the point of parsimony.²⁷⁷ At home she might have been a box of fluffy ducks, but she also had a temper. '[It was] quick to rise, noisy and fiery,' Dumink knew all too well, 'yet easy come, easy go'.²⁷⁸ Outdoors, everyone recognised her as *Tax-Xib* (The Elder's Girl),²⁷⁹ and she came to

know the neighbourhood and its people like the palm of her hand,²⁸⁰ as her son had to appreciate when in politics years later. ‘I know all the families within a radius of half a mile,’ she always boasted to anyone willing to listen.²⁸¹ Gregarious and ingenious by nature, this was due both to her penchant for milling crowds—a fondness her husband did not share in the least²⁸²—and the requirements of her entrepreneurship.²⁸³ All in all, from a very young age she gathered a rich social capital, an asset her son Dumink admired tremendously, later going to the extent of asserting that she had all the credentials needed to efficaciously run a country.²⁸⁴ She had the backbone of a boss, for sure, coupled with what her son later described as an ‘obstinate determination’.²⁸⁵ She had her powerful eyes—‘her pride and her glory,’ as Mintoff pledged²⁸⁶—with which ‘she looked straight at every mortal however frighteningly powerful’. She also had a distinctive ‘carrying yet mellifluous voice’,²⁸⁷ which her son, kindly identifying it as a ‘strong soprano voice’,²⁸⁸ sometimes decided it was ‘loud yet caressing’.²⁸⁹ These singular gifts matched to perfection her dexterity with people—a tact better than her son Dumink could ever master.²⁹⁰ All of these stood her in good stead. She was a cheerful hard worker, her son assured us,²⁹¹ at one with the people around her ... not excluding, understandably enough, some plebeian affectations, such as her nosiness,²⁹² her susceptibility to gossiping,²⁹³ her fancy for exaggeration,²⁹⁴ her congenial coarseness,²⁹⁵ and her demonstrative sympathy.²⁹⁶

IN HER INEVITABLE DISSONANCE with her husband, conceivably brought on by their inherent incompatibility, Ćetta had Dumink inexorably in *her* corner. This could not but lead to a very complex type of relationship between the child and his parents, especially with his mother. Deep down, as he would grant straight out decades later, to him his father was merely ‘her inconspicuous spouse’.²⁹⁷ *He*, on the other hand, bright as a button, was abundantly conspicuous and doted on by his mother. He was her darling ... and also, we might attentively add, her surrogate partner, and this from a very early age. By then Ćetta already had two girls—Āanna, three years prior to Dumink,²⁹⁸ and Mananni, two years before that²⁹⁹—and would not have another son, Joseph, until two and a half years afterwards.³⁰⁰ By then Dumink would have already begun to play up to his role within the family system. This would not seem to have changed

much when, after Joseph, four other boys and three girls followed in the next fourteen years, two of them, the second and the last, dying in infancy.³⁰¹ None of them, as Mintoff would not fail to notice much later, achieved the same status that he had had.³⁰²

As the hoped-for firstborn son in a household then teeming with women, Dumink was instantly in their limelight. His perspicacity, moreover, apparently shown from a very early age, seems to make him stand out. It also immediately promised a deep contrast with the family's male members, especially his father. This helped in no measure to endear him in a special way to his mother as much as to her whole close family. It was all very natural of course. However, as the child grew older, and his responsive faculties developed, it seems that a reciprocal affective bond set in which assuaged his mother's inescapable isolation. Apparently, what insufficient affection she failed to get from her absent husband she reflexively sought from her son. He must have seemed to respond to her needs, reciprocating them accordingly, better than a husband who was seldom if ever around. Her son Joseph was probably too late in coming, let alone all the other boys, before the deep-seated attachment between mother and son was forged. Dumink, still in his pre-adolescent years, was fully conscious of this, though he could not have taken it for what it was worth; he was too young to understand its full significance, its deeper purpose or even its possible impact on his formation. He might have done so much later as an adult, though forestalling its arcane upshots would eventually prove to be elusive as the chaotic feelings of dependence deepened.³⁰³ All he *could* know at the time was that his mother swathed him with affection, idealised him, confided in him, made him feel special and, for all this, staked out unwavering loyal devotion.

So overwhelming was her fondness of him over her other offspring that, even in those early years, it made him feel uncomfortable as if sensing, in his infantile way, that a boundary had been crossed. Well into his old age Mintoff was outright about it. 'The surfeit of love my mother showed me embarrassed me,' he bluntly recognised.³⁰⁴ It discomfited him, palpably, because, even as a young boy with then limited analytical powers, he seems to have intuitively discerned that it stretched over and above whatever love she unquestionably must have had for his siblings, her parents, her relatives *and*, most disturbingly, her inconspicuous husband. This excess of motherly

affection, initiated surely by her dire want of self-worth, in due course exacted from him a preoccupation with his mother's needs, and compelled him to be protective and concerned in her regard.³⁰⁵ The very thought of her abandoning him, just as he might have felt his father had done, must have sent shockwaves through his psyche. An especially acute illness of his mother when Dumink was a mere toddler might have been one of the earliest of these occasions. 'Among the few really unpleasant recollections of my childhood,' he would gloomily disclose after a lapse of three-quarters of a century, 'is the misery I went through when my mother [...] fell ill and could not look after her tiring toddler.'³⁰⁶ On this particular occasion the dismay might have been more harrowing since the tot was removed to his grandmother's, and saw his mother no more.

Mother's bonding affection, however, also seems to have made him feel emotionally used and entrapped. Though he must have innocently welcomed it, as any child naturally would, he apparently felt it more confining than releasing, more taking than giving, more invasive than rearing. He subconsciously seems to have felt somehow cornered, a feeling so pronounced that it seems to have instilled in him a lifelong fear of being trapped or cornered. Such a fear is technically called cleithrophobia (not to be confused with claustrophobia, the fear of enclosed spaces).³⁰⁷ Later in life this fear revealed itself in a dread, among others, to ride elevators or escalators, excusing himself by stating that climbing stairs was a profitable physical exercise.³⁰⁸ Be that as it may, his cleithrophobia most likely came about since, indeed, the singular mother-son relationship seemed to be less about meeting his needs than hers, dictated, as it appears to have been, by that inexplicable sensation of entrapment shared by all surrogate partners of parents.³⁰⁹ 'All my life,' Mintoff so poignantly professed decades later, 'I have been overwhelmed by a great dread of being isolated, of being hemmed in, of being made to toe the line, of being tied to a single tree – even one of unerring knowledge and wholesome nourishment.'³¹⁰ He could hardly have been clearer. What's more, he also had a name for such a feeling. A 'stifling solicitude,' he carefully called it in his memoirs;³¹¹ and saw fit to be precise about his reaction to it. 'The older I grew,' he explicitly confided, 'the more I shunned [mother's] caresses [...] and ran away from her stifling solicitude.' It must have felt stifling, to be sure, because her solicitude seems to have made

claims too big for a young boy so unbecoming, as anyone always would be, to act out the role of a surrogate husband.

Mother's 'caresses' could not help in such a situation. Of course, caresses come naturally to every caring parent, and are important for children's feeling of tenderness and affection. Such feelings, it has been proposed many a time since by Freud, from their very nature are sensual nonetheless. For young Dumink to feel the need to 'shun' them might suggest that in his case they could have been overstated. On a subliminal level, without knowing why, the young lad felt uncomfortable with them, as when Gita, the Mandragg bosom friend, back in 1922 mimicked Cetta's affection by giving five-year-old Dumink, as he himself recalled decades later, a 'sweet but embarrassingly long embrace'.³¹² Such displays of overstated caresses certainly could not have implied any overt erotic pats—such a thing would be preposterous to insinuate—but they rather might have reinforced a mother-son relationship which apparently was proving to have become too chummy for the child's ease. Their suggestiveness might be perhaps glimpsed if one recalls how Dumink, evoking the experience with those Mandragg boys whom he viewed through rose-tinted glasses, seems to have eyed his own mother in 'her unalluring yet attractive sexiness of subdued femininity'.³¹³

People close enough could see that there patently was too intimate and singular a bond between Cetta and Dumink,³¹⁴ one that seemed to overstep a mere mother-son relationship.³¹⁵ Nevertheless, such bystanders never appeared to be able to put their finger on it. Someone nearer, a younger brother by fifteen years, came closer to the mark. He could not help observing that, in the absence of their father—when at sea as when not—their mother endorsed the eldest brother Dumink as 'the man of the house', and had him exert parental authority together with her.³¹⁶ This surrogacy could seldom have been his place in the family system, let alone at his young age. It bestowed upon him, puzzlingly enough, a role which encroached upon his boyhood, even if it did naturally give him pleasure in believing that he was special.

She, on her part, never seems to have stopped driving the point home. He was her out-and-out pride. Starting off with his girlish 'long curls' in infancy³¹⁷—which grandfather Pagann hated so much³¹⁸—mother Cetta gushed over her son's envisaged brightness,³¹⁹

and his extreme luck,³²⁰ often harping to him: ‘You are the luckiest of my children’,³²¹ whatever that was supposed to mean. Perhaps he should have felt lucky since it was to him, as the presumed man of the house, that his mother seems to have turned to confide in and share her concerns. This led to ‘important chats’ with her son, as Mintoff himself informs us; without, however, divulging what was so important about them. They might have been conversations about family matters, one could guess; perhaps even about father. Whatever the case, these mother and son *tête-à-têtes* became a recurring practice forever after.³²² Although Dumink confided in her in a way he could never have done with his father, at least not till much later,³²³ the chats could not have been but asymmetrical, particularly when Dumink was too young to contribute significantly; all he could vouch for was that, as he attested much later, ‘I always believed what mother said implicitly’.³²⁴ Without doubt, he trusted her wholly. Could he have done otherwise?

Made to feel special or even unique by the one most important person in this family system seems to have given the young Dumink a notion of being set apart for special treatment or consideration, especially since his grannies, aunts and elder sisters seemed to have followed Cetta’s suit in doting on him.³²⁵ All, significantly enough, *except* his father. ‘He avoided fuss,’ his firstborn son impassively recalled about his father’s affection, ‘especially the parental type’.³²⁶ Anyway, there seems to have been plenty of it around to suffice for a lifetime. So much, indeed, that it appears to have instilled in the young lad a sense of self-worth, coupled with a penchant to charm people. This might have possibly verged on narcissism.³²⁷ What mainly seems to have led on to such self-centredness appears to have been the belief, certainly not baseless, that his intellectual abilities placed him in the catbird seat. His mother, for one, was ‘totally convinced of my scholastic aptitude’, Mintoff agreeably disclosed later;³²⁸ and adds that she drew tremendous pleasure from being ‘complimented and flattered by her betters’ for her prodigious offspring. Of course, quite understandably, she did not keep her persuasion to herself. ‘It was my mother’s weak habit at the slightest provocation (when out of my presence),’ Mintoff remembered well, ‘to brag about my scholastic achievements’,³²⁹ telling one and all how smart her ‘intelligent son’ was. This rubbed off. Many decades later Mintoff was still smug about ‘the ease with which I grasped the

difference between letter a and b without having to repeat the vowels a hundred times after the patient teacher'.³³⁰ This was in prep school. Later his self-admiration seems to have swelled when he realised, as he vainly informs us, 'the ease with which I passed exams'.³³¹ How he stood tall amongst the horde of Bastjun illiterates! He basked in 'outwardly suppressed pride', he unabashedly informs us.³³² 'The greater the precaution I took to allow no outward manifestation of this selfish conceit,' he adds gleefully, 'the more potent was the flattering aura of distinction that radiated from my presence.'³³³ The young lad seemed to be happy with the role he was given to play at home. The only problem was that he was not seen as a distinct person with separate desires, needs, likings and sentiments. He performed as was expected of him.

Living up to the demands the status quo made upon his affections, he reciprocated his mother's solicitude effusively,³³⁴ endorsing a bond which seemed natural as much as indispensable. The common intent appeared to be pure and simple survival—for both of them—against life's threat of loneliness and unhappiness. He might have had this too in mind when decades later he mused philosophically: 'When two or more persons feel indissolubly bound together by a common purpose or destiny, mutual confidence removes the artificial gloss, and mutual consent achieves the same transparency wrought by nature's cataclysms.'³³⁵ Mutual confidence and tacit consent sealed Dumink's possibility of a timely getaway from the stifling solicitude which he instinctively felt he should run away from. For the appropriate boundaries between a mother and a son were certainly not any 'artificial gloss' which could be removed without harm. 'His mother,' Dumink's own daughter would be able to vouch almost a century later, 'had a particularly special place in [my father's] heart; he was always mentioning her, always bringing her to mind.'³³⁶ And not without cause, for he could not but acknowledge that she had infallibly always been there for him heart and soul, especially when, as during his childhood illnesses, he needed her most ('The sweetest, tenderest, and [most] fearless nurse one could ever dream of!').³³⁷ She was for him 'the best [mother] there ever was',³³⁸ and her motherly presence was always made known in his life.

Nevertheless, the 'solicitude and caress', as Mintoff had to call the profuse attention,³³⁹ also felt somehow icky, requiring—when he found some will to kick back—all the mental strength he

could muster to slacken the smothering. Perhaps it should come as unsurprising that, when decades later he might have obliquely touched upon this, the dark image of prey and predator came to mind: ‘To the little creatures destined for survival but lacking size, the experience and the external resources of their predators,’ he wrote, ‘the gods gave swift intellectual reactions together with an intrepid spirit of endurance and self-reliance.’³⁴⁰ The image is certainly one of a trapped animal in frantic flight absorbed in breaking loose. The fact that Mintoff believed this to be, as he called it, ‘nature’s law of compensation’³⁴¹—one he would see at work in other ambits quite distinct from his boyhood experience—must have tendered little respite to such a ‘little creature’ on the run.

His boyhood solution, apparently, was to be of two minds at once, however strenuous that could have been: one which pleased; the other being as the other pleased. ‘[A] spiritual euphoria [...] lifted my entire being into another world where peace and bliss stunned all senses,’ Mintoff discloses quite expressively.³⁴² ‘Time stopped, and a benevolent Almighty took over all present cares and future worries. It was, no doubt,’ he highlights, ‘a reflection of the godly side of my dual personality which was temporarily winning the battle raging inside me against the social forces whipped up by hard and complex realities.’ Perhaps this sounds too heavy coming from a mere adolescent. However, even if taken with a pinch of salt, it definitely expresses the afflicting hauls within a mind which has been hindered from being itself, a mind which seems to be more at home in a fantasy world than in the mundane exigencies of the real world. The octogenarian Mintoff was quite frank about this. ‘From early childhood to my teens,’ he affirms, ‘I suffered from a fixation that the world around me was a figment of my imagination, like props in a theatre. It would dissolve into thin air the moment I moved to another locality – a world of make-believe, entirely of my own making.’³⁴³ The props kept going the act of his ‘parentification’, as it might be called, props that were intuitively and progressively assembled and set up by the accrual of that information which was necessary to pull off the deal. They were *props* nonetheless; illusory and belying. And their price was high indeed, for they seem to have encroached upon the lad’s due development and growth. His father, even if somewhat from afar—perhaps unsurprisingly; though, without doubt, inadvertently—hit the nail on the head. ‘It seems that

storing knowledge and entertaining beautiful dreams,' he had told his teenage son, 'come easier to you than the acquisition of maturity and wisdom.'³⁴⁴ Both might not have divined how true these words must have been. They might have even perplexed the young son; he could have seen them ill-advised. Decades later, when his father was ages dead, he surely was wiser, for he somehow acknowledged such a view, though guardedly: 'I cannot deny,' he unburdened, 'having always—more pronouncedly and more often in early life and after middle age—given in to contradictory pulls resulting, not in a double life, but rather in a single personality enriched or spoilt by a mix-up of attitudes, feelings, and pursuits.'³⁴⁵

Whatever part Ćetta could have played in all of this was almost certainly not intentional at all. It was indeed no fault of hers, at least not directly, that she happened to have an inconspicuous husband, that her affective needs were not met or that she automatically turned to her firstborn son for emotional support and relief. Neither was it Wenzu's fault that a life at sea gave him an incurable appetite for autonomy, that he felt estranged from Bormla's inhibiting environment or that he consistently avoided facing head-on his thorny marriage by forsaking his elder son to an over-assertive wife. Such matters are seldom decided consciously or are planned ahead. They are part of the stuff of life as it comes. Nevertheless, no one can go through them turning up smelling of roses. What's more, they come to bear on everyone within the household, especially in a close-knit family system like Dumink's. Their full brunt, however, seems to have been taken mostly by the firstborn son. First off, he was consumed with 'great shame', so he confesses,³⁴⁶ whenever he ever dared neglect giving his mother the attention, the time or the loyalty he felt duty-bound to provide. It was sometimes an ignominy so intense that not even four score years could assuage it, forcing Mintoff, while recalling it, to own up—in the present tense—that 'shame [still] swells in my soul'.³⁴⁷ Indeed, it must have never ever been enough, young as he was and unequipped in any affective way, to live up to this onerous expectation of himself. This overpowering sense of guilt and shame came with a battery of worries which, he admits, 'I was too frightened to share with anybody'.³⁴⁸ The worst part, perhaps, was when these 'long-suppressed worries', as he calls them, unexpectedly flared up in paroxysms of vehement, sometimes vicious, uncontrollable anger. 'These violent fits,'

Mintoff wearily concedes, ‘broke out irrepressibly against my will.’³⁴⁹ Indeed, they plagued him—and those around him—throughout his entire life.³⁵⁰ Even so, what might be the most surprising is that he never seems to have fathomed the actual source or nature of these ‘volcanic eruptions’, as he so pungently calls them.³⁵¹ For even as an octogenarian—let alone in his boyhood—he persisted in calling them ‘stupid outbursts’ (emphasis added),³⁵² evidently not realising in the least their reflexive character as a much-needed discharge of pent-up anger brought about by his crushing sense of guilt and shame in his corner as surrogate husband. This self-reproach got to the extreme point of actually making him feel anomalous, for, as he moaned years later, he possessed a ‘guilty feeling of being abnormal’³⁵³ And what was so stupefying to him he hardly ever chose to talk about, confessing that ‘I have been very reserved about my upbringing and its concomitant passions and phobias, and avoided the subject [most] carefully’.³⁵⁴

Had these cravings and dreads anything to do with his mother? One might safely assume that they had. A brother of his, younger by ten years but the closest to him among his siblings over a span of some seventy years, authoritatively assures us that Dumink *feared* his mother, in boyhood as in adulthood.³⁵⁵ What he appears to have feared most about her, especially when considering the prolonged time-span of such dread, seems to have been letting her down; not living up to her high expectations of him in his tough role of surrogate partner. Perhaps he also feared her temper which, like his, could well have been the outcome of repressed anger, but which blew up whenever disappointment or dissatisfaction happened to befall. Much was expected of him, and he, to retain his special status and be compliant with his mother’s wishes and sensibilities, put himself out for her. If she needed him to be strong, he must have felt that he had to be stronger than the one for whom he was a stand-in. For this reason, not less to shield him from the Bastjun ruggedness, she made it her resolute task to bring about, against any weakness of character, ‘the early steeling of my young soul’, as he put it years later.³⁵⁶ Whenever any feebleness unwittingly showed up, however, which seems to have been quite often, ‘I let [my mother] give me hell without remonstrance,’ he sheepishly informs us;³⁵⁷ regretfully adding that her chiding came with many a ‘cutting remark’. This would only have deepened the boy’s guilt-feeling and

shame for having performed beneath the mark, even if we are only left to imagine what these hurtful put-downs could have been. What we can be sure of is that repeatedly they came with a thrashing, which seem to have been intended to drive the point home. He in fact assures us of his boyhood certainty that ‘a big hiding awaited me’ whenever he proved to be intractable.³⁵⁸ At such moments, he unburdens, ‘my legs burned with physical hurt’.³⁵⁹ These hidings could be quite severe. Once, ‘[my mother] spanked me until I winced with pain,’ Mintoff recalled desolately after decades, ‘and she only realised how hard she went at it when my legs burnt her palm!’³⁶⁰ On another occasion among many others, he ‘was given a robust smacking which bruised the skin of my legs,’ he informs us. Whatever for? Just for being found guilty of a ‘sad dereliction of duty’.³⁶¹

On her part Cetta decided that her son’s insubordination was due to his ‘wild streak’, or so she called it.³⁶² Whatever she understood by this remains a mystery. Perhaps she had her brother Ġuži in mind, or even her husband’s father, Danjeli, both of whom had cut loose from their family to brave the world; or even her own husband—who can tell?—with his stowaway boyhood and bachelor exuberances. Whatever the case, to her it seems to have been clear enough to explain why, as Mintoff himself informs us, it ‘made him disappear from her sight for several hours at a time and landed him in the midst of the toughest street urchins’.³⁶³ Never in a million years could she have figured out that such meandering away from her side and against her express orders might have been the only way the boy could live his life as he wished without stifling impositions which should not have been his lot. These could have possibly been his inarticulate version of a distress signal. For neither were they a figment of the imagination nor props in a theatre. They were the son being a boy, not a parent or a husband. Nevertheless, ‘my mother always lamented [that] I courted trouble wherever I went’, the grown-up boy enlightens us.³⁶⁴ It must have never occurred to her of course that, in his boyish way, for him stirring things up was part of his survival craft with which he could retain his sanity. Evidently, this was a conundrum to the boy himself who felt guiltier and guiltier each time he worried his mother by letting her down while, in the meantime, becoming more and more dependent on her needs and emotions. The feeling must have been quite intense and

lasting. For the very first sentence that came to his mind when, some seventy years later, he sat down to write his memoirs was a sharp rebuke from her for being insubordinate: ‘You are turning my hair grey!’³⁶⁵ and ruefully proceeds: ‘I can hear my fiery mother scream as if it were only yesterday. “You are always in trouble, drawn to it like a moth to a fire”.’ These opening lines, significantly enough, set the pace for the entire account of his reminiscences.

What his mother seems to have failed to notice with equal perceptiveness, or appraised enough perhaps, was the boy’s compulsive shyness. This could be noticed only at close quarters. Mintoff himself never tires of mentioning it in his memoirs,³⁶⁶ and one of his daughters could warrant with assurance that he was ‘*incredibly* shy’.³⁶⁷ While Cetta does not seem to have been at all shy, Wenzu was the opposite in this respect,³⁶⁸ though possibly for reasons different from those of his son. Though Mintoff sometimes dismissed his shyness as being something merely ‘natural’,³⁶⁹ or even ‘innate’,³⁷⁰ it can be attested that it could not have been so. Shyness is contingent to the sense of self which only begins to be evidenced in humans at approximately eighteen months of age.³⁷¹ This proves that shyness is a social trait connected to self-consciousness, self-evaluation and self-preoccupation. More accurately, its developmental root is clearly a *fear* connected to the affirmation of the self or the lack of it. This, from so early an age, is intimately linked to maternal behaviour and sensitivity.³⁷² In Dumink’s case, there can be no doubt whatsoever that his mother was fully responsive to her child; even over-responsive, for that matter. However, her involuntary though persistent intrusion upon her boy’s private boundary by parentifying him might well have seriously undermined his autonomy, self-efficacy and self-regulatory skills. Much later, it could also have contributed to emotional attachments which, due to their insecurity, were not conducive to forming strong relationships. In other words, to all appearances Mintoff’s shyness was not shyness at all; it was mistaken for subliminal fear.

Strangers, for instance, *petrified* Dumink both when young as in adulthood. Onlookers accustomed to seeing him in the midst of thronging crowds might be surprised by this. However, its intensity cannot be brushed away as mere shyness. It seems to have been much more deep-seated than that. Representing ‘the other’, strangers can trigger off one’s avoidance mechanisms for whoever

might seem menacing. In children who were consistently made to play the role of surrogate partners, the approach of strangers would intuitively call to mind the unasked for incursions of the intrusive parent. Subliminally, this would be menacing enough. So much so that strangers would starkly represent the conflicting advances of the parent, and thus prompt the fear associated with the invasion. In such manner, though an adult, whenever the affected person perceives the possibility that his or her intimacy could be breached again, the terrifying recollection of what had been instinctively experienced as a child is again evoked, and this kicks in the fear. Time and time again in his memoirs Mintoff refers to this onrushing fear when coming face to face with strangers,³⁷³ even with friends of friends.³⁷⁴ The fear actually kept him back from speaking with them,³⁷⁵ particularly in his younger days when he longed to approach the ‘lasses’, as he called the girls.³⁷⁶ Dancing, especially, was anathema to him; the physical closeness it suggested induced in him ‘a great fear [which] kept me rooted to my spot’.³⁷⁷ This simply could not possibly be his way of socialising. ‘I feel very ashamed to confess,’ he openly conceded, ‘that I have always felt too shy to join persons of my age and clan in their dancing.’³⁷⁸ But years later this was equally true of dancing with his own wife. His elder daughter was dead sure that she never once saw her parents dancing; her father always claimed to be too shy to do so.³⁷⁹ ‘My psychological impediment,’ he confessed with reference to his dancing-fear ‘was mightier.’³⁸⁰ It might seem clear here that, as he appears to have done since childhood, Mintoff was unusually worried about the effect he had on other people. Perhaps evoking his fixation with props in a theatre, he too was as if an actor, always giving a performance, thinking of how to please rather than being simply himself. Odd as this might seem, Mintoff acknowledged that he always had ‘the lurking impression in my subconscious of the embarrassment and awkwardness [of] my shyness with strangers’.³⁸¹ He was of course well aware of this xenophobia, and frankly admitted its grip on him.³⁸² It was painful nonetheless. One episode in the summer of 1972 might be particularly indicative. While holidaying in Cyprus with family Mintoff desired to go down from the hotel to a crowded beach which was new to him. When his son-in-law, Bernard McKenna, was asked to go with him the latter thought nothing of it. However, on approaching the beach, he was surprised to discover that his

father-in-law was gripped with veritable terror, almost wanting to actually grasp his arm, until his alarm subsided.³⁸³ Acquaintance of course did the trick. Thus what initially looked strange and alien somehow acquired some kind of assurance that it is not foreboding. In such manner the form or pattern of the unaccustomed and unrecognisable surroundings are acknowledged as safe and reliable. This happened often with Mintoff when, on many occasions, some kind of familiarity set in with a person who would otherwise be seen as chancy.³⁸⁴ At times, however, Mintoff overcame his initial fear of strangers by sheer recklessness,³⁸⁵ which seems to have been rare enough, or alcohol,³⁸⁶ which was rarer. In adulthood he surely considered it a most unhelpful ‘disability’,³⁸⁷ alternatively calling it ‘clumsiness’,³⁸⁸ ‘boorishness’,³⁸⁹ or outright ‘stupid’.³⁹⁰ Nevertheless, when he had become an established public figure, Mintoff avoided social gatherings as much as possible, masking his ingrained xenophobia by feigning that he did not like them. ‘I am immune to the pull of social gatherings,’ he nonchalantly stated,³⁹¹ claiming that such convivial occasions were ‘a social exercise for which I nurtured from childhood a boorish dislike’.³⁹²

The aversion, which had to become well known simply as one of his eccentricities, could have indeed been nurtured from childhood, but it was possibly something more than plain dislike. What is sure is that, when he came to a time that he could allow the amenity of not attending social get-togethers, it saved him a lot of time and, simultaneously, kept to a minimum his public appearances, inducing the public to hanker for his rare presence. Mintoff sometimes also extended his dodging to official, public events, persisting in his pretext that ‘formal social gatherings jarred with my taste’;³⁹³ additionally giving an ideological twist to his deficiency, stating that ‘I have always felt a strong aversion for hothouse pleasures which divorced the merits of high art from the warm embrace of the common people’.³⁹⁴ All of this rings as untrue even if convenient, for at other moments he candidly conceded that it was his ‘shyness’, and nothing else, which was the culprit for his repulsion of socials.³⁹⁵ And rightly so. People around him witnessed him many a time becoming visibly nervous and irate whenever crowds of strangers pressed on him.³⁹⁶

From his mother, terse as this might seem, Mintoff merely claimed that ‘I learnt two secrets: to court smiles, laughter and merriment

as God's herald on earth of the mythical joys in his everlasting paradise; and to apply myself to hard physical and mental exertions as a means of softening and overcoming life's stunning blows and great sorrows'.³⁹⁷ The rest, it seems, was better left unsaid.

DOMINIC, CONCEPTUS, JOHN, JOSEPH Mintoff was born on Sunday, 6 August 1916.³⁹⁸ Since the middle ages this day was earmarked by the Catholic Church and various other Christian communities to celebrate the solemnity of Jesus' transfiguration on Mount Tabor, a feast commonly known in the Maltese Islands simply as *Is-Salvatur* (the Saviour). Many years later some overzealous political fans saw in this coincidence a sign of fate.³⁹⁹ Back in the days of the child's birth, however, another type of partisanship was at work: the religious type so common here and there in the Maltese Islands until this very day. Cottonera's Three Cities were rife with it. Each faction fanatically rooted its own patron saint. While both at Isla and at Bormla the people separately championed Jesus' mother in their own way, at Birgu two parties had formed, one supporting the parish patron, Saint Lawrence, a 3rd-century martyr, and a faction backing Saint Dominic, a 13th-century contemporary of Saint Francis of Assisi. As avid rivals of both the parishes of Isla and Birgu, most of the Bormla parishioners—Ċetta not excluded—sided with Saint Dominic's faction. As it happened, her child was delivered on a date very dear to this party,⁴⁰⁰ which made it almost compelling to name the child after the saint.⁴⁰¹ It's obvious that Saint Lawrence, though her husband's namesake, did not turn Ċetta's crank.⁴⁰² It might be that, religious as ever, she had also made a vow with Saint Dominic for a safe delivery.⁴⁰³ Whatever the case, sticking to Bormla's and his mother's partiality, the child grew fond of his patron saint and his followers, the Dominicans. Back in the middle ages these had formed the Order of Preachers, and were in part responsible for the Inquisition. 'I did find consolation in learning,' Mintoff had to disclose, 'that my mother Ċetta [...] had given me a name that was also associated with virtuous, exceptionally brave men who have ennobled the past perhaps as much as it was soiled by the Inquisition's scoundrels.'⁴⁰⁴

Whatever this was intended to mean, the association does not seem to have been consoling as much as Mintoff wanted us to believe; for in his mature days he was wont to say that he was not of

the doctrinal, intellectual ‘Dominican’ type but rather felt himself to be a simpler, more humane ‘Franciscan’ sort of man.⁴⁰⁵ As Mintoff wrote in his memoirs, though he esteemed Saint Dominic for being a ‘preacher-reformer’,⁴⁰⁶ even if one with a ‘narrow [...] Christian outlook’, he admired Saint Francis more, for, as Mintoff approves, he ‘healed the ailing spirit by speaking to the heart. His simple poems,’ he recognises, ‘are more moving than eloquent sermons, his loving care [...] more healing than the physician’s ointment, and his love overflows the boundaries of life, [...] embrac[ing] the universe’.⁴⁰⁷ The two saints might possibly suggest two impulses which appealed to Mintoff in different ways: the Dominican one evoked his rational, self-controlled, individualised nature elicited by his status at home since childhood; the Franciscan one charmed his instinctual, spontaneous, existential nature which fought to survive parentification. No wonder, perhaps, it was to the latter that he felt more spontaneously attracted to despite the preponderance of the former.

Thirty-two-year-old Wenzu was at sea when his firstborn son came into the world.⁴⁰⁸ The time was not very propitious, as Mintoff had to facetiously concede many years later.⁴⁰⁹ Of course, the First World War was then in full rage, having begun two years before, and still had another two to go. Though its battles were being fought far away from Malta’s shores,⁴¹⁰ the tens of thousands of ill or wounded soldiers brought over to Malta for treatment won her the epithet ‘nurse of the Mediterranean’.⁴¹¹ Around Dumink’s birth, the epic naval battle of Jutland off Denmark had recently ended (1 June 1916), and Wenzu was part of it. He was employed on the submarine depot ship H.M.S. *Titania*,⁴¹² he and his mates catering for some 250 men on board.⁴¹³ Elsewhere in that hot August, the British were fighting to pre-emptively occupy the Sultanate of Darfur and annex it to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the initial phase of the notorious Battle of the Somme in France had begun, and the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo in north-eastern Italy was in full course. Wenzu could not get back to Malta until his son was over a year of age,⁴¹⁴ though he was understandably informed of his son’s birth by telegram.⁴¹⁵ When he finally disembarked, he preferred to call his son with a Gozitan dialectic twist which sounded different from how his wife had named him,⁴¹⁶ changing Dumink to Dumenk.⁴¹⁷ Still, it also seems that he had a secret name for the babe, Ġannmenk,⁴¹⁸ one

he kept to himself until he divulged it only to his boy in his teenage years.⁴¹⁹ Mintoff later claimed that these private names were ‘a reminder to all that he and I had [Gozitan] blood in our veins’.⁴²⁰ Anyway, by having his own clandestine name for the boy Wenzu might have felt to have scored a small victory over his wife, though a victory nonetheless.

Dumink was born at his grandparents’ house (in Irish Street) which they had inherited.⁴²¹ Twenty-three-year-old Ċetta had temporarily moved there to deliver the child with her mother’s assistance,⁴²² though the delivery seems to have been a difficult one and a doctor had to be urgently called.⁴²³ At the time the child’s parents resided just some forty-five metres (150 ft.) away down a stepped street (Saint Mark).⁴²⁴ Their house was owned by Ċetta’s parents,⁴²⁵ and was preciously positioned around a public fountain from which much-needed water was drawn by everyone around.⁴²⁶ Ċetta took up residence here with the blessing of her parents the moment she returned from England in 1911,⁴²⁷ and Wenzu seems to have had to be stuck with it. Before going to England, the newly married couple stayed at granny’s.⁴²⁸ The place in Saint Mark Street was a ‘poor and shabby’ house,’ Mintoff gathered years later, with a suffocating ‘high-walled yard’.⁴²⁹ Worse still, the superstitious Ċetta unequivocally believed the place to be haunted by a Turk or some other kind of dark-skinned infidel.⁴³⁰

The infant was baptised the day after his birth, on Monday, 7 August 1916, at Bormla’s parish church,⁴³¹ just a few streets away from where he was born. For the third time running, the godparents were Ċetta’s parents,⁴³² her husband’s mother being consistently eliminated from the equation completely. In the days following the delivery the child contracted double pneumonia,⁴³³ and the grandmother, who, like many a housewife, dabbled in home-made cures, promptly applied a sweltering poultice.⁴³⁴ Though it might have rid the child of the infection, it permanently left an ugly creased and pocked scar on the right-hand side of his chest.⁴³⁵ While Mother was deeply sorry for the blotch on her golden boy, he was for ever ashamed of it and made his best to always hide it from view.⁴³⁶ To him it could have seemed to be a glaring sign of a sore moment when the vulnerable child was left unprotected by its mother. The blemish appeared to speak more of *her* than of him, visibly stating that his mother’s perceived perfection and all-round

security, at least where he was concerned, had its dire limitations. More than ashamed of the scar itself, deep down he could have been troubled by it constantly and unavoidably reminding him of having shamefully found fault with his idealised mother.

Despite the dreaded spectre spooking around the house, Dumink's family lived in the house in Saint Mark Street for some seven years, leaving in 1919 when the boy was two years old. Of this residence he had no recollection whatsoever.⁴³⁷ He had of the next, which was not very far away (in Alexandra Street),⁴³⁸ where the family stayed for some four years, leaving in 1923.⁴³⁹ Most probably, with their growing family, Dumink's parents made the move in order to escape the dilapidation of their former residence. It must have become too inhibiting. The new house they took was rented to them by a British financial institution operating in Valletta, most probably the Anglo-Egyptian Bank.⁴⁴⁰ Though not more than a hundred metres (300 ft.) away from granny's command centre—enough not to make Ċetta get *too* homesick—the residence was sufficiently removed, uphill and round a corner, as to be somewhat out of slum territory, just so on the fringe of Bastjun. The street was a quiet, outlying thoroughfare twice as wide as the one they had before, with no people tripping over each other or milling around, unencumbered by street-steps, clear of drying linen hanging from every window and balcony, freed of screeching and squealing, possibly cleaner, and communally up a notch.⁴⁴¹ The new residence itself, occupying the first floor of a two-storey building, and having its own access from the street, was considerably larger than the one before, airier, and in almost open space.⁴⁴² To Wenzu, who was now nearing his age of retirement from the Navy, this must have seemed like heaven, peeved as he was by Bastjun's nefariousness. His firstborn son enjoyed it too. It was here, out of the deep slumland, that he had his first experiences of outdoor conviviality, likening it, whimsically enough, to a 'first bite at the forbidden fruit of conquered freedom'.⁴⁴³

It must have been thrilling for him to get out of the house and play about with peers. He had now just reached an age when he could do so. In addition to the slum-dwellers down the road where his granny lived, these childhood jaunts brought him in contact with people who were not part of that blighted area. The street was occupied only by British families of the civilian contingent who, living in new houses built by a local bank, supervised Maltese workers

at the Naval Dockyard.⁴⁴⁴ The Mintoffs were the only family there with both Maltese parents.⁴⁴⁵ Little Dumink, just four to six years of age, played with these families' children in the street,⁴⁴⁶ and was treated by some British couples like a son of their own.⁴⁴⁷ Though he then knew no English,⁴⁴⁸ he seems to have got on fairly well, learning quickly the rough and tumble of other boys, and standing up for himself.⁴⁴⁹ In the process he discovered, as he affectionately recalled many years later, 'the bittersweet taste of self-reliance'.⁴⁵⁰ And there was also a further buzz in the bargain. Yonder beyond the family houses there loomed above the whole street a huge military garrison area, enclosed within high bastions of its own, The Verdala Barracks, popularly known as *Il-Kastell* (The Castle).⁴⁵¹ Here hundreds of prisoners from territories of the Central Powers were kept during and after the First World War.⁴⁵² No one came in direct contact with them, of course, but sometimes their indistinct hubbub and occasional hollering would be heard over the walls. All of this undoubtedly widened Dumink's social consciousness, especially through his contact with British nationals, children and adults alike, residing and fraternising at Verdala. He would never forget them. They must have formed in his mind enduring impressions of British civility and sociability, very unlike what he was used to up till then in the slum, which never seem to have abandoned him. Years later, he recalled these early social impressions with indebtedness, insisting that they gave him a sense of equality ('racial superiority was contrived by man-made machinations')⁴⁵³ and an appreciation of personal identity ('[every person's] talents and innate resources [...] add up to a more or less equal sum').⁴⁵⁴ All in all, the relatively short spell out of Bastjun's clutches remained for him till old age 'by and large a joyful experience'.⁴⁵⁵

When the Mintoffs moved again—Dumink now being six years of age⁴⁵⁶—it was back down into the hotbed of Bastjun's slum (lower Eagle Street).⁴⁵⁷ Exactly why the family had to make this move is not known with certainty. However, it probably had something to do with the rent, at least in part. By 1923, in fact, when the move was made, expenses increased as the number of the family's children grew to six.⁴⁵⁸ Conveniently enough, the new house came free of charge since it was passed on to the Mintoffs by Ċetta's ever-present parents.⁴⁵⁹ Nevertheless, there must have been more in the bargain. Perhaps, at an outlying place such as Verdala, the gregarious and

business-minded Cetta felt too disconnected from her customers, and needed to have her finger closer to the pulse of her client base. It also might have been too quiet for her liking. She was more in her element back in the slum even if this meant that the family had to forgo most of Verdala's amenities.

To begin with, the rooms of the new small abode to which they relocated were few and tiny, and the house lacked sufficient air and light.⁴⁶⁰ Just to eat together the family had to sit 'huddled in rows of two' on the steps of the stone staircase, since, as Mintoff could not forget many years later, 'the well-scrubbed stairs offered the only free and clean space for us to sit and dine'.⁴⁶¹ The whole family slept in a single room.⁴⁶² There was barely room for anything else except the absolute necessary. Young Dumink himself, then still beginning his academic path, had nowhere to complete his homework or to read. He was pushed out almost on the sidewalk. 'I laid claim,' as he merrily recalled in his old age, 'to part-ownership of the front-door sill that served as my writing desk'.⁴⁶³ There, among the street's racket, he seems to have sharpened his concentration skills since he had to pay no heed whatsoever to anything and everyone in order to focus on his tasks. Intently perched on the doorsill, he recalled many years later, he spent his study-time in 'total detachment from my surroundings'.⁴⁶⁴ Nevertheless, this was far from ideal for a budding academic. However much it honed his intellectual powers, it also got him into the bad habit of a wrong writing position which, evident in his calligraphy, could never be shaken off in later years.⁴⁶⁵

The new surroundings fared none better. Now the family was back to a stone-stepped street.⁴⁶⁶ The general environment around the residence was once more that of typical slum squalor teeming with 'uncouth dwellers', as Mintoff remembered all too well years later.⁴⁶⁷ Recalling the herds of goats moving through the narrow streets, Mintoff could not but evoke how soiled and stinking the place was with 'many puddles of urine and beady droppings by visiting goats serving Bastjun twice daily with fresh milk'.⁴⁶⁸ The place was also routinely swarmed with people since it was a stone's throw away from a heaving little plaza which led to one of Cottonera's main hindmost porticos. This was *Il-Mina ta' Santa Liëna* (Saint Helen's Gate), the very core of Bastjun's notorious slum, where the loudest rumpus, the grimmest filth, and lewdest seediness, flocked to play on common ground. Most evidently, the difference from the Mintoffs'

prior residence was striking. Wenzu must have been appalled ... while his wife was as happy as a sand boy. The contrast seems to have daunted young Dumink quite intensely, for, shortly after this sweeping move occurred, he vented his first real act of rebellion. This was his way of beckoning his SOS alert to break loose.

¹Dom Mintoff, *Mintoff, Malta, Mediterra: My Youth*, ed. by Daniel Mainwaring, Book Distributors Ltd., Malta, 2018 (henceforth: *Abridged Memoirs* or *Abr. Mem.*; the original version being referred to as *Original Memoirs* or *Orig. Mem.*; see note 604 on page 616 below).

²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 54.

³*Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 53f.

⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14). The late Mr. Aquilina, born in Tripoli on 25 July 1920, was Mintoff's cousin once removed; he was interviewed various times by the author in 2014 (thanks to Ray Mangion).

⁷T.G. Bonney, E.A.R., et al. (1907), *The Mediterranean: Its Storied Cities and Venerable Ruins*, James Pott & Company, New York City, United States, p. 275.

⁸*Ibid.*: 'two-and-a-half' acres in area, peopled by 2,544.

⁹Martin Zammit to the author (02/11/15); 'Dak iż-żgħir' in Maltese.

¹⁰1911 Census, *Blue Books: 1916-17*, Government Printing Office, Malta, 1918, p. L2.

¹¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 58–102, *passim*.

¹²See: *Ibid.*, p. 58; and *Orig. Mem.*, f. 385, para. 4.

¹³This was uncovered in 2004. See: Mark Montebello (2013), *Dimech*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1, Miller Distributors, Malta (1st ed., Publishers Enterprises Group, Malta, 2004), p. 43.

¹⁴See Mark Montebello (2018), "No Manderaggio thorn", *The Times of Malta*, Malta, 23 November; and Henry Frendo (2018), "Dimech and Mintoff", *ibid.*, 6 December.

¹⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 63. Since this part of the *Orig. Mem.* (from f. 311, para. 2, till f. 349, para. 1) was accorded a chapter on its own in the *Abr. Mem.* (pp. 58–102), the designated Title of this chapter is taken from this quote, "The Mandraġġ thorn" (p. 57), supposedly referring to Dimech, is a misnomer since the 'thorn' mentioned by Mintoff in the quote does not refer to Dimech but to the unpleasantness of the Mandraġġ.

¹⁶See: Dom Mintoff (1961), *Priests and Politics in Malta*, Malta Labour

Party, Malta, p. 2. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 73, 93; and: Francis Degiorgio (1977), *Il-Thet Soġjalisti Maltin: Manuel Dimech – Pawlu Boffa – Dom Mintoff* [The Three Maltese Socialists: Manuel Dimech, Paul Boffa, Dom Mintoff], Union Press, Marsa. See also: Marengo, "Towards a new beginning", *Sunday Times of Malta*, 1 June 1980, p. 19.

¹⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 76.

¹⁸For Dimech's place in Malta's power-struggles, see: Dominic Fenech (2005), *Responsibility and Power in Inter-War Malta*, Book 1, Endemic Democracy (1919–1930), Publishers Enterprises Group, Malta, pp. 16, 29f., 84, 85, 110.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 529 (concluding chapter title).

²¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 417, para. 8.

²²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 45.

²³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 419, para. 3.

²⁴*Ibid.*, f. 538, para. 7.

²⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 135.

²⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 774, para. 3.

²⁷*Abr. Mem.*, pp. 134f.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 297.

²⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 427, para. 6; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 137.

³⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 434.

³¹LRM, 1897/597, 1900/1211, 1902/2489, 1906/1508, 1909/2273, 1909/2552, 1909/2852, 1910/3006, 1911/826, 1911/1620, 1912/712, 1912/808, 1912/1715, 1913/870, 1913/1142, 1913/1224, 1913/1608, 1914/1309, 1916/620, 1918/1770, 1921/1343, 1921/1696, 1921/1697, 1921/1783, 1922/2445, 1923/1485, 1925/1430, and 1928/2762 (for Giovanni Maria Farrugia, son of Giovanni, born at Bormla); and 1896/688 (for 'Daniele Mintuf [Mintoff], son of Luigi, born at Xaghra).

³²Maria Camilleri to the author (21/07/14).

³³*Abr. Mem.*, p. 459. See also: Joseph Pirota, ELM, p. 465.

³⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 795, para. 11.

³⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 54.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷See: *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 8, para. 6. For the swarthy face, see: *Ibid.*, f. 280,

para. 6.

⁴¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 18, 45, 115, 166; also: LRM, 1882/1439, 1900/1211, 1902/2489. Though Mintoff refers to his grandfather as a 'coal-heaver', this must be a misnomer, for this term usually refers to labourers who unload coalmine carts on the surface, where here no mines are involved.

⁴²See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 132, 134.

⁴³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 5; *Abr. Mem.*, p. 20.

⁴⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 104.

⁴⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 8; f. 407, para. 6; f. 409, para. 8.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, f. 420, para. 1; at the top end of Eagle Street (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 134).

⁴⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 241.

⁴⁸See: *Ibid.*

⁴⁹See: *Ibid.*

⁵⁰Yana Bland, ELM, p. 109.

⁵¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 21.

⁵²See: *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 54.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁵Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 386.

⁵⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 155f.

⁵⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 360, para. 4.

⁵⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 115.

⁵⁹See: *Ibid.*, pp. 115f.

⁶⁰See: *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 17.

⁶²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 612, para. 5.

⁶³*Abr. Mem.*, p. 214.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁷On Tuesday, 17 May. She was baptised the day after, having Margarita Mifsud, the widow of Luke, from Bormla, as godparent (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, Baptismal Registers, Vol. 19, Part 2, f. 342r, where her mother's surname was first registered as Bilon, then corrected to Burlò).

⁶⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 166.

⁶⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 14.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³On Mananni's illiteracy: *Ibid.*, p. 128; on Cetta's: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 467, para. 7; f. 494, para. 3.

⁷⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 19.

⁷⁵LRM, 1897/597, 1900/1211, 1902/2489, 1906/1508, 1909/2273,

- 1909/2552, 1909/2852, 1910/3006, 1911/826, 1911/1620, 1912/712, 1912/808, 1912/1715, 1913/870, 1913/1142, 1913/1224, 1913/1608, 1914/1309, 1916/620, 1918/1770, 1921/1343, 1921/1696, 1921/1697, 1921/1783, 1922/2445, 1923/1485, 1925/1430, and 1928/2762.
- ⁷⁶On Gita's income, see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 154; also: Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 386.
- ⁷⁷On Mananni's shop, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 417, para. 7; *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 17, 128f.; on Ċetta's shop, see: *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- ⁷⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 20.
- ⁷⁹Mary Grech to the author (09/09/11).
- ⁸⁰On Mananni's pawn brokerage, see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 20; on Ċetta's: Martin Zammit, ELM, p. 276, and Raymond Mintoff, *Ibid.*, p. 387; on that of both Mananni and Ċetta, see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 154.
- ⁸¹Simon Mercieca, BSM, p. 63.
- ⁸²Keith Zahra, Manager of the Communications Unit at the Malta Financial Services Authority (MFSA), to the author by email (27/10/16).
- ⁸³Julia Busuttill née Dougall to the author (26/07/14).
- ⁸⁴Lawrence Ancilleri to the author (11/10/16).
- ⁸⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 52.
- ⁸⁶See: *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁷See: *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 154.
- ⁸⁸*Org. Mem.*, f. 416, para. 8.
- ⁸⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 50.
- ⁹⁰See: *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 56.
- ⁹¹NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 1.
- ⁹²On Tuesday, 7 December (the vigil of the parish feast). BPA, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 14, f. 307. This was the only marriage ever held at the Bormla parish in which the groom's surname was Mintoff. The marriage was officiated by the Deputy Parish Priest, Canon Joseph Azzopardi. The witnesses were Joseph Ebejer (son of Felix) and Vincenza Barbara (daughter of the late Joseph).
- ⁹³See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 14; also: Dionysius Mintoff to the author (22/06/15).
- ⁹⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 50.
- ⁹⁵See: *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁶See: *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁷See: *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ⁹⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ⁹⁹See: *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁰See: *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 306, para. 11.
- ¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ¹⁰³See: *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 405.
- ¹⁰⁴See: *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ¹⁰⁵*Orig. Mem.*, f. 307, para. 2; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 50.
- ¹⁰⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 832, para. 5.
- ¹⁰⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 50.
- ¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁹See: *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 363.
- ¹¹¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 45; also Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 60.
- ¹¹²NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheets 1 & 2.
- ¹¹³*Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴On Monday, 21 May. The official names bestowed were Frederick and Lawrence (in this order). The christening was administered by a Franciscan Capuchin, Rev. Ambrosius, by delegation. The baptism was held the day following the child's birth, i.e., 22 May 1883. At the time, the child's parents lived at *Via Pietatis* (Sorrows Street; today Pietà-Guardamangia). The godparents were Tony Pace and Vincenza Mifsud. According to a marginal note in the register, since the parents' names were recorded as *Danièle et Maria* [née] Mifsud, on 31 August 1911, a decree was issued from the Archbishop's Curia to change the names to *Danièle Mintoff et Maria* [née] Refalo (Msida Parish Archives, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 1, f. 188r, No. 1501). See also: *Orig. Mem.*, 249.
- ¹¹⁵Godfrey Wettinger (1968), "The distribution of surnames in Malta in 1419 and the 1480s", *Journal of Maltese Studies*, University of Malta, Malta, No. 5, 25–48, where it is pointed out that, while no Mintuf is represented in the *Militia List* of 1419/20 nor in the *Angara Roster* of the 1480s, a certain Bertus Mintuf existed at Gozo in 1486. Apart from this, it seems that the earliest occurrence in local official documents goes back to 1561 (NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 20, f. 264), where we encounter the record of the marriage of Michael Mintuf and Vincenza née Muctara at the Cathedral church, Victoria, Gozo, on 21 September of that year. This corresponds to the record held at the AAS (*Matrimonii Originali Della Chiesa Matrice e Cattedrale Del Gozo*, f. 110v), which additionally specifies that the bride was the natural and legitimate daughter of Nicholas Muctara. Stanley Fiorini's earliest mention of the Mintuf family is from 1574 ("The 1551 Siege of Gozo and the repopulation of the island", *The Registrum Fundationum Beneficiorum Insulae Gaudisii 1435-1545, Documentary Sources of Maltese History*, Part 5, No. 1, *Documents in the Curia of the Archbishop of Malta*, ed. by Stanley Fiorini, Malta University Press, Malta, 2006, p. 6).
- ¹¹⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 398, para. 5.
- ¹¹⁷Mario Cassar (2003), *The Surnames of the Maltese Islands*, Book Distributors Ltd, Malta, 2003, pp. 250-251.
- ¹¹⁸As in the proverb *Il-far iż-żgħir isibni miġġub*; the rat whose hair has been plucked (pulled out) is chary; meaning: Once bitten, twice shy (see: J. Cassar-Pullicino (1967), "Ethno-linguistic aspects of animals in Malta", *Journal of Maltese Studies*, University of Malta, Malta, No. 4, 1–68, p. 35; see also: p. 22). Also as in the expression *'idġiet mintufin'*; plucked/jerky ideas (see: Herbert Ganado, editorial, *Lehen is-Senwa*, 11 January 1939, p. 4, col. A–B). Ganado also uses the verb *mintuf* (see: *Ibid.*, col. B) to mean tousled or tangled, as when someone plucks his/her own hair and ends up a mess ("cattolicu mintuf", a plucked/tousled Catholic; "socialista mintuf", a plucked/tousled socialist).
- ¹¹⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 29.
- ¹²⁰Ganado was the editor of the Catholic newspaper *Lehen is-Senwa*, see: editorial, "*Idġiet mintufin'*" (plucked ideas), 11 January 1939, p. 4, col. A–C. Mabel Strickland was one of Mintoff's early political opponents; see: Mabel Strickland address, PMA, Debates, Parliament 1, Sitting 11, 1 September 1962.
- ¹²¹The first registration with the surname Mintoff was the baptism of a John Mary, son of Lawrence Mintuf and Catherine née Gauci, held at the Cathedral church, Victoria, Gozo, on 17 September 1719 (NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 8, f. 32r).
- ¹²²Għarb Parish Archives, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 7, f. 233, No. 467, registering the baptism of a Carmelo Mintuf, son of Joseph and Dolores née Caruana, on 5 May 1952 (the day after the child's birth), at the parish church of Għarb. The infant's sister, Mary Dolores, born on 8 November 1964, and baptised two days later at the Cathedral Church in Victoria, Gozo, was registered as Mintoff, not Mintuf (Għasri Parish Archives, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 7, f. 362, nru.725).
- ¹²³As an indication of the change of the surname's form in a single lifetime, consider the case of one Saviour, born at Għasri on 6 July 1924, of Louis and Salvina née Zammit. At his baptism the day after his birth, he had the surname Mintuf (Għasri Parish Archives, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 1, No. 28. See also: NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 10, f. 344v), but then, at his marriage (to Rose née Zammit) twenty-seven years later, held at the same Għasri parish church on 2 September 1951, he was registered as Mintoff, not Mintuf (*Ibid.*, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 1, No. 78).
- ¹²⁴See: NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 10, f. 34r. On the Mintoffs' genealogy in general: Tony Calleja to the author (23/06/17).
- ¹²⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 238, para. 8.
- ¹²⁶On Sunday, 11 February, the same day of the child's birth. The child was christened Daniel, Angelo, Tony. Its godparents were Tony Grech (son of Michael) and Angela (daughter of Michael Teuma), and officiated by the Archpriest Michael Buttigieg (Saint George's Parish Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 10, f. 77. See also: NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 8, f. 34v).
- ¹²⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 5; f. 398, para. 5. Since both San Lawrenz and Għasri were not established as parishes when Danjeli was born in 1849, this is the most likely reason why he was baptised at Victoria, Gozo's main town. San Lawrenz became a parish on 15 March 1893, and Għasri on 16 December 1921.
- ¹²⁸At the Cathedral church, Victoria, Gozo, on Saturday, 15 June. The witnesses were Francis Farrugia (son of the late Fortunato) and Felix Caruana (son of the late Tony). The vows were officiated, and the subsequent mass said, by

- the Deputy Parish Priest Mons. Francis Mercieca. (Cathedral Parish Archives, Gozo, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 4 [unnumbered folios]. See also: NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 16, f. 142r–143v).
- ¹²⁹Born at Xaghra on 4 November. The child's parents were John Dominic (k.a. Ganndumink) Refalo and Catherine née Bartolo. The godparents were Felix Caruana of Zebbug, Gozo, and Rose née Farrugia of Victoria, Gozo (*filia in capillis*; an adopted girl) (Xaghra Parish Archives, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 5, f. 99r). The child was named Mary after her parents had two other similarly named girls who had died in infancy, one born on 12 May 1844, and baptised the day after (*Ibid.*, f. 67v) and the other on 3 September 1845, and also baptised the day after (*Ibid.*, f. 73r). The first one died a month after her birth, on 15 June 1844 (*Ibid.*, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 4, unnumbered folios); the second one on 26 October 1845, at seven weeks of age (*Ibid.*). The bride's parents, John Dominic and Catherine (Wenzu Mintoff's maternal grandparents), married at the Xaghra parish church on 23 February 1841 (*Ibid.*, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 2, f. 103v). While Catherine was the daughter of Saviour Bartolo and Angela née Borg, John Dominic was the son of Joseph Refalo and Oratia née Cefai, all from Xaghra, Gozo. The witnesses at their marriage were Michael Xerri (son of Joseph) and Angela Sultana (daughter of Saviour). Though the marriage was officiated by the Parish Priest, Mons. Michael Francis Buttigieg, the subsequent mass was said (with the Parish Priest's permission) by Rev. Lawrence Rapa.
- ¹³⁰Xaghra Parish Archives, Gozo, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 2, f. 103v.
- ¹³¹Peppi Attard to the author (15/08/16).
- ¹³²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 5.
- ¹³³*Ibid.*, f. 301, para. 5.
- ¹³⁴They lived in Wilga Street; Tony Calleja to the author (23/06/17).
- ¹³⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 27.
- ¹³⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 5.
- ¹³⁷Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).
- ¹³⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 27.
- ¹³⁹NAM, MFA 01/8020/71. His passport was issued on 28 April 1871, just three months after the birth of his second child.
- ¹⁴⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 27.
- ¹⁴¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ¹⁴²See: *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- ¹⁴³Though it cannot be ascertained with certainty, the family must have migrated around 1880/82, certainly after 17 August 1880, when their daughter Carmen, Judith, Victoria, Mary Joseph was born. The girl was baptised the day after at the Cathedral parish church by the Deputy Parish Priest, Mons. Fortunato Calleja, with godparents Joseph Xicluna, son of George, and Victoria Borg, wife of Tony (Cathedral Parish Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 12, f. 56).
- ¹⁴⁴This must have been before 21 May 1883, when Wenzu Mintoff was born and baptised at the Msida parish church.
- ¹⁴⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁴⁶Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14). Carmela, Judith, Victoria, Mary Josephine (k.a. Guditta) was born on 17 August 1880 and baptised the day after by the Deputy Parish Priest, Mons. Fortunato Calleja, with godparents Joseph Xicluna, son of George, and Victoria Borg, wife of Tony (Saint George's Parish Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, XII, f. 56).
- ¹⁴⁷Maybe around 1887, when he was around sixteen years of age. Johnny (John, Tony, Joseph) was born at Ghasri on Friday, 27 January 1871, and baptised on the same day by the Deputy Parish Priest, Mons. Felix Refalo, with godparents Felix Caruana, son of the late Tony, and Rosina Farrugia, wife of Joseph (Saint George's Parish Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, XI, f. 384).
- ¹⁴⁸Joseph, Louis, Francis (k.a. Wigg), was born on Thursday, 3 September 1874, and baptised the day after by the Parish Priest, Mons. Paul Bilocca, with godparents Francis Cefai, son of the late Joseph, and Mary Gambin, the daughter of Louis (Saint George's Parish Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, XI, f. 549). He joined the Royal Navy at the age of 24 in 1898. He served as cook, rising to the rank of Class I Officers' Cook. He retired in 1922 (NAE, ADM 188/540/356512 and 3565123). Living at Msida, he died at 66 years of age on 5 January 1941, at the King George Hospital, Floriana, at 7.50 PM, and buried the next day at the Addolorata Cemetery, Paola, in lot No. 30, East Section (Msida Parish Archives, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 5, No. 7132).
- ¹⁴⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 28.
- ¹⁵⁰Apart from Guditta, the other was Mary, Olympia, Rose, Vicenza, born on Sunday, 27 September 1868, and baptised on the same day by the Deputy Parish Priest, Mons. Carmelo Sultana, with godparents Vicenza Bondi, daughter of the late public notary Joseph, and Rose Farrugia, daughter of the late Paul (Saint George's Parish Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, XI, f. 294). See also: NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 8, f. 34r, where it is stated that the girl is known as Censa.
- ¹⁵¹For first-hand accounts of Maltese and Gozitan emigrants in Tunisia, see: Gużé Cutayar (2009), *Sibajjilni Multi ta' Gwenna* [I felt like a Maltese native], Malta University Press, Malta, pp. 109–116.
- ¹⁵²According to the Généalogie Algériec Maroc Tunisie, G.A.M.T., who helped me locate this information, he was buried (*inhume*) on Monday, 27 January 1919, in the (currently derelict) Philippville Christian Cemetery, at lot 126f, tomb 953. No further information on this point is available. Perhaps we can assume that he died the day before or, at most, maybe on the preceding Saturday. The farm at Philippville is mentioned in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 232. Also, on Danjeli's death at Philippville: Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).
- ¹⁵³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 6.
- ¹⁵⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 26.
- ¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁵⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 6.
- ¹⁵⁷She died by natural causes at 6.30 AM on 28 March 1942 at No. 50, Saint Margaret Street, Siggiewi, and was buried at the Addolorata Cemetery, Paola, in lot No. 21 of Section B (Siggiewi Parish Archives, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 10, f. 288). The place where Mari resided seems to have been left uninhabited after her death (see: *Ibid.*, *Status Animarum: 1944–50*, f. 119). No other Mintoffs ever died in this village before or after her. Thanks to David Lanfranco who helped me locate the date of death.
- ¹⁵⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 30.
- ¹⁵⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 30. Also: Yana Bland to the author (18/03/14).
- ¹⁶⁰NAE, ADM 188/544/356512.
- ¹⁶¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 30. Also: Yana Bland to the author (18/03/14).
- ¹⁶²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 30.
- ¹⁶³See: *Ibid.*, p. 43. The vessel's official number was 47542. Not to be confused with the Cargo Ship of the same name (no. 79390) which ran aground and was wrecked at Conil Reef, near Cadiz, Spain, in 1888, or with the Screw Steamer, also of the same name (no. 112405), which ran aground and was wrecked at Woolstack Point, Skomer near Milford Haven, Wales, in 1929.
- ¹⁶⁴NAE, Belfast Telegraph/110/69/80.
- ¹⁶⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 302f., para. 7f.
- ¹⁶⁶Subsequently, he always seems to have held that he was, even to his son. See, for example: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 30.
- ¹⁶⁷The stated date of birth is 10 May 1882 (instead of 21 May 1883). NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 1.
- ¹⁶⁸NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 1.
- ¹⁶⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 619, para. 7; also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 28.
- ¹⁷⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 33.
- ¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ¹⁷²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 619, para. 9; and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 215, 249.
- ¹⁷³On Wenzu's illiteracy, see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 3, 28, 65, 231, 245.
- ¹⁷⁴See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 570, para. 3.
- ¹⁷⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁷⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 243, para. 3.
- ¹⁷⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁷⁸See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 243, para. 3; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁷⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 32, 396, 493.
- ¹⁸⁰The vessels were: (1) H.M.S. *Andromeda*, (2) H.M.S. *Dolphin I* (?), (3) H.M.S. *Russell*, (4) H.M.S. *Montagu*, (5) H.M.S. *Victory I*, (6) H.M.S. *Hindustan*, (7) H.M.S.

Gladiator, (8) H.M.S. *Britannia*, (9) H.M.S. *Crescent* (4 times), (10) H.M.S. *New Zealand*, (11) H.M.S. *Terrible*, (12) H.M.S. *Victory* (twice), (13) H.M.S. *Niobe*, (14) H.M.S. *Argyll*, (15) H.M.S. *Commonwealth* (twice), (16) H.M.S. *Euryalus*, (17) H.M.S. *Gibraltar*, (18) H.M.S. *Indefatigable*, (19) H.M.S. *Esmonth*, (20) H.M.S. *Antrim*, (21) H.M.S. *Titania* (twice), (22) H.M.S. *Lord Nelson*, (23) H.M.S. *Queen*, (24) H.M.S. *Partridge II*, (25) H.M.S. *Princess Ena*, (26) H.M.S. *Pegasus* (twice), and (27) H.M.S. *Eagle*. The land establishments were: (1) H.M.S. *Royal Arthur* – the Petty Officers' training school at Butlins Skegness, later Corsham, Wiltshire, England (twice), (2) H.M.S. *Vivid* – the naval base at Devonport, Plymouth, Devon, England, (3) H.M.S. *Egmont* – the naval base Fort Saint Angelo in Malta (five times), and (4) H.M.S. *Tamar* – the base operating at two locations in Hong Kong (NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheets 1 & 2).

¹⁸¹NAE, ADM 171/140, listed as 'Mintuff I[orenzo] O[fficers'] C[oo]k k 1'; the medal was issued on 14 July 1921, following (*ibid.*, ADM 188/544/358912, sheets 1, *infra*) the 'Traced Medal' verification, which was concluded the previous 25 May.

¹⁸²NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheets 1, *infra*), No. 252 on the H.M.S. *Egmont* list.

¹⁸³NAE, ADM 171/140, listed as 'Mintuff Lorenzo', an 'O[fficer's] C[andidate] C[ook]' serving at H.M.S. *Egmont* (Fort Saint Angelo, Malta).

¹⁸⁴NAE, ADM 171/140, listed as 'Luigi Mintuff', No. 356512, an 'O[fficer's] C[andidate] 1', at the time serving on the C-Class light cruiser H.M.S. *Cordelia*.

¹⁸⁵The Navy's practice of renaming vessels can be very confusing at times, as in the case of H.M.S. *Egmont*. There were several ships successively named *Egmont*, the last being H.M.S. *Achilles*, an armoured frigate laid down in 1861, floated out in 1863 and completed in 1864. In 1901 she was sent to Malta as a depot ship, releasing her name for a new armoured cruiser, and thus named *Hibernia* in 1902. She was then named *Egmont* in 1904, and remained in Malta until 1914. But her role in Malta was assumed by the stone frigate Fort Saint Angelo, which from 1912 until 1979 served as the headquarters of the British Navy's Mediterranean Fleet, first as H.M.S. *Egmont* and then, from 1933, as H.M.S. *Saint Angelo* (Abigail Blasi, *Malta & Gozo*, The Lonely Planet, 6th ed., Melbourne, Australia, 2016, p. 61). Meanwhile, in 1914 the original *Egmont* (ex-*Achilles*) was taken to Chatham, and served there as a depot ship under the successive names of *Egmont* (1916) and *Pembroke* (1919); cf. Paul H. Silverstone, *Directory of the World's Capital Ships*, Hippocrene Books, New York, USA, 1984, p. 207).

She was sold for scrap in 1923 (cf. Admiral G.A. Ballard, *The Black Battlefleet*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1980).

¹⁸⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁷See: *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁹At 45 Church Street. See: *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁹⁰*Orig. Mem.*, f. 359, para. 9.

¹⁹¹The exact dates of Cetta's departure and return to Malta cannot be ascertained with precision, one reason being that, since she was a Navy seaman's wife, it seems that it was not requested of her to procure an official passport to travel on the Navy's own vessels (Joseph Amodio, Assistant Archivist at NAM, to the author; 27/02/17). From what can be reckoned from scant official records, her total stay in England can possibly be estimated to have been for some ten to thirteen months, starting around mid-December 1909 till around mid-February 1910. This is what can be ascertained: Wenzu embarked on H.M.S. *Argyll* from Portsmouth on 18 January 1909, exactly six weeks after getting married (NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 1; also for similar subsequent details).

It must have been during that five-week period, between the second week of December 1909 and the second week of January 1910, that the couple travelled—first overland through Italy and (probably) France, then by boat from Calais—to England and settle down at Portsmouth. At that time, the *Argyll*, a Devonshire-class armoured cruiser, was, from 1909 to 1911, transferred to the 5th Cruiser Squadron of the Atlantic Fleet (cf. Robert Gardiner & Randal Gray, eds., Conway's *All the World's Fighting Ships: 1906–1921*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, USA, 1984). Wenzu stayed on duty on the ship till 20 August 1910, when he returned to shore 'on request'. He boarded his next ship, the King-Edward-VII-class battleship, H.M.S. *Commonwealth*, from Portsmouth three and a half weeks later, on 15 September 1910, with frequent return calls to port, ending this assignment, on 7 December 1910, thirteen weeks later, at HMNB Devonport, Plymouth, some 300 kilometres (some 200 miles) down the coast from Portsmouth. At that time, as a result of a fleet reorganisation in 1909, *Commonwealth* was undergoing a refit at Devonport, started in October 1910 till June 1911, to become a Home Fleet unit in the 2nd Division, formerly the Channel Fleet (cf. R.A. Burt, *British Battleships 1889–1904*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, USA, 1988). During the thirteen weeks that Wenzu was part of *Commonwealth's* crew, Cetta became pregnant with their first child, most likely around the last week of November of 1910. However, it was in Malta that she gave birth, on 25 August

1911, to their daughter Mananni (Dionysius Mintoff to the author; 22/06/15). In the intervening months, Wenzu was on leave for over ten weeks, from 8 December 1910, till 19 February 1911, and serving for more than five and a half months on the Cressy-class armoured cruiser, H.M.S. *Euryalus*, from this latter date till the following 9 August 1911, and for just over a week on the Edgar-class cruiser, H.M.S. *Gibraltar*, from then till the 17th of the same month, before being again on leave, this time for seven weeks, from then till the next 7 October 1911, during which time Mananni was born. Cetta's return might thus have been in mid-February of 1911.

¹⁹²See: Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 60.

¹⁹³See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 14; also: Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 60.

¹⁹⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁶Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 60.

¹⁹⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²See: *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰³See: *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁰⁴See: *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 232, 234.

²⁰⁵See: *Ibid.*, pp. 232, 379, 399.

²⁰⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 551, para. 1; and: *Abr. Mem.*, 251, 252.

²⁰⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 209.

²⁰⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁰⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 360. The beach was at Birzebbuga. For a similar reference, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 359, para. 9. Both citations most probably refer to the same occasion. Though in the former one Mintoff writes (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 359) that he had five years of age (making it 1921), this seems unlikely. His father was on duty at Hong Kong at the naval base H.M.S. *Tamar* till 3 May 1920, thereafter being assigned to the other land frigate, H.M.S. *Egmont* (Fort Saint Angelo, Malta), for more than three whole years, up till 15 May 1923 (NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheets 2).

²¹⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 115, para. 8 and 9; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 115.

²¹¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 571, para. 2.

²¹²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 199.

²¹³See: *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 154 (Emphasis added).

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 198.

²¹⁷Maria Camilleri, ELM, p. 117.

²¹⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 362, para. 3.

²¹⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 181.

²²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 250.

²²¹Ann McKenna to the author (03/10/13).

²²²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 34.

²²³*Ibid.*, p. 35.

²²⁴NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 2.

²²⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 132, para. 5; f. 204, para. 3; and: *Abr. Mem.*, 28.

²²⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 32, 209, 493.

²²⁷See: *Ibid.*, pp. 30ff.

²²⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 985, para. 10; *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 210f.

- ²²⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 213.
- ²³⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 362, para. 3; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 40.
- ²³¹Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).
- ²³²See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 30–2.
- ²³³*Ibid.*, p. 30.
- ²³⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 359, para. 8.
- ²³⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 115.
- ²³⁶See: *Ibid.*
- ²³⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 362, para. 8; f. 363, para. 2.
- ²³⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 362, para. 8.
- ²³⁹See: *Ibid.*, f. 362f.
- ²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, f. 363, para. 2.
- ²⁴¹*Ibid.*
- ²⁴²See: *Ibid.*, f. 362f.
- ²⁴³See: Steven G. Marks, “War finance (Russian Empire)” (2017), *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_finance_russian_empire (accessed 24/10/18). The investments were called *titoli* in Italian, and printed on paper measuring 25.5 cm x 10.5 cm (10 in. x 4 in.) each (Carmel Cauchi to Lawrence Ancilleri, 2 September 1992; Ancilleri Collection).
- ²⁴⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 363, para. 3.
- ²⁴⁵*Ibid.*
- ²⁴⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 45.
- ²⁴⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 359, para. 9.
- ²⁴⁸Dionysius Mintoff, ELM, p. 325.
- ²⁴⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 362, para. 4.
- ²⁵⁰For example, see: Heejung Kim and Karen M. Rose (2014), “Concept analysis of family homeostasis”, *Jun*, Vol. 70, Issue 11, November 2014, USA, pp. 2450–2468.
- ²⁵¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 49.
- ²⁵²*Ibid.*
- ²⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ²⁵⁴See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 359f; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 115.
- ²⁵⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 34f; and: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 262, para. 1.
- ²⁵⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 45.
- ²⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ²⁵⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ²⁵⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 359, para. 9.
- ²⁶⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 35; in Maltese: *Mutu muttu, grunni f’bntu*.
- ²⁶¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 159; also: Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 61.
- ²⁶²See: *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ²⁶³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 428, para. 3; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 14.
- ²⁶⁴See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 467, para. 7; f. 494, para. 3.
- ²⁶⁵See: *Ibid.*, f. 428, para. 3.
- ²⁶⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 14.
- ²⁶⁷LRM, 1897/597 refers to him as an ‘impiegato’ (an employee or, better, a labourer), called in the official Italian used at the time ‘*lavorante nel carbone*’ (*Ibid.*, 1882/1439) or ‘*carbonajo*’ (*Ibid.*, 1900/1211, 1902/2489).
- ²⁶⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 147.
- ²⁶⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ²⁷⁰See: Simon Mercieca, BSM, p. 62. The small business was run by a Licari family.
- ²⁷¹Designated as ‘*in commercio*’; LRM, 1910/3006, 1911/826, 1911/1620, 1912/712, 1912/808, 1912/1715, 1913/1142, 1927/1609, 1933/1524; also as ‘*trafficante*’ (*ibid.*, 1905/384, 1906/115, 1916/620) or, more common, ‘*commerciante*’ (*ibid.*, 1906/1508, 1909/2273, 1909/2552, 1909/2852, 1909/3258, 1911/1866, 1913/870, 1913/1224, 1913/1608, 1914/1309, 1917/456, 1918/1770, 1921/1343, 1921/1696, 1921/1783, 1922/2445, 1923/1485, 1925/1430, 1928/2762, 1931/519).
- ²⁷²Worked out from the records at the LRM; see references in the notes above.
- ²⁷³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 5; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 105. Karmena was almost three years older than Cetta. She was born on 27 July 1889 (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 19, f. 237).
- ²⁷⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 206.
- ²⁷⁵See: *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 40.
- ²⁷⁶Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 388; Anne McKenna, *Ibid.*, p. 683.
- ²⁷⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 35, 114, 186; also: Joe Camilleri, ELM, p. 43.
- ²⁷⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 105.
- ²⁷⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 111, 186, 213; and: Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 388.
- ²⁸⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 14.
- ²⁸¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 474, para. 7.
- ²⁸²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 360.
- ²⁸³Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 387.
- ²⁸⁴Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 61.
- ²⁸⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 147.
- ²⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ²⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ²⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 405.
- ²⁹⁰Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 388.
- ²⁹¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 116, 154.
- ²⁹²Consider: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 620, para 9: ‘my nosy mother’.
- ²⁹³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 404, para. 6.
- ²⁹⁴See: *Ibid.*, f. 361, para. 8; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 112.
- ²⁹⁵Consider: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 6: ‘[Grandmother Mari] showed off a refinement of taste and manners unknown to my mother.’
- ²⁹⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 379.
- ²⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 257: head of chapter.
- ²⁹⁸Born on 8 October 1913 (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 20, f. 336f). In the *Index* (Vol. M, f. 53v) the surname is initially written *Mintus*, then the last letter was changed to an *f*, as it is recorded in the aforementioned register. The child was baptised on the same day of her birth by Mgr. Joseph Borg with the names *Ioanna, Rita, Josepha, Maria*. As in the baptism of the child’s sister two years before, the godparents were the maternal grandparents (the grandmother being marked as being from Bormla instead of from Isla).
- ²⁹⁹Born on 25 August 1911 (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 20, f. 303f). In the *Index* (Vol. M, f. 53v) the surname was initially written *Micallef*, then changed to *Mintuf*, as it is recorded in the aforementioned register. The child was registered as ^f⁴⁰ *Federici*, the father’s official name, and this is repeated for the successive two births, including Mintoff’s. The child was baptised the day after her birth, on the 26th, by Mgr. Joseph Borg with the names *Maria Anna, Concepta, Josepha, Ioanna*, witnessed by the godparents Joseph Mary Farrugia (Paġann) and his wife Marianna, the child’s grandparents, marked as both from Bormla (even if Marianna, from Isla, wasn’t). This baptism was the first ever of a child with the surname Mintoff to have been baptised at the Bormla parish church.
- ³⁰⁰Born on 17 April 1919 (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 22, f. 170). In the *Index* (Vol. M, f. 55^v) the child was registered as ^f¹⁰⁰ *Laurentis* (the father’s second official name, and the one with which he was known), and this is how he is registered in all the successive births except two. See also: Portus Salutis Parish Archives, Valletta, Malta, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 29, f. 478, where the child’s year of birth is erroneously registered as 1920, not 1919.
- ³⁰¹The children were: (1) Daniel, born on 13 March 1922 (and baptised the day after, having as godparents Eliseo Cremona and his mother Cajetana from the parish of Porto Salvo, Valletta, probably the brother and mother of Gita; Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 23, f. 17^v); (2) Anthony, born on 12 November 1923 (and baptised the day after, having as godparents Carmel Lautier, son of Felix, from Bormla, and Sunta Farrugia, Cetta’s sister; *Ibid.*, f. 103^v) and died on 26 November 1924 at twelve months and a half (*Ibid.*, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 14, f. 328); (3) Raymond, born on 9 February 1926 (and baptised on the same day, having as godparents Joseph Bartolo and his wife Angela, both from Bormla; *Ibid.*, f. 217^v); Sunta, born on 11 March 1929 (*Ibid.*, XXIV, f. 112^v); (4) Paul, born on 1 April 1931 (at 8.00 AM, and baptised on the same day, having as godparents Concetta Micallef, wife of Joseph, from Bormla; *Ibid.*, f. 255^v); (5) Mary, born on 30 December 1932 (at 6.00 AM, and baptised on the same day, having as godparents Dominic Mintoff, her brother, and Carmela Lautier, wife of Felix, from Bormla; *Ibid.*, XXV, f. 67^v); and (6) Concetta, born on 19 May 1934 (at 7.30 AM, and baptised on the same day, having as godparents Maria Preziosa Cassar, wife of Francis, from Bormla; *Ibid.*, f. 166^v) and died on 28 May 1935 at twelve months and a half (*Ibid.*, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 15, f. 224).
- ³⁰²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 35.
- ³⁰³See: Pia Melloyd, Andrea Wells Miller and J. Keith Miller (1989), *Facing Dependence: What it is, where it comes from, how it sabotages our lives*, 2003 ed., Harper Collins Publications, Harper One, New York, New York, USA.
- ³⁰⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 154.
- ³⁰⁵See: Patricia Love and Jo Robinson (1990), *The Emotional Incest Syndrome: What to do when a parent’s love rules your life*, Bantam Books, paperback edition (1991), New York, New York, USA.

- ³⁰⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 17.
- ³⁰⁷Also called clithrophia or cleisiophobia. See, for instance: common-phobias.com/Cleisio/ phobia.htm (accessed 29/10/18) and related sites.
- ³⁰⁸Mary Spiteri, ELM, p. 213; Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici to the author (30/10/18).
- ³⁰⁹On this and other related aspects, see, for instance: Kenneth M. Adams (2011), *Silently Seduced: When parents make their children partners*, revised and updated ed., Health Communication, Inc., Deerfield Beach, Florida, USA.
- ³¹⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 3.
- ³¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 154.
- ³¹²*Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ³¹³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 307, para. 2; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 50.
- ³¹⁴Maria Camilleri to the author (21/07/14).
- ³¹⁵Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).
- ³¹⁶Dionysius Mintoff, ELM, p. 324. The precise words in Maltese are: 'I-bicca l-kbirna missieri kien iksun imsejfer; allura hu [Dumink] kien imsejji flimkien m'ommi' [Most of the time my father would be abroad; so Dumink ran (the family) together with my mother].
- ³¹⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 280, para. 7.
- ³¹⁸*Ibid.*, f. 280, para. 8.
- ³¹⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 134.
- ³²⁰See: *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- ³²¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 2.
- ³²²Yana Bland, MBS, p. 322.
- ³²³*Abr. Mem.*, p. 202.
- ³²⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 361, para. 8.
- ³²⁵See, for instance: *Ibid.*, f. 253, para. 9; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 17.
- ³²⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 379.
- ³²⁷See, for instance: Neil J. Lavender and Alan Covaioia (2010), *The One-Way Relationship Workbook: Step-by-step help for coping with narcissists, egotistical lovers, toxic co-workers, and others who are incredibly self-absorbed*, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, California, USA.
- ³²⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 147.
- ³²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 366.
- ³³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 114.
- ³³¹*Ibid.*, p. 180.
- ³³²*Orig. Mem.*, f. 611, para. 9; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 240.
- ³³³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 611, para. 10; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 240.
- ³³⁴Maria Camilleri (2009) in an audio-visual recording for *Bijografiji* [Biographies], Malta Television, Malta, 3 and 10 February.
- ³³⁵*Orig. Mem.*, f. 243, para. 1.
- ³³⁶Yana Bland, ELM, p. 109.
- ³³⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 496, para. 7, partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 187. Consider also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 379, para. 5 (where Mintoff describes himself as 'the naughty urchin of Bormla's Bastjun').
- ³³⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 6.
- ³³⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 379.
- ³⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 107.
- ³⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 106.
- ³⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 170.
- ³⁴³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 5, para. 4; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 2.
- ³⁴⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 235.
- ³⁴⁵*Orig. Mem.*, f. 471, para. 9; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 165.
- ³⁴⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 522, para. 2.
- ³⁴⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 135.
- ³⁴⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 386, para. 2.
- ³⁴⁹*Ibid.*
- ³⁵⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 386, para. 1.
- ³⁵¹*Ibid.*, para. 2.
- ³⁵²*Ibid.*, para. 3.
- ³⁵³*Ibid.*, f. 867, para. 5.
- ³⁵⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 137.
- ³⁵⁵Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 388.
- The precise words in Maltese are: 'Dumink kien jibgħa' minnha u baqa' jibgħa' minnha anki meta kieber' [Dumink feared her and persisted in fearing her even when he grew up].
- ³⁵⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 10.
- ³⁵⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 147, para. 4.
- ³⁵⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 135.
- ³⁵⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 433, para. 4.
- ³⁶⁰*Ibid.*, f. 362, para. 3.
- ³⁶¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 144.
- ³⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 134.
- ³⁶³*Ibid.*
- ³⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ³⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ³⁶⁶See, for instance: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 355, para. 1 ('the embarrassment and awkwardness that my shyness [...] created all around me'), partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 107; f. 475, para. 1 ('always very shy with [...]'); f. 577, para. 8; f. 728, para. 3; f. 748, para. 10 ('[my] sociable mood, which through shyness was normally notably absent'), partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 383; f. 752, para. 6; f. 803, para. 11 ('I have always felt too shy to [...]'); f. 828, para. 2 ('I felt too shy to [...]'); f. 829, para. 10; f. 830, para. 1 ('my stupid shyness'); f. 834, para. 15 ('my boorish shyness'); f. 846, para. 5; f. 867, para. 5 ('my innate shyness'); f. 876, para. 1 ('my natural shyness'); and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 106, 206, 207, 211 ('his shyness exceeded mine'), 212 ('[I was] too shy to [...]'), 216 ('I felt very shy'), 240 ('my natural shyness'), 469.
- ³⁶⁷Ann McKenna to the author (03/10/13).
- ³⁶⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 34 ('He was an extremely shy person'), 43.
- ³⁶⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 876, para. 1; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 240.
- ³⁷⁰*Orig. Mem.*, f. 867, para. 5.
- ³⁷¹See, for instance: Bernardo J. Carducci (2008), "Are we born shy? Genetics, environment, and bashfulness", *Psychology Today*, psychologytoday.com/us/blog/breaking-the-ice/200806/are-we-born-shy (accessed 01/11/18).
- ³⁷²See, for instance: Natalie D. Eggum, Nancy Eisenberg, Tracy L. Spinrad, Mark Reiser, Bridget M. Gaertner, Julie Sallquist and Cynthia L. Smith (2009), "Development of shyness: Relations with children's fearfulness, sex, and maternal behavior", *Infancy*, 1 May issue, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 325–345. Reproduced by the National Center for Biotechnology Information at ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2791465 (accessed 01/11/18).
- ³⁷³See, for instance: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 475, para. 1; f. 577, para. 8; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 211, 577.
- ³⁷⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 383.
- ³⁷⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- ³⁷⁶See, for example: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 42, para. 9; f. 147, para. 1; f. 546, para. 2; f. 828, para. 13, f. 871, para. 8; and *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 201, 115.
- ³⁷⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 803, para. 11.
- ³⁷⁸*Ibid.*
- ³⁷⁹Ann McKenna to the author (03/10/13).
- ³⁸⁰*Orig. Mem.*, f. 803, para. 13.
- ³⁸¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 107.
- ³⁸²*Orig. Mem.*, f. 280, para. 2.
- ³⁸³Ann McKenna to the author (03/10/13).
- ³⁸⁴See, for instance: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 752, para. 6; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 469.
- ³⁸⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 230.
- ³⁸⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 383.
- ³⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 207.
- ³⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 477.
- ³⁸⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 834, para. 15.
- ³⁹⁰*Ibid.*, f. 830, para. 1.
- ³⁹¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 252.
- ³⁹²*Orig. Mem.*, f. 384, para. 7.
- ³⁹³*Ibid.*, f. 810, para. 6.
- ³⁹⁴*Ibid.*, f. 384, para. 7.
- ³⁹⁵See: *Ibid.*, f. 828, para. 2; f. 830f.
- ³⁹⁶Charles Mizzi, ELM, p. 611.
- ³⁹⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 116.
- ³⁹⁸Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 22, f. 8v.
- ³⁹⁹See, for instance: Jackie Mercieca (2012, 25 August), comment in *Malta tigha' Tajfulek Parit: Supplement Dom Mintoff - 1916–2012* [Malta Forever Grateful to You, Architect: Dom Mintoff supplement], supplement with *Kullbadd*, Malta, p. xvii; and Carmen Sant, ELM, p. 534.
- ⁴⁰⁰St Dominic had died on 6 August 1221. Since this was the Saviour's Day, his official feast day had always been traditionally celebrated two days previously, on 4 August.
- ⁴⁰¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 207.
- ⁴⁰²St Lawrence's feast day had always been traditionally celebrated on 10 August, which of course happened to be just four days after the birth of Cetta's child.
- ⁴⁰³Dionysius Mintoff (2012), "I-mewt tiegħu hija raġda sabiha wara hafna bidma" [His death is a sweet sleep following great work], *Dom Mintoff (1916–2012): L-arkitekt ta' Malta bielsa* [Dom Mintoff: The architect of free Malta], special edition magazine, *It-Torja*, ed. by Aleks Farrugia, Malta, p. 30.
- ⁴⁰⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 48, para. 3.
- ⁴⁰⁵*Ibid.*, ff. 47ff.
- ⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.*, f. 47, para. 6.
- ⁴⁰⁷*Ibid.*, f. 49, para. 5.
- ⁴⁰⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁰⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ⁴¹⁰See, for instance: Anthony Zarb-Dimech (2014), *Malta during the First World War: 1914–1918*, 100th anniversary edition (1914–2014), Book Distributors Ltd., Malta.
- ⁴¹¹The appellation probably originates from Albert G. Mackinnon's 1916 book-title: *Malta: Nurse of the Mediterranean* (Hodder and Stoughton, London-New York-Toronto).
- ⁴¹²NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet

1. This stretch of service lasted from 31 January till 30 November 1916.
- ⁴¹³*Ibid.* 53/63204-16 – Admiralty Log Book: H.M.S. *Titania* (16 Nov. 1915 – 30 Nov. 1916). At the time *Titania's* base was at Blyth in southeast Northumberland, England, supporting the 11th Submarine Flotilla of the Grand Fleet (National Library of Scotland, *Monthly Navy Lists*, July 1916, p. 26; also: *ibid.*, January 1919, p. 920a, No. 886, and *ibid.*, *Supplement*, p. 11).
- ⁴¹⁴NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 1. After service on H.M.S. *Titania*, Wenzu was at shore in England, taking up the next re-engagement on 21 February 1917 with the huge Lord Nelson-class pre-dreadnought battleship, H.M.S. *Lord Nelson*, which had a complement of over 800 souls. He stayed with her, participating in the Dardanelles Campaign, while she was the flagship of the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron, which was later re-designated the Aegean Squadron. He was put to shore in Malta on 31 August 1917.
- ⁴¹⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 13f.
- ⁴¹⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 48, para. 3.
- ⁴¹⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 212.
- ⁴¹⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 29. The name—an odd fusion of John and Dominic—was that of his maternal great-grandfather. According to Wenzu it came about when his great-great-grandparents, at loggerheads as to what to call their child, settled on a compromise which resulted in the strangeness of the name (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 216, where Mintoff states that it was his father's grandfather who was called Gannmenk, whereas in fact it was his great-grandfather; Wenzu's grandfather was called Louis).
- ⁴¹⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 216.
- ⁴²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 212.
- ⁴²¹LRM, 1897/597.
- ⁴²²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 5.
- ⁴²³Dom Mintoff, reported by Daniel Massa (2013) in *PSI Kingmaker: Life, thought and adventures of Peter Serracino Inglott*, Malta, p. 15; the physician in question was Dr Giovanni Felice Inglott (the great-grandfather of Rev. Peter Serracino Inglott).
- ⁴²⁴See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 5. Ċetta's sister, Karmena, lived further down the same street (see: *Ibid.*, f. 352, para. 1).
- ⁴²⁵LRM, 1900/1211, 1902/2489. So was Karmen's house (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 1).
- ⁴²⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 351, para. 10, and f. 352, para. 1.
- ⁴²⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 104.
- ⁴²⁸Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 61.
- ⁴²⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 352, para. 2.
- ⁴³⁰See: *Ibid.*, para. 3.
- ⁴³¹Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 22, f. 8v. He was baptised by the Deputy Parish Priest, Mgr. Joseph Borg. The father is registered with his official name, spelt *Friderio*.
- ⁴³²As in the other two previous baptisms the grandmother is marked, yet again, as being from Bormla instead of from Isla.
- ⁴³³See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 11f.
- ⁴³⁴See: *Ibid.*, p. 367.
- ⁴³⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 8, para. 3f; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 367.
- ⁴³⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 8, para. 2.
- ⁴³⁷See: *Ibid.*, f. 351, para. 3 and 9.
- ⁴³⁸In his memoirs Mintoff erroneously varies this street name, so-called after Queen Alexandra, wife of Britain's King Edward VII, once calling it *Alexander Street* (p. 400) and mostly calling it *Alexandria Street* (pp. 351, 352, 353, 354, 408, 409, 411, 414, 428, 459).
- ⁴³⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 154.
- ⁴⁴⁰See: *Ibid.*, p. 106, where Mintoff only says that the bank was 'English', 'more powerful' than the few extant local banks, and that it 'established itself in Valletta'.
- ⁴⁴¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- ⁴⁴²See: *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ⁴⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ⁴⁴⁴See: *Ibid.*, p. 106. The bank was that of the Marquis Scicluna, known as *I-Ċisik*.
- ⁴⁴⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- ⁴⁴⁶See: *Ibid.* In this memoirs Mintoff designated, as all Maltese do, the British as 'English', undifferentiating whether they are actual English or Irish, Scot, Welsh or whatever.
- ⁴⁴⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 106.
- ⁴⁴⁸See: *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴⁹See: *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 107.
- ⁴⁵¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 403, para. 3, where the word is spelt with an initial /g/ rather than a /k/ presumably to bring out the pronunciation according to local custom.
- ⁴⁵²See: *Ibid.*, para. 6. Though in his memoirs Mintoff states that the inmates were 'Turkish prisoners' (as, probably, popular hearsay reported), men from other countries were also held here during the same period, such as from Austria, Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece (See: Anthony Zarb Dimech, "Prisoner of War Mail", Malta Study Circle, Paper 44, 1991, reported in *The Malta Independent Online*, 1 April 2012; accessed 08/11/18).
- ⁴⁵³*Abr. Mem.*, p. 106.
- ⁴⁵⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 354, para. 6 (originally a continuation of the former paragraph).
- ⁴⁵⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 107.
- ⁴⁵⁶See: *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 154.
- ⁴⁵⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 290, para. 7; f. 404, para. 5; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 40.
- ⁴⁵⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 109.
- ⁴⁵⁹LRM, 1916/620, 1917/456 (transfer made on 13 February 1917).
- ⁴⁶⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁶¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 462, para. 5.
- ⁴⁶²See: *Ibid.*, f. 715, para. 9.
- ⁴⁶³*Abr. Mem.*, p. 133.
- ⁴⁶⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 405, para. 4.
- ⁴⁶⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 164f.
- ⁴⁶⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 290, para. 7; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁶⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 20.
- ⁴⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 133.

CHAPTER 2

RELEASE

(1923–1930)

One lazy day, seven-year-old Dumink was audacious enough, or rather reckless, to explore on his own a dark, low-barrelled vault partly concealed by overgrown vegetation. He was just wandering around Reverend Spir's place killing time. The vault's mute gape revealed a tunnel which looked discarded, to be sure, but this only stirred his curiosity further. The excitement made his heart pound while he warily skulked towards the foot of the mighty bastions enclosing his Cottonera district. That day the enormous structure must have seemed as ugly and useless as ever. Erected for a futile purpose—a fight with Ottomans which never came—it survived for so long only as a display to the vanity of the Knights of Saint John who had them built by hordes of abject drudges. Today it serves no other purpose except to get in the way of anything else, and stands as a baroque backdrop to tourists' snapshots and selfies. Back in the days of the little boy's adventure the bastions' sheer height, their stale austerity and their blunt angles made them depressing and ominous.

The small vault stealthily piercing the bastions—known as Il-Mina tal-Barumbara (The Pigeon-loft Tunnel)—was a no-go area for everyone at Bastjun, and the boy knew it. However, the mystery of the unknown beyond its dark passage promised to imbue the idle day with a thrill of discovery which could seldom be resisted, and the boy didn't. He went pluckily through with no thought of any possible danger. With every step forward the bright light at the end of the still, tomblike underpass heartened his resolve to look over strange territory and prohibited ground.

What first bit him on the other side was a formidable stench. It came like a knock to the head, more so because it was utterly unexpected. The boy had never smelt anything so revolting. Promptly adapting his eyes to the bright light he quickly realised that he had emerged into a landfill surrounded by derelict land. The fetid reek of rancid trash made his

stomach churn. He barely had time to figure it all out, however, when faint squeals and grunts of pigs struck his ears. He rapidly scanned around for them lest they be vicious. At long last he spotted them safely wallowing in a filthy sty some distance away close to a pitiful wooden shack which, to his great surprise, appeared to be inhabited. He had no idea that people lived there. Or could. He was still getting a grip over his stupor when the most bewildering thing happened: across the debris Dumink's astonished gaze locked with the livid eyes of a boy, not more than three years older than he, who seemed to live there with his family almost indistinguishable from the pigs. Other families lived there too. The lad had been startled, and hastily stood up, glowering at his intruder.

Dumink recognised him instantly. He had often seen him around in his neighbourhood. It was In-Naqrita, The Morsel, as he was known by all. Dirty and scruffy as ever, the boy went about scavenging the streets and gathering refuse in his hessian sack which he later painstakingly sorted out once back at his hovel. The wretch was scorned by women folk whenever he approached them begging for scraps, shooed away each time he came too close to anyone, and mercilessly harassed by children, sometimes much younger than he, yelling after him 'Naq-ri-ta! Naq-ri-ta!' to revel in seeing him scamper, chastened, away. His thin and famished body drew no one's pity, or almost. Even God seemed too busy to care or take his side. Yet he took it all in his stride, or so it appeared. He merely smirked awkwardly, endured the invectives as if unperturbed, and scurried to other streets to relive the same humiliation all over again. He always seemed to be agonisingly resigned to his wretched fate.

On coming face to face so unexpectedly with little Dumink that day, the luckless boy turned aggressive. Gone was the usual grovelling squib. He was on his home turf and he intended to keep it that way. Collecting himself in an instant, he instinctively grabbed a stick, and without thinking twice dashed headlong towards his trespasser. Dumink, equally taken by surprise, panicked. He promptly realised that he had overstepped his bounds. His only thought was of hastily retreating into the tunnel from which he had emerged. Absolutely terrified, he dashed through the tunnel, and scuttled to the safety of his home as fast as his legs could carry him.

LITTLE DUMINK NEVER FORGOT this episode. It had scared him out of his wits, for sure. However, perhaps there was more to it for him. Somehow it seems to have touched some of his most sensitive

nerves which, not sure why, made him retain this incident well lodged in his mind. In time, it also appears to have acquired new meanings as his experience of life became more robust and wholesome.

This experience at Bormla's landfill around 1924 came at a time when, at the age of seven or thereabouts, little Dumink was apparently becoming ever more socially aware of his surroundings. The brief, chance encounter with *Naqrita's* world seems to have opened up to him, almost in an instant, how unkind and comparatively harsher life was for some people who shared his lower-class status and lived nearby. This appears to have come as some sort of revelation to the young lad. Dumink was totally unaware of the existence of *Naqrita's* dump till then. As it happened, he was not unfamiliar with the expanse of land on the other side of the landfill. He had been there before when he sometimes visited the place in order to assist at mass at an outlying chapel (San Ġwann t'Għuxa) said by his confessor, Canon Carmel Bugelli.¹ However, leaving Bastjun through Saint Helen's Gate, the priest and his altar boy would have always taken a route which carefully skirted the dump. On coming to it up close for the first time that day, Dumink seems to have become starkly aware, perhaps for the first time, of how relative poverty must have been, and where *he* stood on that score. The so-called lower-class certainly had its own internal strata. At the bottom end there seems to have been the likes of *Naqrita*, the redundant, and the unemployed. Comparing these people to his neighbourhood's destitute, Mintoff later described them as 'even poorer than our poorest'.²

The latter, 'our poorest', possibly a notch higher in living standards, would have included the working-class families, who, like their inferiors, subsisted on discarded left-overs from the tables of the British marines and sold on the cheap. Since in naval slang this was called "gash" (actually meaning rubbish), and the process of preparing it called "gashing" or "gashin", the word was corrupted into Maltese as "gaxxen". There were two types gaxxen, one made up of wholesome leftovers (such as fruit, cake, bread, vegetables, *etc.*), the other was a hogwash which was supposed to be given to animals but instead was sold dirt-cheap.³ Only the poorest of the poor made do with gaxxen. Dumink, however, could see it on demand all around him. 'Our Bastjun neighbours,' he would reminisce scores of years later, 'were so miserably poor that gaxxen was the major content of their diet and without it they starved'.⁴

Dumink's own family was not part of this low-class stratum; it certainly was better off, and seems to have never hung on any gash. On the contrary, by this time Grandfather Pagann was already a well-heeled businessman and property-owner,⁵ and Dumink's father too was beginning to buy property for himself.⁶ Not to mention his mother's and his grandmother's ongoing little businesses.

Naqrita's shocking poverty, patently so beneath Dumink's social rank, seems to have stung the little boy quite deep. 'To this day,' he confessed some three quarters of a century later, 'I am [still] ashamed of [that] nauseating repugnance'.⁷ Dumink felt embarrassed, and continued to feel so in subsequent years, not so much for having felt disgusted by *Naqrita's* misery but more so for the fact that he felt disgusted *at all*. It seems to have been the feeling's involuntary, spontaneous nature that Dumink wasn't proud of. He would have very much preferred, at least in later years, that the feeling which had come so impulsively was of another sort, perhaps one of compassion for *Naqrita*, or at least of pity; certainly something more Christian, perhaps, or even something which could later be remotely considered more socialistic. But no; what Dumink discovered in himself that day as it instinctively showed its face before *Naqrita's* desolation was snootiness; the sort that easily could have elicited the notorious prayer, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this ... *Naqrita!*' Instead, how much in later years Mintoff would have preferred that that day he could recall something more akin to that Christian Socialism which he wanted everyone to believe existed in him from day one of his existence on earth. Alas, it didn't. Its contrary and negation did. Most probably that's why the feeling appalled as much as surprised Dumink. For what he impulsively felt in the presence of *Naqrita's* misery, as if by second nature, was the un-Christian, un-socialist, even the un-liberal, feeling of being somehow set apart; of being, much within the lowly slum milieu, a member of some sort of elite. This stung because, as Mintoff would realise in a few years, *Naqrita's* struggle with life was, as he would state, 'not so ignoble'.⁸ Of course it was not! There was absolutely no disgrace in the despicable state in which the likes of *Naqrita* were forsaken. The dishonour lay heaped on the head of whoever was responsible for that state. Perhaps it was for this reason, its stark political implications, that *Naqrita* seems to have remained on Dumink's mind like an indelible image

of reprehensible social inequity ... enough, in fact, as he would acknowledge later in life, to put him up against the commanding image of 'penny-half-penny politicians who cringe for favour and promise heaven on earth on election platforms and sell their countrymen down the river when called to account.'⁹

This outburst on *Naqrita's* behalf suggests that perhaps in this newly-discovered, as yet inarticulate, awareness lay the first chink which imperceptibly began to crack the grand narrative of Dumink's worldview. This mental orientation was, of course, the one he had uncritically received from his forebears. There was still a very long way to go indeed before that hairline fracture became the fissure which so greatly re-dimensioned his entire life and had so momentous an effect on his country. It seems to have been an initiation nonetheless; one which began to show up when, some months after his portentous visit to the Mandraġġ boys, the shy, obliging, little boy resolved to play fast and loose. Twice. This second flight was during the summer of 1923.¹⁰ The first getaway was just for a night, when he slept at a public building close to his home;¹¹ the second time, which must not have been too long afterwards, was perhaps more worrying: he slipped away from home and walked a distance of some eight kilometres (5 miles) out into what must have appeared to be the wilderness. His only focus was to get to his father's mother at Msida.¹² The mere idea, considering his age and almost-nil experience of the outside world, is simply staggering. The impulse must have been too much to bear. 'It was one of those fractious days that periodically visit me and plunge me into a lethargic mental tiredness that compels me to waive aside the workaday routine and take time off whatever the consequences,' Mintoff forlornly confided decades later.¹³ If this were merely the confession of a workaholic adult such as Mintoff one would surely empathise fully; though to have it said of but a six-year-old should raise one's eyebrows. Lethargic mental tiredness at so tender an age must indeed make us pause, surely.

The anguished child seems to have been utterly weary of being obliged to play the adult. Dumink's endeavour to satisfy his mother in her inevitable needs, his determination to prove himself worthy of a benchmark which was unreachable and consistently moved further away, his over-anxious fear of failure, his guilt-feeling and shame at betraying his mother's expectations, all of this must have

worked in unison to crush so young a lad, and induce him to resort to desperate measures. The entire struggle drained the boy by its sheer strain. In his memoirs Mintoff does not seem to be able to distinguish the adult from the child as much as little Dumink appears to have been unable to distinguish the child from the adult. His performance seems to have despairingly reminded him of what a mockery his inadequacy made of his feigned effort. ‘This tiredness,’ Mintoff lamented about his childhood-cum-adulthood feeling, ‘worsens into a black despondency and a deep contempt for myself bordering on insanity.’¹⁴ The intensity with which he here laments so movingly cannot be missed, not least its severity. It seems to be, again, his beleaguering cleithrophobia which cries out so acutely, beseeching on his behalf a desperate release from his oppressive feeling of entrapment, an earnest SOS to have him rescued from his terrifying fear for his very survival. The unbearable anxiety mustered his ever-impending rage. Mintoff was quite lucid about all this. ‘This dark mood can only be dispelled,’ he judiciously affirmed, ‘by a temporary defiance of all restrictions imposed by established authority, and all warnings of wiser relatives, friends and the sense of self-preservation; and in so doing hurting myself and all those I love most.’¹⁵

One can only begin to imagine what the six-year old must have felt the day of his bold getaway, and the sway of its compulsion. Scores of years later he still seemed to be surprised by its suddenness and its apparent craziness. ‘When I woke up that morning,’ he confided as if casually, ‘Santa Liena drew me into its vortex, and, feeling utterly disgusted [...], I dashed out of our home, unwashed and without breakfast, before my mother returned from her daily six o’clock mass.’¹⁶ Indeed, though the impelling urge to flee the quagmire appeared to surface unexpectedly, as it is always wont to do, it seems to have been neither sudden nor crazy. There must have been a build-up to it. The flight was long in coming, much prior to when the Mandragg boys signalled the way. It does not appear to have been a sheer naughty boy’s sheer devilry. It could be condoned if it were merely so. Indeed, it seems to have been as shameful to the boy as much as daring. In fact, in his old age Mintoff still called it ‘the climax of perfidy in my childhood’.¹⁷ In so doing he does not seem to have looked upon it as a plain act of tomfoolery; nor of mere defiance. He appears to have seen it more as treachery, an

act of disloyalty, towards his mother. For to whom did he abscond? Not to any of his mother's relatives even though they lived all around. Despite the danger and the effort, it was to his mother's arch and permanent antagonist that he ran: *his father's mother*.¹⁸ He knew very well that his mother 'hated her guts', as he assures us;¹⁹ and also, perhaps referring to his escapade, 'how fiendishly, though unconsciously, I exploited this enmity for selfish reasons when I was not yet seven'.²⁰ None of his siblings, he proceeds, 'played the same trick'.²¹ Indeed, Grandmother Mari seems to have represented in Dumink's infantile eyes all that *should* have been, the non-theatre, the world without props ... but, alas, was not. With her he could be the boy he in fact was, not the husband that he was expected to be.

Years later, in his memoirs Mintoff dwells at some length on how much granny's house that day seemed to differ from home in almost every detail,²² not forgetting to point out, cuttingly enough, how his granny showed sublime qualities 'unknown to [*i.e.*, lacking in] my mother'.²³ Far from being a perfidy, let alone a 'dreadful day', as he described it many years later,²⁴ his breakout that day figures out as perhaps the most authentic deed of his childhood. In the year following his escapade, 1924, his mother had to *willing* allow her insistent seven-year-old get away from under her wing to that of his grandmother. That was when, as Mintoff recalled ages later, 'I spent my first wonderful summer holidays away from the bastions of Bormla'.²⁵

DUMINK MIGHT NOT HAVE known it at the time, and quite possibly never did so later, but there were conceivably undeniable signs of the anguish he was going through. Two of them, both temporary, seem to have been somewhat stark. One, the most protracted, was his absolute conviction that he would die young. The other, certainly more intriguing, was his claim to seeing apparitions. Both are well worth examining closely.

To begin with, Dumink's obsession with dying young was quite hazy about *when* exactly this had to happen. 'Before the age of thirty-two,' he once disclosed;²⁶ 'not [...] longer than thirty years,'²⁷ he stated on another occasion; and again: 'before the age of thirty,'²⁸ 'by the age of thirty or thereabouts',²⁹ and 'before the age of thirty-three'.³⁰ Give or take, somewhere between twenty-five and thirty, we should adduce. Whatever, it seems certain that Dumink did not take

the hunch at all lightly.

It was ‘a premonition turned into a fixed obsession,³¹ he insisted; one which ‘haunted me [...] since childhood’.³² For him, as he asserted, ‘this presentiment [was] a near certainty’.³³ ‘It pursued me,’ he later declared, ‘as closely as darkness chases light when the sun is out of sight.’³⁴ So much so that in his teens and twenties it actually interfered with his everyday functioning. In fact, he actually took momentous decisions with this belief firmly lodged in mind. ‘It was this uncanny foreboding,’ he dispassionately uncovered, ‘that had prevented me from making any long-term sentimental commitments.’³⁵ Mintoff believed that he could pinpoint the timing of the presentiment’s duration. He maintained that it originated during his first year at the primary (or elementary) school in 1922, at five years of age,³⁶ when he had almost drowned in the course of one of his first truancies with his peers, and was only saved by someone who had dived for him.³⁷

It lasted, he sustained, until the latter part of the Second World War, ‘when bombs and an uncertain tomorrow made life precarious for everybody around me’, as if this was sufficient for an explanation.³⁸

From the evidence we have just visited it is reasonable to suggest that Mintoff had little if any idea *why* he was deeply possessed with such a certainty of his presumed early death. Decades later he even went to the extent of calling it ‘groundless’.³⁹ It might have been bizarre but certainly not groundless. This here does not seem to have been a mere fear of dying, as all of us might more or less have; it appears to have been an overpowering feeling, an anxiety verging on obsession. Such a thing does not come and go for no reason at all. More likely than not it is a way of trying to make some sense of unresolved childhood conflicts, in our case of what is usually called a *predatory* death anxiety.

This is the most basic and ancient of anxieties. It arises from the fear of being trapped or harmed in some way.⁴⁰ In humans the predatory death anxiety is unknowingly induced by situations which somehow suggest some kind of trailing danger—not necessarily physical—to one’s survival.⁴¹ People afflicted with it conjure up a fantasy way of escape just to rest square with the thought that the perceived danger will one day come to an end, and liberation achieved. We have seen that Dumink *did* feel trapped, as if prey

to a predator. His death fantasy seems to have been one way with which his mind made sense of his cleithrophobia, thus suggesting a possible way of avoiding being cornered at all costs.

No wonder, then, that to mark out the moment when the anxiety set in, his mind conveniently picked out an instance which came at the onset of when he was being set loose into the 'adult' outside world, represented by formal schooling. Equally significant, this instance concurred with one of his first guilty acts of overt insubordination. Both, one may note, could have served as a way of somehow fighting back. At the other end, Mintoff fancied that the presentment would be fulfilled at an age which suggested that the struggle could finally come to its termination. Indeed, twenty-five, or thereabouts, could have brought to mind his father's age—twenty-six, to be exact—when *he* got married. This was a *real* marriage, not a surrogate one; a marriage which should have left Dumink live his childhood properly. That age, obsessed upon quite arbitrarily, appears to have somehow inferred some kind of liberating moment.

This suggests that Dumink's total self-conviction of an early death seems to have functioned as an element in a cathartic process, one which led to a final release, and thereby providing relief from the strong and repressed emotions he felt. In other words, the child appears to have been trying to cope as well as he could with the unavoidable situation he found himself in. He seems to have been involved in a conflict of choice between fight or flight in what he instinctively appears to have felt to be a threatening situation. All of this might have been part of that mental theatre of props and make-believe he conjured up. It was a way of striking back at his subjective concerns by symbolically objectifying them. Specifically, his 'fixed obsession' does *not* seem to have been of a literal early death at all, however realistic and compulsive that appeared to him, but rather of his own crushing conflicts and of his instinctive longing to beat them to the draw.

The second undeniable sign of Dumink's anguish at around the same age of six years,⁴² his claim to seeing apparitions, can be considered very much another element or aspect of the cathartic process. 'Several times,' he revealed, 'I was petrified at night at the sight of vagrant souls in mid-air kneeling silently as if in prayer and expecting me to join them.'⁴³ Dumink convinced himself that the images he saw were not some fiction of his imagination or a

delusion, for they appeared to him flesh and blood. ‘They took the form of ordinary people,’ he maintained, ‘clad in daily habits’.⁴⁴ They seemed to be sort of *ghosts*: clearly ethereal but strangely opaque; not translucent as ghosts should be.⁴⁵ Of course, Dumink believed in ghosts. Like all good Christians he too had been taught to believe in the immortality of the soul and in its subsistence in heaven, hell or purgatory. In fact, already as a six-year-old he saw nothing extraordinary in expecting a little pal who had died around the time of these apparitional experiences—at whose funeral Dumink was pall-bearer⁴⁶—to pay him a visit from beyond.⁴⁷ ‘All the grown-ups around me,’ he assured us, ‘believed in ghosts, and many—my mother included—had actually seen and heard them.’⁴⁸ What more proof could one expect?

However, there was more to these apparitional experiences. Although the vagrant souls in mid-air appeared to be ambiguously indistinct—Dumink did not seem to recognise any familiar face amongst them—one in particular stood out from all the rest. ‘A white-haired old man,’ Mintoff disclosed, ‘was a regular visitor, always the first to appear and the last to go.’⁴⁹ Helpfully going into some more detail, Mintoff stated that this old man would be clad in some kind of khaki clothes.⁵⁰ Furthermore, he ‘would appear kneeling close to me lost in prayer. I heard his prayers,’ he proceeded, ‘as clearly as the snoring of my siblings sleeping in the same room; and I was terrified’.⁵¹

Mintoff was and remained certain throughout his entire life that the apparitions were not a chimera ... *despite* the fact that his belief in ghosts dwindled as he grew up. This discomfited him terribly.⁵² As a grown-up he seems to have not *wanted* to believe in ghosts. Yet, neither could he possibly deny the apparitional experiences he claimed to have had. ‘I feel embarrassed,’ the octogenarian wrote scores of years later in his memoirs, ‘because I could not then *nor now* tell whether the apparitions were in a dream or the creatures of a hallucination’ (emphasis added).⁵³ The experiences were all the more perplexing because, as Mintoff avowed, ‘I have never shown symptoms of schizophrenia or psychotic disorders with hallucinations and delusions’.⁵⁴

This bewilderment on whether the apparitional experiences were real or not came with a sense of great shame. ‘I feel ashamed,’ he proffered in his memoirs still writing in the present tense, ‘because

my fear was greater than at any other time in a long life enlivened by many hazards.⁵⁵ To be scared to death by apparitional experiences is perfectly normal, one should think; surely nobody in a right mind would adjudge anyone terrified by such occurrences as a coward. Yet Mintoff seems to have been ashamed precisely for coming out as a weakling. ‘I still cannot believe,’ he confided again in the present tense, ‘that the little coward panicking at the sight of the apparitions was the older version of the fearless street urchin who defied the pitch darkness of the night and all the unknown pitfalls of a strange territory.’⁵⁶ For sure, he seemed fearless enough, young as he was, if not also amused, when, around the time of the apparitional experiences, an underwater earthquake close to Malta sent everyone scampering to the streets heart in mouth very early one fine morning.⁵⁷

The fact that decades later Mintoff still recalled these apparitional experiences ‘with embarrassment and great shame’⁵⁸ clearly suggests one blunt fact: that throughout his entire life Mintoff had not the slightest clue what to make of them. Never did he seem to suspect that they might have been directly linked to his unresolved childhood conflicts and, further, that they could have been part of a cathartic process providing some relief from the strong and repressed emotions he then felt. Without the need to discount offhand the possibility of departed souls paying uninvited visits to mortals, let alone small boys, it seems clear enough that the apparitional experiences involved some kind of perception. This means that, based on knowledge stored from the past, one sees in the external world things one looks forward to.⁵⁹ In such cases two factors are central to the phenomenological content of perception: the recalling of memorised information, and the expectation of a desired outcome. In our case, it looks like young Dumink’s conflicting mind expressed his suppressed emotions by drawing on what he gathered from the people around him concerning ghosts—how they should appropriately appear, namely, in mid-air, kneeling, and praying—coupled with a projection of his yearn to bolt. This key to the apparitional experiences suggests that the persistent white-haired old fellow represented the defeat of an otherwise assured early death. The fellow stood for longevity, endurance and durability. Accordingly, the khaki colour of the elderly’s clothes—khaki being the common colour in military uniforms—evoked the

image of a person who has had long experience in warfare, and came out unconquered. In other words, the elderly man could well not have been a visiting ghost from the spirit world at all. He was rather the semblance of Dumink's *own* liberated and victorious self-projected into an indefinite future. Perhaps this somehow explains why Mintoff, years later, was in the habit of exclaiming daily, 'See, today I robbed God another day!'⁶⁰

By his late teens Mintoff's fear of a premature death and, sometime previously, his apparitional experiences had seemed to begin to wane. The reason could not have been fortuitous. Some soothing of his anxieties appears to have begun as he widened his circle of social confinement. The more he physically distanced himself from his natural family and its environment, particularly from his mother, the more it seems that he could breathe easily and shake off the immediate debilitating effects of his previous surrogacy. Nevertheless, the scars never faded, and some never healed. His cleithrophobia, for instance, appears to have been a case in point. Being one of his earliest and most tenacious disquiets, it seemed to endure unabated into adulthood and even old age. Apparently the same with the unostentatious type of his closet narcissism, typical of his introvert personality; it does not seem to have lost any of its vigour by time. Other anxieties, apparently less pervasive and disruptive, might have latently remained equally burdensome. One of them was, as Mintoff confessed, 'my foible for cleanliness',⁶¹ only it does not seem to have been a mere foible. It looked more obsessive and compulsive than that. By his own admission, Mintoff was 'cleaner than many flesh and blood figurines who, scented but unwashed, strut in the public view parading gaudy and fascinating drapery'.⁶² This illustration hints at the fixated, intrusive thought that dirt or illness, harbingers of death, might lurk beneath a surface that to all intents and purposes appears to be safe and sound. This suggests that Mintoff's fear of contamination might have been originated by his fear of death and his compelling mania of forestalling it as much as possible. 'Physical exercise and cleanliness,' he maintained, 'were a paramount necessity for me with a priority as high as food and shelter.'⁶³ Everyone close enough to him could see this clearly enough throughout his entire life. Not only did he fixate on cleanliness but also, right up to a very ripe old age, he was intent on much vigorous workouts, turning to them first thing every

morning.⁶⁴ Not to mention his enormous zest, especially from his middle-age onwards,⁶⁵ for outside sport activities. According to him, it was ‘the perverse hardness of the social structure in my country [which] spawned [in me] a craving for physical fitness to heal the wounds incurred in the search of a moral well-being’.⁶⁶ This might have been particularly true of swimming in the open sea all year round come rain or shine.⁶⁷ ‘I did not feel fit,’ Mintoff insisted, ‘unless I swam daily in the sea or a lake or river.’⁶⁸

Mintoff was absolutely obsessed with his physical health, one close friend asserted.⁶⁹ As with any other classical case of hypochondriasis, Mintoff could not tolerate the thought of being ill. That was one reason, at least, that ‘kept me very wary of promiscuity,’ he confessed.⁷⁰ In any case, illness and death scared the daylight out of him. Even the very sheer mention of them alarmed him, and he avoided these subjects outright.⁷¹ Ailments and death thoroughly depleted him of all his pluck, one close observer noted.⁷² ‘Not unlike a coward,’ Mintoff frankly admitted in his old age, ‘I have since childhood always run away from people’s ailments and disfigurements.’⁷³ The mere allusion to someone having fallen ill, another close friend observed, affected him to the point of tears.⁷⁴ It was once in a blue moon for him to visit anyone critically ill,⁷⁵ and often appeared quite callous when declining to do so.⁷⁶ ‘Nothing causes me a greater distress,’ Mintoff gloomily acknowledged, ‘than visiting a gravely ill person in hospital or bidding the last adieu to the dead corpse [*s’i*] of someone very near to my heart before it is lowered into the grave.’⁷⁷

All of this was almost certainly not unrelated to ‘my upbringing and its concomitant passions and phobias’, as Mintoff later admitted.⁷⁸ These could have been evident to anyone who looked close enough. Rarely anyone does. And the dazzle of Mintoff’s subsequent public persona made this the more difficult.

YOUNG DUMINK’S FIRST THRUST at formal education came, as all children his age in his neighbourhood, at four years of age when he was made to attend an evening catechism class.⁷⁹ The place where this was held was called the House of the Nazareth Family (*Domus Familia Nazarenæ*), and was quite close to where the Mintoffs lived (Bajtra Street). It was run by an elderly Rev. Spyridon Penza (*Dun Spir*), ‘an exceptionally big-hearted priest,’ according to Mintoff’s

recollections.⁸⁰ Together with him there laboured in the Lord's vineyard a small lay group of godly unmarried men and women. Amongst these, two in particular seem to have caught young Dumink's eye the most. Both were then in their early twenties. One was Żaren, known as *L-Appostlu* (The Apostle). He was a skilled worker at the Naval Dockyard. The other was an attractive damsel, Rosina, who apparently was the right-hand colleague of the head priest.

Little Dumink seems to have liked the singers more than their song. In fact, their way of teaching—getting the children to memorise incomprehensible text-book religious formulas by constant sing-song repetitions—was ‘unbearably pompous [and] boring’, as Mintoff seemed to suggest much later.⁸¹ The main idea of their classes was functional of course: to prepare children to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, and the Eucharist.⁸² Dumink received his in 1921 around his fifth birthday,⁸³ followed by the sacrament of Confirmation two years later, in 1923, from Bishop Angelo Portelli.⁸⁴ More importantly, that same year of his first Holy Communion, though he was still unable to read or write⁸⁵ Rosina picked him to deliver a short memorised sermon in Rev. Spir's small makeshift chapel on Christmas Eve.⁸⁶ This tradition, which is still much loved till this very day throughout the Maltese Islands, was enacted at every place of worship. Alas, little Dumink did not go through the parroted sermon without having ‘faltered and stuttered’, as he admitted in his old age.⁸⁷ In later years this did not seem to withhold him from amply embellishing the memories of that sermon (‘It was my first mass-meeting’),⁸⁸ of Rosina's contribution to its learning (‘... by helping me [in later life] to find simple, unsophisticated ways of stating abstruse political problems’),⁸⁹ or indeed of that entire blessed Christmas night (‘I had graduated from Rosina's mouthpiece to be [the people's] spokesman, their medium, their orator’).⁹⁰

There was, however, perhaps at least one embellishment Mintoff did not do with these early episodes of his life, one that might have been much more substantial than the rest of the hyperboles: his penchant for charming people who were just rightly placed to lend him a hand in whatever he wanted to achieve. Rosina might have been one of them. ‘Sweet Rosina,’ he still chirped decades later, ‘the most attractive of Rev. Spir's catechism teachers, was the young lady who spotted, culled, and nurtured my talent for God's glorification.’⁹¹

What talent that was exactly is hard to say. The thing that perhaps mattered most was that Rosina singled him out to do what Dumink—or, presumably, his mother—wanted most: ‘Many lit candles and flowers surrounded me as I stood in a trance on a stool,’ Mintoff gloated over the little sermon he had aped, ‘with a crib on my right in which baby Jesus was smiling from his cradle to Mary and Joseph as kindly as did Rosina and Rev. Spir sitting on my left to lift my heart.’⁹² He certainly felt privileged, and privileged he was. However, Rosina might not have been the first to be thus charmed. His mother’s sister, Aunt Esther, still in her twenties when Dumink was a child,⁹³ might have been beguiled before her. ‘I loved being in Esther’s care,’ he confided many years later. ‘[Her] big heart left ample space for infant Dom to assert his freedom [that is, get what he wanted].’⁹⁴ Neither Esther, nor Rosina, would possibly be the last.⁹⁵

It is of course perfectly normal for children to manipulate significant grownups by their charm to get their way. However, a child that has got it into its head that it is exceptionally special could feel the need to sway adults, particularly those identified as useful stakeholders, to back up that push which is deemed crucial for them to excel. People with a narcissistic streak are great charmers, initially at least, until the ones charmed cease to fit into their plan.⁹⁶ Many ways might be used to beguile others. These could include mirroring them in little ways, gazing raptly into their eyes, keeping close-by, proving oneself useful, taking trivial liberties, sharing some personal secret, dropping pet names, being complimentary, or justifying their disappointments. Though Mintoff might have used one or more of these to ingratiate himself when young or older, he seems to have had his own way. ‘I would first show the part of myself [others] would be pleased to see,’ he openly conceded, ‘and suggesting to them to reciprocate by elaborating the good points I know they had. After establishing a bond of sympathy that could stand the strain of conflicting ideals and values, I would reveal the unpalatable remainder of my personality.’⁹⁷

Sweet Rosina seems to have served as a stepping-stone for Dumink to reach beyond a single chapel sermon. Through her the lad could get to *Zaren l-Appostlu*. The latter was the right contact needed to lead on to another privileged prize. ‘The training of my memory by Rosina came in handy for another holy purpose,’

Mintoff apprised. Žaren was brought about, he continued, ‘to teach me the responses to the priest’s loud declamations at mass – of course, all in Latin’.⁹⁸ This reward not only advanced the little lad to serve as altar boy around the most revered of places, the priests’ enclosed chancel, but also to assist at the town’s holy of holies, the large parish church itself.⁹⁹ Žaren was also a member of a lay religious society, the MUSEUM, which had been very recently founded by a certain Rev. George Preca, a local priest canonised in 2007. Their catechetical males-only centre (in Nelson Street) was twice as distant from the Mintoffs’ residence than Rev. Spir’s *Domus*. ‘For this work of love Žaren expected to be rewarded in heaven,’ Mintoff impudently remarked, ‘but I was handsomely paid for my pains there and then.’¹⁰⁰ The recompense was not only in social approbation or perhaps spiritual solace but also in some financial gain. For, having befriended the sexton, Dumink could earn a little bit of spare brass for candy by helping out with the seating accommodation in the church.¹⁰¹

DUMINK WAS QUICKLY EXPANDING his horizons, undoubtedly. It came during the time that he began attending the primary school at Bormla. Skipping the few little private schools that operated around,¹⁰² he was enrolled at the government elementary in 1922 when six years old,¹⁰³ just a few weeks after his encounter with the Mandraġġ boys, and stayed there three years, leaving in 1925 at eight years of age.¹⁰⁴ It was here that he learned to read and write, make his sums,¹⁰⁵ and improve the knowledge he already had of coinage, weights and measurements.¹⁰⁶ He proved to be bright, and learned quickly.¹⁰⁷ The school was situated at quite a distance from the Mintoffs’ home, at a neighbourhood called Ix-Xghajra.¹⁰⁸ For a short time, the school was even temporarily moved to where the Mintoffs had formerly lived close to the Verdala Barracks.¹⁰⁹ The children at this school hailed from both the low- and middle-class of Bormla’s social strata.¹¹⁰ Predictably, the schooling was boring (‘[Children] were condemned to sit arms-crossed on wooden benches for several hours on end,’ Mintoff whined),¹¹¹ and the teaching worse (‘Joyless and primeval’),¹¹² attended as it was by ‘the boredom and monotony of countless repetitions’.¹¹³ This of course was usual pedagogical practice in all schools. Here, however, the class itself was overcrowded, having over forty children crammed

into a relatively small space.¹¹⁴ Worse still, the tots were regularly beaten. ‘A rod [was] applied,’ Mintoff bitterly recalled in old age, ‘on palms, knuckles or legs.’¹¹⁵ Indeed, in later years Mintoff could only recall his experience of the primary school as ‘repulsively sour’.¹¹⁶ However, there was an upside to all of this. Walking to and from school was fun,¹¹⁷ and so was the tomfoolery little Dumink got into while there.¹¹⁸

Of course the little imp made scores of new friends,¹¹⁹ amongst whom he was always the shortest.¹²⁰ ‘The raw and cooked moral fare,’ he crowed decades later referring to his Bastjun environment, ‘made me feel at ease and happy as much in the company of schoolmates whose life-style out of school differed entirely from mine as I was in the scuffles and wild escapades of the unschooled offspring of the lowest class’.¹²¹ Be it as it may, some certainly did not consider *him* ‘respectable company’ enough.¹²² And not for nothing. According to his own admission, he was ‘as slovenly as you [could] make them’.¹²³ Like most other low-class folks around the neighbourhood, The Elder’s Dominic (*Duminku tax-Xif*), as he was known (“The Elder” being Grandfather Pağann), went everywhere barefoot,¹²⁴ and having a wash, as he recalled, was ‘a great luxury’, to him as to them.¹²⁵ Moreover, to make matters worse he ganged up with nine other brats who, as he never forgot, ‘[were] sworn to everlasting solidarity and friendship’¹²⁶ ... and also, as might be expected, much mischief. In his older days, Mintoff never tired narrating to anyone ready to listen of his devilling with his gang.¹²⁷ How, for instance, they pinched fruit from orchards;¹²⁸ how they slingshot stray cats, lizards and birds;¹²⁹ how they nabbed pastries from a meek street-vendor;¹³⁰ how they filched lunch from other children;¹³¹ or how they taunted and mocked a poor daft beggar.¹³² Nothing to brag about, in other words. What Mintoff spoke of less was that, when not with his school gang, he once more recoiled into himself, reverted to his introversion, and spent hours alone in solitude reading his eyes sore.¹³³ His mother kept an eagle eye on him. ‘Held on a tight rein by mother,’ Mintoff recalled many years later, ‘I longed for the welcome opening of the school portals and for my lively mates.’¹³⁴

During these years at the primary school, there was one particular child with whom little Dumink cottoned cheek by jowl. Their friendship seems to have been Dumink’s most compelling of those

early days, and might have become in his mind the prototype of others yet to come in later years.¹³⁵ He was a Michael Debono, who was known simply as Kieli, older than Dumink by a year and lived in the Bastjun neighbourhood too.¹³⁶ He had lost his mother when still a babe, and his illiterate father, who occasionally worked as an unskilled labourer at the Naval Dockyard, managed some private lotteries on street corners.¹³⁷ Though intellectually Dumink could run circles around him, Kieli seems to have been quite astute and streetwise.¹³⁸ It was this Kieli who had introduced young Dumink to reaping some profits at church.¹³⁹ And it was also he who got him to pilfer the collection box.¹⁴⁰ Together they devised childish ways of being frequent truants from school,¹⁴¹ an infraction to which the younger skiver grew quite accustomed.¹⁴² (It was during one of these getaways that Dumink had almost drowned)¹⁴³ Kieli was hugely admired by his little chum. At school ‘I became [his] double’, Mintoff conceded,¹⁴⁴ and had him ‘as guide’.¹⁴⁵ Of course it could have been the male-to-male bonding that initially caused the lure, something Dumink must have missed. Yet it could also have been Kieli’s bravado that so impressed him. His older chum carried with him a sense of freedom and defiance which Dumink seems to have longed for more and more. He must have appeared to him to be the closest he could get to anything like the Mandragg boys so far. Dumink would never seem to forget him. When the time came for them to part their close company after the elementary school years, Kieli left, as Mintoff expressed years later, a ‘big vacuum’¹⁴⁶ and a ‘big void’,¹⁴⁷ in his young life which could not be filled that easily.

YOUNG DUMINK MIGHT NOT have noticed it immediately, yet his entanglement with his mother was on the rise, even though with his gang escapades and all he might have thought the opposite. Towards the termination of his three-year period at the primary school in 1925 his mother’s mind went in fast-forward mode, ushering in a new kind of ball game. For now, having unmistakable signs however faint of her son’s intellectual acumen, she decided upon his future, and set out to bring it into effect. *He* was of course not consulted, and probably nor was his father. ‘[Mother] had become totally convinced of my scholastic aptitude,’ Mintoff recalled decades later, ‘and with an obstinate determination she set out to provide me with the formal education denied to her and her likes.’¹⁴⁸ More to the point,

with typically provincial thinking what she had adamantly resolved was that her son would be a priest and, specifically, a monsignor canon at the local town church.¹⁴⁹ This was no surreptitious plot. As Mintoff attested a lifetime later, ‘my mother [made] embarrassing proclamations to the four winds that God had created me solely to become a priest’.¹⁵⁰ His father does not seem to have interfered that little bit in the whole scheme of his ‘more possessive’ half, as Mintoff branded her.¹⁵¹ At the time Wenzu must have been around the house quite frequently. For, having come to the end of his long Navy career, he worked on H.M.S. *Eagle*,¹⁵² which was assigned to the Mediterranean Fleet operating offshore between Malta and Egypt, and on land at Fort Saint Angelo.¹⁵³ Mother schemed every step of the way, and that was that.¹⁵⁴

Now eight years old, Dumink not only seemed to play along with this plan but appears to have been thoroughly taken by it. ‘My childhood dream,’ he piped decades later, ‘[was] of militating for Christianity.’¹⁵⁵ This aspiration, as we have it here, seems to have an authentic ring to it. It is typical of pre-adolescent thinking in at least two ways.¹⁵⁶ It is fantastical, and gender-specific. Its fantastical nature can be noticed in its ambiguity for, though it almost certainly refers to the priesthood, it does so quixotically, being not at all clear what type of priestly engagement it refers to exactly.

‘Militating’ further suggests some kind of vague adventuresome enterprise such as proselytising amongst the heathen in some missionary hinterland. This is characteristic of pre-adolescent life-dreams, which tend to have a less realistic occupational or career-oriented quality than those of adolescents since they are generally less constrained by societal norms, realistic opportunities and ability. Pre-adolescents, as we can observe in this case too, tend to state the type of occupation they would *like* to have rather than broad future life states they would *hope* to achieve, such as, for example, being a priest. Then again, young Dumink’s ambition was clearly male-specific, for any pastoral or ecclesiastical work, let alone being expressed in so combative a term such as ‘militating’, would have been strictly exclusive to men. Women in the Catholic Church were, and still are, barred from the priesthood and from all ministerial offices. Like all pre-adolescents over the age of seven, Dumink not only would have known and endorsed gender stereotypes but also viewed gender-atypical behaviour negatively and also probably

avoided gender-atypical types of play.

On the other hand, however, his aspiration was also stratospheric. With his kind of low-class social status, and with the limited resources his family possessed, qualifying to form part of the Church hierarchy must certainly have appeared difficult to achieve. God's will apart, for them to be accepted by the Church hierarchy, priests needed to have sufficient financial prospects. Considering the fact that children from lower-class backgrounds tend to have more modest occupational aspirations, and to aspire to less prestigious careers, than their more advantaged peers, for pre-adolescent Dumink to have humoured such a dream seems anomalous. Social disadvantage is directly related to low aspirations. But not in this case, it seems. Which makes it clear enough that his mother's thumb was on the scales. She knew well enough, like everyone around, that having a priest in the family was a great honour, and could draw towards the family considerable prestige, wealth and power. Dumink could not understand any of this as yet. In other words, the aspiration does not seem to be his, at least not entirely, as much as his mother's. It apparently responded more to her than to his needs. What he seems to have needed, entrapped as he seems to have been, was to loyally abide by a decision, even one so portentous, which his mother had unambiguously settled upon. 'Her fretting ingenuity overcame all obstacles,' Mintoff affirmed many years later in his memoirs immediately after admitting his futile attempts at shunning his mother's caresses, ignoring her admonitions and running away from her stifling solicitude;¹⁵⁷ and sullenly continued: 'Until I was fourteen my mother succeeded in fixing the boundaries of my young life and attributing to my exuberant spirits my constant straying away into a forbidden evil territory.'

These final words should perhaps not be taken lightly. Their drift is evidently religious and moral, and may possibly attest to Dumink's confusion in fusing his fear of God with the fear of his mother, taking her will to be implicitly that of the Almighty. It is almost painful to think that Dumink seems to have been accused by Mother-cum-Almighty that whatever bid he would have attempted to cut and run could have been sinful. This would have exacerbated his unbearable shame and guilt. In real fact his insubordination and defiance do not appear to have been 'straying away' at all but rather retrieving his rightful place as a distinct human person with separate

feelings and wants. Similarly, the ‘forbidden evil territory’ would not have been his own breathing space away from the stifling surrogacy but rather that at which he seems to have felt confined and trapped. His moral reasoning here seems all warped.

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1925, while his mother was setting in motion her ‘ambitious plans’, as Mintoff christened them years later,¹⁵⁸ she also tried to induce her son to focus on his future. One way of trying to do this, at least partially, was by finding him some job to keep him off the streets, distance him from unsafe influences and, like all other working children at the time, learn some useful and employable skill. This was ‘merely my mother’s ruse,’ Mintoff pondered in old age, ‘to keep me away from the bad company I found so congenial’.¹⁵⁹ The first job was without pay.¹⁶⁰ Dumink just helped out a furniture-maker close to home with odd tasks. Unsurprisingly, the boy seems to have been bored to death, and spent more time dodging his work and roaming in the streets. His mother of course was livid. Then came another job, this time with some remuneration.¹⁶¹ It was at a little jewellery workshop run by two bachelors, again close to home. Dumink seems to have taken more interest here, even if he terribly resented his mother taking most of his weekly earnings.

While working here, his mother procured another occupation for her lad, perhaps one more congenial to his aptitudes. It was attending an arithmetic class close by.¹⁶² Though the other twenty or so children were older and paid a nominal fee, Dumink’s mother prevailed upon the young, rather peculiar teacher to take her son, and do it for free. The chap used the rod lavishly and still won no respect from any of his pupils. Dumink, the tiniest and youngest of them all, willingly joined his pals in mocking the teacher behind his back,¹⁶³ however he simultaneously used his charm on him, thus becoming, by Mintoff’s own admission, ‘his mascot’,¹⁶⁴ and his ‘star pupil’.¹⁶⁵ Ingratiating himself despite the levelled scorn seems to have worked. ‘I enjoyed the limelight,’ Mintoff recalled decades later, ‘and was flattered.’¹⁶⁶

That busy summer brought other experiences down Dumink’s lane. One of them was not so nice. It was a direct contact with overt sexual child abuse. To begin with, as one would expect, the flagitious slum was not the best of all possible worlds for healthy sexual education. It teemed with ‘pimps, prostitutes, thieves and loafers’,

as Mintoff could not help recalling.¹⁶⁷ The place was licentious and promiscuous. ‘In the Bastjun quarters,’ Mintoff would effortlessly aver ages later, ‘seamy sex shocked nobody.’¹⁶⁸ Still, Dumink had had his skin crawl when a single, mid-aged trusted family neighbour, and a religious one at that, began one day necking and fondling him and his accompanying older pal.¹⁶⁹ They had dallied at his house-cum-workspace for want of nothing better to do. Dumink was disgusted and, if his memoirs are to be believed, just scurried out as fast as he could, leaving his pal behind. This was the second time, in fact, that such an inappropriate sexual advance happened to him. The previous one took place a few months earlier during a heavy rainfall.¹⁷⁰ While Dumink and the very same pal took shelter at the workshop of a handsome deaf-and-dumb coy teenager, this youngster suddenly stripped naked before them and was evidently whipped up. This time too, while he again insists that he left his pal behind, Dumink was horrified and fled. Harking back to that Mandragg boy of two years before must not have been too difficult for him. Perhaps also with the same guilt feeling of treachery and disloyalty towards his mother. What is sure is that more than seven decades later he still had ‘incised in my memory [the youth’s] naked, statuesque figure resembling a Greek athlete in the ancient Olympic games’.¹⁷¹

Thankfully not all of his experiences that summer were traumatic. The friendship some Carmelite friars struck with him could still gladden Mintoff after three quarters of a century. It began when one of them, a Friar Anselm (‘A jovial, redolent [friar] with a heart bigger than his good brain’),¹⁷² spotted Dumink hanging out in the streets and gave him some candy to run him some errands.¹⁷³ The die was cast. Their friendship grew to the point of having little Dumink accompanying a whole group of friars while they took excursions on rowing boats off to swim. The lad seems to have enjoyed their company enormously, together with the food and hilarity. It must have been a most welcome respite from the watchful eye of his mother.

HER EYE, IN THE meantime, was fixed elsewhere. Approaching a priest or two at Bormla who knew the ropes,¹⁷⁴ she got it into her head to have her son enrolled at the best primary school in town, possibly in the whole island. This was the small De La Salle College run by a Catholic religious teaching congregation, the *Frères Chrétiens*

(Christian Brothers). Their school at Bormla was closer to the Mintoffs' home than the government elementary, just a few blocks away from Bastjun (Bongiorno Street).¹⁷⁵ The six Brothers who ran the school, with the addition of another the year after,¹⁷⁶ catered for six classes accommodating a complement of one hundred and seventy-eight boys, nineteen of whom were given free tuition.¹⁷⁷ Most of the paying students hailed from some of the more comfortable, mostly professional or business, families around Cottonera and beyond;¹⁷⁸ only a few came from Bormla itself.¹⁷⁹ For the non-paying pupils, who were always accepted as a matter of Christian duty,¹⁸⁰ the Brothers were receiving an annual government subsidy.¹⁸¹ The school, renowned for its discipline and serene atmosphere as much as for its academic record,¹⁸² was somewhat out of tune with its slum surroundings. 'Outside their premises,' Mintoff griped years later, 'the Frères were totally exposed to the degradation of Bormla's working-class environment'; and proceeds: 'Its social immorality could not but impinge on the Christian conscience of the Brothers.'¹⁸³ Anyway, the Brothers' main commitment was to prepare their pupils to sit for the entrance examinations of the Naval Dockyard (mostly as apprentices) or the public Lyceum.¹⁸⁴ Entering religious orders, as quite a number of pupils did,¹⁸⁵ or the bishop's seminary, as Dumink's mother intended for her son, was not exactly their remit. Dumink had already been familiar with the Brothers' college because he had often accompanied a priest, Canon Francesco Casha, known as The Choirmaster (*Il-Kantur*), to serve mass there.¹⁸⁶ Incidentally, this priest was the paid college chaplain,¹⁸⁷ and his mother's confessor.¹⁸⁸ Though it was probably he who dropped the crucial word to get eight-year-old Dumink enrolled at the school in the autumn of 1925, it seems to have been rather his mother's deft entreaties that got him in free of charge for as long as he stayed there in return for some manual help the lad gave to the Brothers.¹⁸⁹ By this time the family appears to have been able to sustain the expense for their finances had crawled into the green rung. It had afforded to buy off its house at Eagle Street,¹⁹⁰ and also a family tomb at Malta's main cemetery at Paola.¹⁹¹ However much Dumink's entrance in so prestigious a school—and cost-free to boot—must have delighted Ċetta, some of the merchant families of Bormla were not in the least amused that their sons would have to come in contact with the likes of her boy.¹⁹²

Dumink studied at the Frères' school for two scholastic years until 1927.¹⁹³ Classes were from Monday to Friday between 8.00 AM till 4.15 PM.¹⁹⁴ Since he was not preparing for the Naval Dockyard apprentice entrance examination he was admitted to the Lyceum class.¹⁹⁵ This was divided into three streams of proficiency with the highest reserved only for the very well-advanced few.¹⁹⁶ All boys were taught English, Italian, Arithmetic and Religion,¹⁹⁷ and had only schoolwork, never homework.¹⁹⁸ Dumink had two Frenchmen, an Irishman and two Maltese as teachers during his stay.¹⁹⁹ Initially he progressed from the lowest to the middle stream in six months, but then apparently stayed there till the end.²⁰⁰ For all his brains, throughout his studies he needed extra 'care and encouragement,' as he confessed many years later, 'to make the grade scholastically'.²⁰¹ His best results seem to have been in the subjects he liked most, arithmetic and English.²⁰² Notwithstanding, his overall marks appear to have been not more than just over the average.²⁰³ 'Allowances [had to be made]', he candidly later acknowledged, 'for my limitations'.²⁰⁴ His ugly calligraphy was one of them, and this certainly could not be remedied.²⁰⁵ Another one, much more serious, was his persistent truancy, which, though less frequent than before, alas became day-long.²⁰⁶ Perhaps Kieli's pull could not be left in the dust so easily.

One worrisome drawback the school had was that no Latin was taught there.²⁰⁷ Since Latin was indispensable at the seminary, some alternative had to be sought. This proved to be an easy hurdle for Dumink's mother. Her cousin, a thirtyish priest, Rev. Ġannkarl Burlò, was at hand close by at the Isla approach road, just a few streets from Bastjun. Again with a little push from her ubiquitous confessor,²⁰⁸ Ċetta persuaded him to give her son private one-hour lessons in Latin, possibly free of charge, twice a week.²⁰⁹ 'How I hated the sleep-inducing Latin declensions,' Mintoff would ungratefully recall in later years.²¹⁰ 'How valiantly,' he persisted, 'did the [priest] struggle to keep me awake and drum the subtle changes of the suffix into my dense head.' Yet the lessons seem to have paid off nonetheless.

Ċetta, however, wanted to squeeze much more out of her young cousin. As it happened, young as he was Ġannkarl seems to have been some kind of big fish at the bishop's seminary.²¹¹ Ċetta prevailed upon him to vouch his assistance in getting her son admitted there.²¹² This was of the utmost importance to her, and

Ġannkarl would prove to be much useful in this respect later on. For the time being, Ġetta further induced him to have one of his lay seminary colleagues who lived just a stone's throw away from the Mintoffs, a certain Angelo Ghigo, give her son private lessons, again most probably free of charge, in English lest the Frères' labours would prove wanting.²¹³ Ġetta's intention in this, however, could possibly not have been exactly academic. What she sought were sufficient sponsors to secure her son's admission at the seminary.²¹⁴ Indefatigably, she also exploited her son's friendship with Friar Anselm to have the good man, surely free of charge, give her young friend private lessons in Italian.²¹⁵

Young Dumink must have surely been quite busy during those couple of years at the Frères' school. Undoubtedly, attending their teaching facility was the best thing that had happened to him until that point. Mintoff was of the same mind, for in later years he unreservedly acknowledged that 'my mother was absolutely right in believing this to be the right school for breaking in her untamed boy!'²¹⁶ Dumink truly seems to have made with the Frères a leap of quality in his intellectual formation. Prior to their instruction, as he heartily recognised in later years, he only had a 'small and totally disorganised store of knowledge that had accidentally come my way'. The Frères' contribution to the boy was not merely academic ('Free and sound tuition,' Mintoff would succinctly call it later);²¹⁷ they induced much-needed and much-vital mental discipline. The 'skillful Brethren,' Mintoff would concede with the benefit of hindsight, 'helped me to lay a more secure foundation on which, through many exciting decades, I could store a vast amount of acquired knowledge and hopefully some little wisdom.'²¹⁸ For this he remained forever grateful, sometimes, when he had become a well-known public figure, thanking them openly at social gatherings,²¹⁹ and even mass meetings.²²⁰

At the end of the 1926/27 scholastic year the Frères could proudly publicise in the local papers their thirteen successful students for that year.²²¹ Five had been admitted at the Naval Dockyard, four at the Lyceum, one at the Central School, another as Public Weigher, and two at the bishop's seminary. One of the latter was 'Mintoff Domenico'. He had done it. He was on to pastures new. His mother's plans, through her determined and unstinting exertions, were working out admirably well ... at least for the time being. Little

could she possibly have suspected that this major step in her son's young life would be the undoing of all her manoeuvres as he slowly but surely set his heart and mind to eventually cut and run.

BY THE TIME LITTLE Dumink entered the bishop's seminary, institutional religion had taken an all-invasive role in the eight-year-old's life. During the couple of years to follow, it would grow and thicken in its rather peculiar, popular mode which in later years Mintoff would unequivocally identify as a 'tenuous mixture of superstition with religion'.²²² To be more precise, what here went with the name of religion was noticeably a hotchpotch of sketchy beliefs, slipshod theology, arcane rituals, ludicrous piques between saints and Madonnas, and much literal understanding of bits and pieces of scripture ... all of which were orbiting the esoteric folklore of heaven and hell, divine retribution, and doomsday. Possibly enjoying pride of place, superstition was just one feature out of this diadem of predilections. '[I was] brought up,' Mintoff would acknowledge with hindsight ages later, 'in an environment where superstition, illiteracy and poverty killed moral rectitude, broad-mindedness and sustainable self-reliance.'²²³

This was Dumink's share as much as that of his family and neighbours. However, for Dumink there probably had been something more at stake. Seen from his point of view, the theocratic vision of life must have mashed in one jumbled lot the supreme presence of his mother and that of God. When it came to Dumink to discern God's mind—so pivotal to every religious comprehension of life, however basic—the line separating God's will from that of Mother Ćetta, *and* vice versa, must have been pretty thin if not altogether blurry. Duty to God and duty to Mother could not have been more indistinct. To make matters worse, the rightful father in the family, figuratively representing the authority of the Father, God almighty, was left to merely play second fiddle. Though Ćetta almost certainly could not do otherwise, forced as she was by circumstances, this arrangement seems to have pleased God to some considerable extent, for even his envoys, her clerical consolers, did not deny her their tacit, and maybe even their explicit, nod.

In any case, it must have appeared to Dumink that, in his universe, his mother left little space for any other God. Wasn't it she, after all, like a prophetess or some high-priestess, who revealed his priestly

vocation, his entire life's purpose, as God's unmistakable will?²²⁴ Or did she appear to his eyes as deputising for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Mother* of God, as she is called by Christians, whose cult in the Maltese Islands, particularly at Cottonera, verged on the idolatrous? Perhaps this was the main reason why, years later, the teenage, otherwise bold, Dumink could not bring himself to confess to his mother his private secession from the Catholic Church.²²⁵ Because deep down it looked more like a betrayal of his mother rather than an act of apostasy, and so it could have been on some subliminal level.

One thing appears to be quite sure: that what went by the name of religion, for Dumink as much as for most of the people around him, was topsy-turvy. 'The great Catholic mass, illiterate and isolated from the rest of humanity,' Mintoff would lament decades later, 'was too ignorant to distinguish between Christian spiritual heritage and its warping by opportunists and superstition.'²²⁶ Certainly, Dumink couldn't. At least not in his pre-adolescent days before entering the seminary. It was *he*, first and foremost, who could not distinguish between God's and Mother Ċetta's will, let alone God's and the clergy's ... who always seemed to be in agreement with *her*. Up till the time he came face to face with *Naqrita*, and in the couple of years after that, Dumink too was definitely part of those whom he later was so fervid in calling illiterate, isolated and ignorant. From childbirth, he was coached to think in none but religious terms, and from an early age groomed to become a man of the cloth. 'Apart from poverty,' he would acknowledge in later years, 'superstition was the only [other] great handicap of my childhood[s] Bastjun environment.'²²⁷

This may have been indeed so ... with one proviso, however: that what he insisted on disposing of as 'superstition' does not seem to have been merely that. To him it does not appear to have been just a socially shared system of false beliefs, as one would conventionally understand superstition; not only, at least. *His* problem was that he seemed to additionally have had a delusional *religious* trust in his mother. What this boils down to is the demarcation line between God and mother, so fundamental for a healthy relationship with both. Where did one end and the other begin? Dumink's devotion to her, or rather his blind commitment to her wishes and desires as things transcendent and godly, or at least as having suchlike qualities,

looks like having verged on impiety, certainly on much religious haziness. It was possibly *this*, in fact, that muddled up his young mind the most. It was also what ultimately proved to be the most crucial in deciding the way things had to go in the young lad's life.

DUMINK'S AFFECTION FOR RELIGION appears to have been quite strong throughout the larger part of his seminary days, reaching an all-time high, and perhaps sincerely so. Then it plummeted. What began so seemingly rock-solid would prove to be anything but. What had happened? What went wrong? ... Or, we should be rather asking: What went *right*? — for leaving the seminary was the best thing that had happened to him in those days.

One might doubt whether Dumink ever really had a priestly vocation, to begin with. This is really a difficult matter to settle one way or another with absolute certainty or, rather, without putting in doubt its possible genuineness. Of course, it assumes not only the existence of a God but also the possibility that God somehow communicates his will to humans. No Christian would doubt any of this. At the time of Dumink's boyhood, whatever the circumstances present around his vocation, it seems that the boy genuinely believed that he did have a calling to the priesthood. Later he was always referring back to it as something he had *lost*,²²⁸ thus implying that it had been there all along. Nevertheless, even if he did *not* have such a vocation, neither he nor his mother could be much blamed for thinking so. It was not the first time, and surely not the last, that someone got that wrong ... as happens, after all, in so many other aspects of life, and of spiritual life in particular.

Whatever the case, when Dumink's love-story with institutional religion came to an end, a rapid shedding of its external, and the more noticeable, features became quickly evident. This would have been expected. Nonetheless, the deep causes which gave rise to such a story in the first place, those which sustained it for some years, and those which brought it to an end, could not be so easily moulted away. Any observer sensitive enough to religion's changing face in converts or apostates would never fail to notice that some of its most basic, emotional essentials always endure unabated, if not becoming even brawnier. Mintoff was no exception in this. While religion's recognisable exteriors flaked away ever sturdier throughout his life, its bedrock preserved more than a modicum of sediment.

Indeed, it would be grossly mistaken had the relatively short period at the seminary been dismissed as a mere shoestring intermezzo in Mintoff's life. Bracketing it off as if it were some ephemeral hiccup, as some commentators are wont to do,²²⁹ misses just how very crucial these years had been for the lad.

MALTA'S SEMINARY WAS A male-only boarder school run by priests in the bishop's pay.²³⁰ Its organisational structure had two major tiers, called the minor and the major. The minor seminary was more or less equivalent to the lower secondary in the UK or the junior high school (middle school) in the US, except that it mostly focused on preparing students for the major seminary. This second tier prepared students for the priesthood. It would begin from a level roughly corresponding to an upper secondary, or a high school, education right up to a university level. Both groups of students were separately housed within a huge, mid-18th-century baroque palace in Floriana, a mere ten-minute walk from Valletta.²³¹

Dumink was admitted as a minor seminarian on Saturday, 26 February, 1927.²³² He was ten and a half years old. A month before, he and a boy from Valletta were made to sit for preliminary tests in the Italian and English languages, and Arithmetic.²³³ The test in the Latin language had been momentarily dispensed with since it was not compulsory at that initial stage.²³⁴ Dumink did very well in these tests; actually obtaining in all three subjects the highest marks out of all the boys—some twenty in all—who set for similar admission tests in that academic year.²³⁵ This was quite impressive. More importantly, it tallied well with his mother's stratagem. For Ċetta not only wanted to get her boy into the seminary—already something fairly beyond his station and social mint—but, on top of that, she planned on having him also receive free tuition *and* free board and lodging.²³⁶ The idea was indeed bold, and one perhaps cannot but gape at Ċetta's pluck and nerve! Understandably, Dumink's academic performance was paramount to the plan. Not only the highest marks were needed, but the highest *of* marks. Dumink did not disappoint her. Dependable as ever, he delivered according to plan.

Ċetta also needed, however, good recommendations, or testimonials, as they were then called, to attest to her son's trustworthy character and Christian disposition. Intelligence was one thing, good breeding another; and a slum pedigree was not

exactly the kind of certificate fit to hang on anyone's wall. This, of course, did not daunt Ćetta. Two of her son's testimonials duly came from people we have met already, namely Angelo Ghigo and cousin Ćannkarl Burlò, Dumink's teachers of private lessons in English and Latin respectively.²³⁷ Wasn't it a happy coincidence that they also both taught at the seminary? And, furthermore, that Ćannkarl was No. 3 in the administration hierarchy there?²³⁸ Or had Mother Ćetta forestalled it? More likely than not. Nevertheless, she wanted to be triply sure of her hard sell.

For this, she employed one of the most important and esteemed persons in the township, a Rev. Anton Camilleri, the Parish Overseer himself (*Il-Kurat*). He was happy to oblige, and little Dumink was personally sent to call at his home in Bormla to collect the testimonial of good conduct.²³⁹ All of this paid off splendidly. 'It was no mean feat for my teachers and sponsors,' Mintoff pondered gratefully years later, 'to gain me admission to Class One halfway through the scholastic year, and as the youngest seminarian to boot.'²⁴⁰ Teachers and sponsors! What about his mother? It certainly was no mean feat for *her*. It was *she*, after all, who took all the pains to astutely move the required pieces in place for the happy outcome of which her son seemed to be the main beneficiary. For, indeed, on that mid-winter day in 1927 Ćetta succeeded in getting her son admitted to the seminary, board there on the house, and begin to receive free tuition. A resounding victory all around, certainly!

Well ... not quite. At the seminary, though moving out of home and physically distancing himself away from his mother, young Dumink remained under her influence as much as ever. Not directly, for sure, but rather emotionally and mentally. The lad would not have had the foggiest idea of this at the time. He might have even thought that, at long last, he had got rid of her, and all his worries were over. Alas, he could not have been more mistaken. His troubles, in fact, were just beginning. They would eventually soar to agonising intensity, and it would take him some time before he began to comprehend the seriousness of his predicament. Little could he have guessed that climbing the graceful flight of stairs of that august mansion at Floriana, and walking through its ornate portals on that day, he was unwittingly moving into the last place he would have wanted to be had he known better.

That gorgeous palace could have stood for the grandest prop of

his life so far. It represented the embodiment of his mother in so far that it stood for her sway over him; the imposition of her will; the satisfaction of *her*, not his, wants and needs. In a much deeper, forceful and sophisticated way, the place and its regime made on the young lad the same basic claims and demands which had until then produced in him so much strain and anxiety. Despite all the good intentions anyone might have had that fateful day, whether they were those of his mother, his family, his teachers, the priests, or of the little boy himself, the deal Dumink got into couldn't be worse. However much it appeared that, from here onwards, the road stretched forward endlessly at ease and unhindered, this was horribly illusory. One need not be a professional psychiatrist to see that at this point Dumink was merely humouring his demons, much as everyone around him, his mother the foremost, in what was expected of him. However, those demons could not be expected to remain subdued for long, and they did not.

IN THE MEANTIME, MOTHER Cetta was making bets on a burning house. She could not realise it at the time, of course; her mind was so focused and preoccupied with thinking well ahead into the future—her son's future, that is—that the ten, fifteen years which came in between seemed as insubstantial to her as thin air. She seemed to have thoroughly assumed that her Dumink would simply go on—at fifteen, twenty, and twenty-five years of age—just playing her game without lifting a finger or whimpering a murmur. To her he seemed as if he was not a person at all, at least not one who featured as a significant player in his own game. It was as if to her he lacked personality; some sort of another Wenzu who played the role of a stop-gap.

Clearly, the situation was getting out of hand; she had pushed Dumink over to the seminary and now was really overdoing it. None of his needs were being given any attention by her—or anyone else, for that matter—and the worst part was that she assumed that this could go on forever. In perfectly good faith, undoubtedly, she schemed and planned; she took all the decisions; she decreed what it was that God wanted; she had the future all figured out. She never seemed to pause to think what she was actually doing to her son. Before it was too late, one would think, she should have been smart enough to realise that Dumink was no Wenzu, and that their

surrogate marriage was no indissoluble union.

Going well over the top, Ćetta set herself the task to make sure that her future priest would be financially well provided for. In her usual fast-forward mode, this was actually *before* Dumink was even accepted by the seminary authorities to be part of their fold.²⁴¹ ‘On the way she planned for me to go to heaven,’ Mintoff light-heartedly reflected years later on his mother’s plans, ‘I would not have to wear a crown of thorns on an empty stomach.’²⁴² Put in crude commercial terms, what she sought for him was a hereditary Church benefice. This was a permanent ecclesial appointment, perhaps a rectorate or a vicarage, for which property and income were provided as recompense for performing pastoral duties. Such a benefice would already have to be within the family’s patrimony; one to which a priest had some legal, transferable right. Ćetta suspected that something like this might be lurking somewhere on her mother’s side of the family waiting for her son to lay claim to it. That got her going ‘so assiduously,’ as Mintoff called to mind a lifetime later, ‘for my worldly comfort and my other-worldly beatification’.²⁴³

The quest to find whether such a benefice existed or not had to be carried out at the records office of the bishop’s curia in Valletta. Since this was an unauthorised insider’s job, it had to be done surreptitiously when the place was closed to the public. It was also one that required an expert hand; someone who knew where and what to look for within the archives, and could promptly identify the required information within scores of old manuscripts written in Latin, Italian or Sicilian. For this, Gita, Ćetta’s ever-resourceful Mandraġġ friend, came to the rescue. She talked to a friend of hers at Valletta whose husband, an assistant at the curia’s record office, agreed to help.²⁴⁴

To start with, he requested to have the family tree drawn up.²⁴⁵ Ćetta, not bothering in the least with her husband’s pedigree, paid to have her own family’s lineage prepared for her;²⁴⁶ a benefice in Gozo would not have been very helpful to the family anyway, at least not as much as one in or close to Cottonera. With this genealogy document procured, the assistant’s job was to check whether the young Dumink was even remotely related to donors of Church benefices, and whether such benefices were vacant or likely to be vacated in the near future due to the incumbents being old or infirm.²⁴⁷ However improbable, the prospect augured well.

In fact, not only was a hereditary family benefice identified, it was furthermore an opulent one, and, better still, it was to become available in a few years.²⁴⁸ The benefice would provide Dumink with a comfortable, prestigious and lucrative position amongst the canons of Bormla's parish church while greatly profiting his family in the process.²⁴⁹ God seemed to be smiling upon the lad. Ċetta certainly was.

On that big day when Ċetta, Gita and the assistant's wife visited the curia and discovered the lucky strike, the ten-year-old Dumink was in tow, and thus became perfectly acquainted with the matter.²⁵⁰ He might then not have understood the full implication of inheriting a benefice, or what it might have meant for his life in real terms; however, he seems to have captured the unanimous prevailing view that the benefice promised 'to give [me],' as he attested much later, 'all heaven and earth too'.²⁵¹ Whatever the case, sometime later, when admittance to the seminary and for the priesthood became a probability, Dumink began to see the benefice for what it actually was: 'my comfortable but contaminated compromise with heaven'.²⁵² In other words, it clashed with his sincere desire to serve the Lord uncompromisingly. The benefice bargained with principle, and he felt that he could not honestly have it. 'The little I discerned of [my mother's] efforts to get me an opulent benefice,' he still remembered in his old age, 'filled my puritanical heart with horror.'²⁵³ Yet he still tacitly consented to let her lead even if his big spiritual step forward was somewhat tarnished by her characteristic worldly way of thinking. His ability to oppose her, of having it his own way, of catering for his own needs, appears to have been next to nil.

THE SATURDAY ON WHICH Dumink entered the seminary happened to be just four days prior to Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, a period of forty days preceding Easter Sunday which is solemnly set aside by Christians for repentance of sins, penance through fasting, and prayer. During Shrovetide, that is, the weekend and days immediately preceding Ash Wednesday, carnival was held, a feast of much gaiety, merrymaking and buffoonery. In the Maltese Islands, especially around Valletta, carnival had been duly celebrated for centuries,²⁵⁴ and 1927 was no exception. Many devotees, however, conscientiously frowned upon the impiety—real or imagined—of carnival revellers, and sought to expiate by special devotions for the

sins assumed to have been committed at that season, such as the forty hours of continuous prayer (*kwaranturi*), and also engage the faithful in spiritually uplifting events as a sort of godly diversion. For this reason, at the seminary that year a religious play was on, all in Italian, and the newly-enrolled Dumink walked right into the limelight of the stage.²⁵⁵

The play, set in some African heartland, presented the tenaciousness of a brave new Christian convert who, like the missionary who baptised him, was martyred for the faith.²⁵⁶ In this prosaic, in-house melodrama, little Dumink was chosen to enact a small but heart-pounding role. Being short, skinny and not much more than a child, he was quickly cast to act the convert's youngest son, tightly clinging to his beloved father, and visibly displaying great anguish when finally torn away from him. The audience to impress consisted mainly of seminarians and their parents, together with the seminary's resident clerics. None of Dumink's family members seem to have been informed of the event, and not one of them was present on the occasion.²⁵⁷

This might have been a bit of a disappointment for the boy. Nonetheless, the thrill and stir of the whole experience amply compensated. 'The clearest imprint of the play on my mind,' Mintoff evoked three quarters of a century later, 'was the ensuing spiritual euphoria that lifted my entire being into another world where peace and bliss stunned all senses, time stopped, and a benevolent Almighty took over all present cares and future worries.'²⁵⁸

This does not seem to have been merely some kind of religious sentimental exuberance. It must have been *that*, for sure; but not only. The play came at a susceptible time when Dumink must have had a feeling that he was on life's threshold. Just recently out of his social quagmire, still getting acquainted with his strange new world, undoubtedly even upset by homesickness, Dumink was now immersed amongst Malta's ecclesiastical select few, and treading his first steps on a potentially illustrious religious career. What seems to have gleamed before him with quite some force and conviction, through the play's sopiness, was a sense of purpose. The boy, very greatly impressed by the play's missionary zeal,²⁵⁹ was gripped, as he attested many years later, by 'a hankering for a heroic self-immolation in a hand-to-hand battle with the forces of darkness'.²⁶⁰ This eagerness, however immature and thespian, nevertheless

embryonically contained what he perceived to be his calling in life. ‘Militating for Christianity,’ he decided, ‘became my life’s vocation.’²⁶¹

The moment appears to have been a defining one for Dumink. He never forgot it. Perhaps it was for this reason that he would henceforth never lay aside ‘the missionary glamour of the priestly vocation’,²⁶² as he later called it. The charm was in campaigning, proselytising, making disciples, doing good, and all that. While his religious pipedream held water, the idea was of course to do this ‘in the ranks of the Catholic Church’, as he was convinced that he should.²⁶³ But when he absconded from the Church, a new idea slowly took its grip on the teenager’s mind: that the militating might be done just the same, but for some secular cause. In a few years he would eventually call this cause ‘Socialism’. ‘My childhood dream of militating for Christianity in the ranks of the Catholic Church,’ Mintoff avowed a few years after leaving the seminary, ‘I replaced [...] by an aspiration to serve the cause of socialism, which grew steadily and became my life’s vocation.’²⁶⁴ He could not have been more explicit ... and more precise. For the latter cause—militating for Socialism—seems to have been, indeed, a replacement of, or, at best, an alternative to, the former one; a sort of stand-in. A replacement. For, when the religious mien of the missionary zeal fell off, it left a horrible vacuum which had to be somehow filled. ‘I needed desperately to discover a purpose,’ Mintoff aguishly reported much later.²⁶⁵ *Domenico*—as he now began to be addressed by the clerics as if to mark his new-status persona²⁶⁶—had been working on his missionary frame of mind since day one of his seminary venture, and kept humouring it for the next couple of years. In those days he must have thought that he might be following in the steps of Grandfather Paġann, the self-made missionary back at Bastjun. The seminary would not have discouraged such musings, and might have actually encouraged them. Later, when Socialism was taken up with the same religious zeal and with the same missionary attitude and temperament, though starkly secular, and very often bitterly anticlerical, it certainly was not at all so void of religious traits and tinges. Mintoff was perfectly right: one was just a replacement of the other.

With this epiphany of championing the true faith in heathen territory, Domenico was introducing something of a novelty in his planned life-purpose. Of course most priests do not become

missionaries, and Bormla's monsignors, with benefices and all, had definitely not. In other words, the notion was not part of Ċetta's plan. Precisely for this reason, for the very first time it must have seemed to Domenico that God's will was manifestly distinct from Mother Ċetta's. God, after all, had a mind of his own! And a voice of his own! This revelation could have been one reason for making the seminary appear to the lad as a place 'where I had been given refuge and loving care'.²⁶⁷ This, however, might have been a mere initial impression ... before his patient though persistent demons came out to play again. In any case, the lad began to feel at ease. The place appeared to begin to somewhat assuage his soul. As he attested, though the seminary 'drove out [the Bastjun] anarchy',²⁶⁸ and replaced it with a definite 'moral rectitude',²⁶⁹ Domenico continued to undergo an 'intensive internal conflict [while carrying out a] dispassionate analysis of the little world around me'.²⁷⁰

The child was struggling to overcome what he failed to identify or define; a powerful undercurrent that in less than three years' time would eventually prove too strong for him. At long last, however, the flight would have been irreversibly underway.

ON ENTRANCE TO THE minor seminary, Domenico was of course part of the very last rank, yet set to begin his gradual climb to higher echelons as hard work, personal merit and perhaps favour steered him through the peculiar intricacies of clerical life. He did not begin with a clean slate, as he quickly discovered, for he was looked on as 'the ex-ragamuffin from Bormla's scabrous Bastjun'.²⁷¹ Anyway, he still had to prove his salt, and there was plenty of time for that. In all, a lad stayed at the bishop's boarder-school for some twelve years, six of them as part of the minor seminary, mostly up till the age of sixteen, then, if he decided to proceed to the priesthood, he would be part of the major seminary for a further stretch of seven years before ordination.²⁷² An unforgiving internal system of tests, checks and balances had each lad constantly scrutinised very closely as he went through the various streams which marked his progress. If in any way not up to scratch, there was no way of getting past the salty dogs. The Church played safe.

The bishop's minor seminary, together with the Lyceum in Valletta, was the best of available schools in the Maltese Islands at that academic level. Unbeknown to young Domenico, then and for

decades afterwards, the rector he admired so much as ‘the super-human leader who inspired respect, confidence and fear in equal quantities’²⁷³—a Monsignor Joseph Darmanin—had been, a mere fifteen years previously, one of Manuel Dimech’s most barefaced persecutors.²⁷⁴ Apart from a few selected local clerics, English and Italian laymen also taught there.²⁷⁵ Among the working staff, however, Domenico was smart enough to befriend two caretakers who gave him and his chums frequent access to lots of otherwise prohibited things, such as extra food, candy, books, playing cards, odd pieces of clothing, and such like.²⁷⁶ It was thanks to them that Domenico could keep up, amongst other things, a steady string of the adventurous novels he loved to read so much.²⁷⁷ There were romances in Italian too, such as Manzoni’s *I Promessi Sposi*.²⁷⁸ In such manner, young Domenico could indulge, as he recalled a lifetime later, ‘my passion to read books that spoke more to the heart than to the mind, and inspired less cold doctrinal virtue and more warm human affection.’²⁷⁹ This he must have also found in a spiritual in-group he became part of, *La Camerata Dei Piccoli* (The Youngsters’ Solidarity), dedicated to the 17-year old Polish saint, Stanislaw Kostka.²⁸⁰

Though the troop of young boarders was kept, as Mintoff well remembered, in ‘greenhouse care’,²⁸¹ some of the boys would be given some special consideration due to their family background. Two of these, for instance, were the nephews of the bishop of Malta himself, Mauro Caruana; another was the nephew of Gozo’s bishop, Michael Gonzi.²⁸² Though Domenico seems to have got on splendidly well with all of his peers, there was one who brought to his mind his erstwhile Bastjun imp Kieli. This was Alfred Gatt, known as Fredu, a boy Domenico’s age from an inland village.²⁸³ Fredu’s father happened to be the first cousin to a very popular priest, also called Alfred Gatt, who was well-known throughout the Maltese Islands for his holiness, wisdom and miracles. Alfred junior had none of these qualities. On the contrary, he was coarse, dense and quirky. ‘This,’ Mintoff mused years later, ‘made him even more endearing to me, for I had met his prototype in my best friend Kieli.’²⁸⁴ With past vibes resurfacing, and not for the last time, Domenico and Fredu became thick as thieves, and shared frequent monkeyshines and mischiefs to their boyish hearts’ content while dodging the watchful eye of their overseers. So close had they

become that during the summer of 1927 Domenico preferred to spend a large part of his first vacations away from the seminary with Fredu's family, and not with his kinfolk at Bormla.²⁸⁵ The lure seems to have been ever so powerful to the lad. In other words, despite his supposed seminary upgrade, the pattern of old—with all its nuances of compliance and rebellion, of acquiescence and guilt—came right back to reassert itself. The pattern will perhaps indeed never change its shape.

As one would expect, a boy's life at the seminary followed a flat structured week. From the dormitories, the refectory, the chapel, the study-rooms, and the classes, down to the diversions—whether some interminable football match or long walks around Valletta²⁸⁶—all had their rhymes and rhythms which were as unailing as much as invariable.²⁸⁷ On some very hot days the boys were taken for an afternoon swim close by.²⁸⁸ Family visits were restricted to just an hour or so on alternate Sunday afternoons.²⁸⁹ Slaving to the maids—with all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry to do—were a crew of nuns who mostly kept out of sight.²⁹⁰ This was an all-male world: celibate men minding pre-adolescent children, teenage boys, and young gents. Despite their strict religious setting—or, rather, because of it—the boarders' mind naturally craved sex. They were, after all, starved of it. To compensate, somehow doing the rounds were 'pictures of nudes and crude drawings of women's breasts and sexual organs,' as Mintoff apprises in his memoirs.²⁹¹ The erotic excitement was palpable. While 'I enjoyed fiddling with my body', he says about his masturbation, 'I took no part in the night-time jig-jigs [*sic*] that relieved the diabolical incubus of [older seminarians'] sexual awakening.' The vulgar slang used here leaves us wondering what these 'jig-jigs' might have been.

Academically, by UK benchmarks Domenico was on average what we would today call a 'B' student ('D' by US standards).²⁹² In his memoirs he later asserted that, both in the classroom and at study-time, 'I concentrated with a great intensity on the work I [was] meant to carry out'.²⁹³ Maybe so; but the result records do not appear to indicate much of a remarkable reap from such attentiveness. The memoirs also assure us of 'the ease with which I passed exams',²⁹⁴ a claim which might not have been entirely true. Out of the ten subjects he was made to follow through the three years at the seminary, on average Domenico really excelled only

in secular history, a subject he came to appreciate from the novels of Sir Walter Scott,²⁹⁵ and genuinely loved for the rest of his life. ('History became the favourite backdrop of my political life,' he avowed much later.)²⁹⁶ As for the rest of the subjects, he acquired middling results in religion, English language, arithmetic, Latin language, and geography, in this order,²⁹⁷ and poor to bad results in Italian language, sacred history, geometry, and algebra, also in this order.

TO COMPLEMENT THIS ACADEMIC record, Domenico's school conduct and study diligence were considered to be somewhere between satisfactory to good. He only seems to have begun flagging in concentration at the beginning of his fourth academic year. In the trimester exams around Christmas 1929 he registered a massive average drop of twenty percent from the results which he had obtained the previous July in the annuals. The rector decided that his diligence was '*poco soddisfacente*' (hardly satisfactory). Of late Domenico had been moody. Either the seminary regime or his phobias began to bite into him and make him somewhat unpredictable. As he attested decades later, he alternated between 'sudden bursts of joy, incomprehensible anxieties, restless boredom, and rootless sadness'.²⁹⁸ There were moments when he was incomprehensibly gripped with 'filthy moods which sometimes broke out with the violence of storms in our September skies [and lasted] for days on end'.²⁹⁹ These abrupt shifts in temperament would have been taken by any seminary prefect as a sure sign that the aspirant is wavering. Since this was precisely the prefect's job, to detect the signs of any backtrack, the lad's vocation would have sooner or later been called into question.

Some leeway would not have been amiss, however. Domenico's emergency removal from the seminary at the beginning of that same year, 1929, would surely have been taken into consideration.³⁰⁰ The problem was with his eyes. At first, the twelve-year old lad was much distressed by having to wear spectacles for the first time in his life because of short-sightedness.³⁰¹ Then, however, while still trying to cope with this handicap, a much more serious ailment assailed him: trachoma. This was probably due to poor personal and community sanitation. Whatever the case, since this was an infectious eye disease which in those days was blinding scores of Maltese children,

Domenico had to be immediately removed from the seminary and sent home until a certificate of freedom from trachoma was issued by a medic.³⁰² For the Mintoffs this was not a good time to have their son back home in such a serious condition. Much expense had been forked out for the marriage of the eldest daughter, Mananni, just a few months before.³⁰³ The family had even lately moved to a new Bormla residence since the one at Eagle Street, less than a hundred metres away,³⁰⁴ was given to the bride as dowry.³⁰⁵ To make matters worse, Ċetta had just given birth to another daughter, Sunta,³⁰⁶ to join the girl and three boys who were still at home, the youngest being just three years old. To tend to Dumink's medical needs on top of everything, Ċetta had to postpone her plans to redecorate their new home in preparation for her second daughter's marriage which was in the offing. In the meantime, her poor child had to lie low for two whole months before being able to return to the seminary.³⁰⁷

However much he must have tried, it seems that Domenico now was unable to settle on his lees. His results in the annual exams seem to indicate that he approached them with a stalwart spirit, placing fifth out of a class of nineteen. The trouble, however, does not appear to have been academic. The lad was now on the verge of becoming a teenager, and it surely should not have appeared so extraordinary that religious doubts began to creep into his mind. Decades later he blamed this on the profane English and Italian novels he liked to read so much.³⁰⁸ Whatever the case, such matters are rarely so simple. Mintoff may have been closer to the point when he intimated that in his final year at the seminary he began to feel too confined in 'the little world around me'.³⁰⁹ That sense of entrapment returned, surely, with much intensity, and here again his maddening cleithrophobia re-emerged. Finally, after three years at the seminary, interspersed with three summer holidays at his parents in Bormla,³¹⁰ and also every Easter recess,³¹¹ he might have begun to see the seminary and the priesthood for what they really were in his case: not God's will, not even his own, but solely Mother Ċetta's. As he hints at in his memoirs, he began to find this thought of being eternally in her pocket unbearably mortifying.³¹² Though deep down he desperately wanted, and needed, to get out, he seems to have been unable to find the right way to go about it ... until his mother, of all people, produced the silver bullet.

Things began to go south around June 1929 when Ġanna, Domenico's elder sister, got married.³¹³ On that occasion their mother saw fit that her family and friends should celebrate the happy event to a fault, even topping Mananni's wedding in September 1928, just nine months previously.³¹⁴ Everything was the bee's knees. At the seminary, however, the rector was not amused. Things came to a head at the beginning of Domenico's fourth academic year when the lad was to be honoured with donning the clerical cassock. He was thus instructed to ask his mother to procure one immediately. However, the child never apprised her, and of course the cassock never arrived. Instead, Domenico concocted lies all around with the immediate injury of not being able to confess and, consequently, receive the holy sacrament. The reason was quite silly. Quite late in the morning of every Sunday the cassocked seminarians had to serve at the bishop's high mass at the cathedral in Valletta. Since they were expected to receive holy communion from the bishop's hands, they were obliged to fast from midnight until that late hour. Domenico wanted to bunk off this loathed privation. In his childish, immature way, while preferring to go on wearing his ordinary shorts, shirt and tie,³¹⁵ Domenico did not realise how bad he made his mother look. In fact, as he subsequently gathered, she was unjustly 'blamed [by the rector] for taking a livelier interest in the maternal fortune of her marriageable daughters than in the spiritual welfare of her family' (that is, her son).³¹⁶ Ġetta was justifiably livid, poor thing, and in a few days, around the beginning of 1930, duly produced a black soutane for her son to don, whether he liked it or not.³¹⁷

The matter, however, did not end there. Having slept at length on the matter, the rector and his advisors informed Ġetta that, as her son recalled forever afterwards, 'the seminary might not be able to provide me with free board and schooling in the following academic year'.³¹⁸ In other words, with the loss of Domenico's scholarship the bottom fell off Ġetta's grand scheme. Choosing to let go of the far-off benefice—which eventually went to her cousins³¹⁹—rather than pay, Ġetta decided to pull the plug, and permanently remove her boy from the seminary.

The priesthood love affair was over.

IN LATER YEARS A number of versions were put forward, perhaps depending on the mood of the time, as to why the thirteen-year old

lad left the seminary. In his memoirs Mintoff seems to gainsay the main account which popularly prevailed that he was actually expelled by the seminary authorities because of ‘the lavishness of [the] dowry and sumptuous reception [Ĉetta] gave her daughter on her wedding day’, and presented it as a mere rumour.³²⁰ He in fact insists that it was a decision taken by *him*, not by any Church authority, even going as far as proposing the unlikely picture that in this matter he took his own way against his mother.³²¹ Furthermore, the reasons he gives for his supposed decision vary. At one point he blames his religious scepticism; at another, he faults some indistinct ideological notions which conflicted with Church doctrine; at a further point he vaguely impugns the hypocrisy of the Church; then again he inscrutably reproaches ‘the foul air of a priestly vocation’.³²² Whatever the case, it all seems as if he’s trying to boil the ocean.

The most likely scenario for the seminary fiasco, one which Mintoff struggled to be forthright about in later years, is that his superiors simply saw through the sinews of his vocation, as one would expect them to do, and pronounced him unfit to proceed with the priestly course. This would not have been necessarily for intellectual or moral reasons but, perhaps more importantly, for psychological reasons. Though the financial situation, both that of the seminary and of the Mintoff family, seems to have indeed come up at the beginning of the end, when his mother was first told that the scholarship might be withdrawn,³²³ it is very unlikely that this alone tipped the scales; the decision, in fact, seems to have been taken almost an entire year after any financial considerations had been mentioned.

Ĉetta herself was so oblivious of the reasons that brought her son’s priestly experience to an end that she ludicrously put it down to the evil eye of one of her neighbours.³²⁴ At the time, her son might not have known better. Nevertheless, it seems that deep down he did indeed feel, after all, that the seminary or the priesthood was not his place. In fact, if his memoirs are closely read, he does not appear to have been exceedingly resistant to the notion of leaving; he might even have seen it as a blessing in disguise, especially since that former instinctive hankering to ‘run away’, as he sometimes candidly expressed it,³²⁵ returned to him time and time again during those final couple of years at the seminary. Following the lad’s exit from the seminary, Bormla’s Kurat curiously told young Domenico

to his face that he had lost his priestly vocation ‘through no fault of your own’.³²⁶ This seems to imply that, according to the sharp pastor, the boy was unwittingly prey to conditions beyond his control, both within his mind and outside of it.

Whatever the case, in April 1930 the thirteen-year old could not cope with his confusion and turmoil any longer. ‘It was the little things,’ Mintoff would attest decades later, ‘those within my intellectual ability to scrutinise fully, that [ultimately] tipped the scales.’³²⁷ During the last week of that month, on leave from the seminary for the Easter recess, Domenico’s pal, Fredu, took him to have a pep talk with his saintly uncle, Rev. Alfred Gatt, in Valletta.³²⁸ Shortly before that, Domenico had even written ‘a long immature letter’, as he expressed it later, to the seminary’s prefect of studies to try to make heads and tails of his hesitations and doubts.³²⁹ Nothing seemed to work; nothing could. Domenico hoped to stick it out at least until the July annual exams.³³⁰ This would have provided him with a much-needed certificate to help him with his entrance at the Lyceum, which now was his only alternative for further studies. However, his anguish taxed his endurance excessively, for sticking it out apparently became impossible. Domenico left the seminary for good in mid-July, 1930, shortly after Whit Sunday.³³¹

THE SUMMER OF ’30 must have been one of Dumink’s weirdest, before and after. His former life, together with his preparation for it, and his life-ideal, had dismally fallen apart. He was at ground zero in a way never consciously experienced before. His personal situation at this point in time was unprecedented at least in three major ways. To begin with, from the relative security of the seminary’s safe harbour—safe in every sense conceivable, including morally, intellectually, socially and financially—he was now way out at sea and, worse still, scattered to the four winds. Secondly, he was of course no more the former boy who had entered the seminary three and a half years earlier. He was a newly fledged teenager who had to adapt himself very quickly to the ways of the world into which he was thrown. On this side of the large seminary portal he was but a mere neophyte sallying forth to brave a life he knew little about. ‘I needed desperately to discover a purpose,’ he groaned decades later.³³² But this could not come so swiftly or so easily. Thirdly—and this seems to have been the ghastlier part of his current jam—

his head was mince. The child of yore needed to be reinvented. Nonetheless, he had no definite bearing to guide his course. Barring his entrance in the seminary, this seems to have been the first time that the lad ended in a position in which he had to redefine himself. There would certainly be other instances in the future for such a dire need. Almost certainly, however, they would not be as drastic or even as blind.

The least to cause Dumink anxiety at the time was his parents' new residence in Bormla to which he permanently returned after leaving the seminary.³³³ They had moved there during the second half of 1928 while he was away.³³⁴ The new house in Saint Theresa Street was considerably larger than their former one in Eagle Street. The main reason why the Mintoffs had moved there was to give the former abode in dowry to Dumink's sister Mananni when she got married. In any case, it certainly seems that the Mintoffs were picking up as their pockets deepened. So much so that by 1931, just around when Dumink was being pulled out of the seminary purportedly for lack of financial resources, Wenzu certainly had a steady income from immovable property or from some other capital, and was in a position to pay a regular rent. In fact, as the law stipulated for males over twenty-one years of age,³³⁵ even if illiterate, Wenzu was included in the electoral register of that year (1931).³³⁶ By now, in addition to the properties he already possessed at Bormla and at the general cemetery,³³⁷ he had bought another property at Sliema,³³⁸ and shortly began renting a development plot at Marsascala,³³⁹ and another at Paola.³⁴⁰ Though the move to the new abode was, unsurprisingly, masterminded by Ċetta, who struck a bargain with impoverished owners,³⁴¹ her husband did not actually buy the place until five years later, in 1933.³⁴²

By slum standards, Saint Theresa Street was considered posh,³⁴³ possibly because it lay just outside the imaginary boundary of Bastjun,³⁴⁴ and because it was wired to the electricity supply.³⁴⁵ The Mintoffs' abode was a large, two-storey, 150-year old house accessible also from Lion Street.³⁴⁶ It must have bestowed a much coveted flair of class. Though Dumink would have perceived this, most likely he had no mind for it. What he really adored was the extravagance of his very own room. This must have been the first time in his life that he enjoyed such a precious amenity. His treat in reality was not more than a make-shift, wooden cubicle, just 3.5 m²

(12 sq. ft.), perched like a small tower on the flat roof of the old building some fifteen metres (50 ft.) above street level.³⁴⁷ ‘My room,’ he would affectionately recall forever after, ‘gave me the great luxury of privacy galore.’³⁴⁸ Its difficult accessibility, in fact, made arduous by more than the sixty large steps one had to climb to get to it, was its best and most cherished asset. The room felt closer to the moon than to mother Earth, and that was precisely what Dumink needed, and wanted, in order to mollify his demons and begin to tidy up a bit of his abysmal confusion.

The lad had already lodged in this room while at home during the summer vacations of the previous couple of years.³⁴⁹ Now, high up in his isolation, the troubled adolescent treasured the room ever more keenly: he commanded a breathtaking view of the streets below as far down as the Royal Dockyard; he exulted in the awesome star-studded sky every night in those pitch-dark times; he savoured the blessed breeze that assuaged the horrid summer heat; he gloried in the thunderstorms which occasionally visited the islands, and he was undisturbed for hours on end to do whatever he felt like doing to his heart’s content.³⁵⁰ With all the time in the world on his hands, one thing he did was read incessantly, sometimes even books for which, as he admitted years later, ‘I had not yet grown the intellectual teeth to masticate [their] wisdom’.³⁵¹ These would have mostly been non-fictional books tending towards theorisation, which—though he needed to read them attentively, and did—do not seem to have really been his cup of tea. ‘The reading of novels,’ he candidly conceded in his older days, ‘was my great passion.’³⁵² Local and foreign newspapers, magazines, encyclopaedias, and such like publications of general knowledge, he read at the public library in Valletta which he visited on Saturday mornings.³⁵³

Less conventionally, another thing Dumink did was to go stark naked; during the night and at times even during the day.³⁵⁴ This definitely seems to have been one way of drawing a line between the past and the present. It demonstrates his defiance. In a household bustling with women, at a seminary swarming with males, never in his entire life could Dumink be so carefree. In his own way, after some eight years of much water under the bridges, the lad could finally draw closer to that Mandragg-enthused fantasy, Liżew, or at least begin to, anyway. He seems to have even gone as far as to dare display himself naked in full view of a young girl who happened to

be on a neighbouring rooftop, though later he claimed that this was just accidental.³⁵⁵

Anyway, going naked seems to have given Dumink a buzz in an otherwise let-down existence. It had the feel of making off. More than anything else, however, going around *au naturel*, with all its libidinous implications, must have evoked a vibe of naughty irreligiousness. Sex and Catholic catechism, as is well known, have never been the best of friends; the former being nothing short of an obsession with most moralists and preachers. Dumink would have been totally cognizant of the seditiousness of his new habit. Religion must have epitomised in his mind all that Grandfather Pagann, Mother Cetta and the seminary, if not the entire Church, stood for. In a way, then, it might seem reasonably evident that the ambit reflexively chosen by teenage Dumink to fight his toughest and most unforgiving battle—the religious field—was a mere substitute for where he could not, in all honesty, engage himself. That was on his own mother’s turf. He thus appears to displace his emotions and desires by transferring them to an area where he could give them battle. This was religion.

The conflict was not new to the lad of course; he had already begun to experience it intensely behind the seminary walls, obviously because the Church was his immediate context, and religion was the main thing in reach within his restrained focus area. With limited critical resources, he seems to have arbitrarily decided that religion was the problem; whence he then carried it forth into the open. In fact, a lifetime later he had to identify this struggle as a ‘religious convulsion’ or even as a ‘spiritual revolt’.³⁵⁶ This created problems of its own. For the lad seems to have genuinely cherished the most basic of Christian instincts, that is, the love of God through goodness, and the love of neighbour through equitable justice. Nevertheless, despite this, institutionalised religion or its representatives, the vehicle of such teachings, somehow seemed to imply some kind of subjugating tyranny or, rather, the subduing or crushing of one’s self or personality. Sainthood, whatever that meant, or at least Christian ethics, seemed to clash with ecclesial officialdom. This might explain why at this time Dumink revered Christian saints such as Francis of Assisi, who in most eyes fought the Church institution and won. ‘The illustrious Italian humanists,’ Mintoff would write years later, ‘with whom, in my early teens, I

associated Francis of Assisi and his soul-mate Clare, conveyed to me [...] the *joie de vivre* that gushed forth like sparkling water from a bursting dam.³⁵⁷ The choice of words here is suggestive enough: the early teens, a ruptured enclosure, an effusive escape, a gratifying life; each one apparently conditional on the one before it. Though clearly the framework is not and need not be religious, it is *given* a religious timbre. ‘At fourteen,’ Mintoff recalled much later on his youth around 1930, ‘besides reaching full sexual maturity, I had rid myself entirely of any fear of Catholic fire and brimstone.’³⁵⁸

This could only have been anything but certain at the time. What is positively clear is the perceived link in the lad’s mind between sex and religion as between God’s wrath and sexual arousal. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable enough to note that Dumink’s secretive nudity somehow protested against his sense of confinement and suffocation, even if in a somewhat craven way. On the other hand, however, for him to associate these with God or religion clearly went a long way in avoiding a confrontation with what he dared not call by name. Mother was that name, but he had no nerve to challenge her neither mentally or affectively nor face to face. In fact, during that summer of 1930 he could not bring himself to tell her that he had completely given up attending mass, which was another way of rebelling against what he perceived to be his religious problem.³⁵⁹ Apparently, he did not fear God but dreaded his mother. Moreover, his cowardice went further, because on this score he had even led her down the garden path. This continued forever afterwards, as he never succeeded in coming clean with her about his skiving. Again, it seems that he could be placidly straight with God but not with his mother. Instead of dealing with her truthfully, Dumink had to play the part by spending time elsewhere, generally on long, solitary walks in the wilderness around the Cottonera bastions,³⁶⁰ or else sometimes going to watch some silent movie at the local cinema.³⁶¹

By reflexively displacing his emotional focus, Dumink was merely evading the jam he could not otherwise face. Though outwardly he might have appeared unperturbed, he must have been as cool as a cat. Like any adolescent who had the misfortune of a peculiarly difficult situation on his hands, he acted impulsively out of confusion in order to survive the moment. His was an identity crisis which, for the next few years, had to be weathered. ‘The more I learnt about people and things [through books],’ he confided a lifetime

later, ‘the less I knew about myself. Like all other teenagers,’ he proceeded, ‘I identified myself with the hero of every story I heard, every silent picture I saw, every novel I read, until I tried to live up to them.’ Poor child, in this mare’s nest his mind appears to have been understandably all scattered, not knowing exactly what was happening to him or who he was, and at a time ‘when the future was not beckoning’, as he placidly expressed it.³⁶² Despite being in a fog, it looks as if one mediaeval legend which Dumink read at the time proffered some consolation. ‘In my teens,’ he remembered always, ‘I lapped with delight an unforgettable story about the Arabs’ bravery in battle.’³⁶³ This was Tariq ibn Ziyad’s capture of Gibraltar in 711 CE. The tale relates that this Umayyad commander only succeeded in finally seizing the rock by ordering the ships he arrived in to be burnt in order to prevent any going back, exclaiming: ‘We conquer or we die!’ This anecdote must have touched Dumink’s feelings to the core while as a sort of latter-day Tariq he felt the full weight of his predicament and faced his precarious future.

Like Tariq, the shore which Dumink decided to conquer was not his native one. Young as he was, he determined that Malta was no place for him to live in, and resolved to leave for good ‘as soon as I was able’, as he later revealed.³⁶⁴ This sounds too momentous a decision for a thirteen-year-old, surely. From what Mintoff intimated many years later on his intent to emigrate, it certainly does not appear that it had anything to do with any economic necessity. In other words, Dumink did not decide to move abroad due to some compulsion to find steady employment elsewhere as, for instance, Grandfather Danjeli and Uncle Johnny—his dad’s father and brother—had done years before by leaving for Algeria; as more than 16,000 other Maltese and Gozitans did between 1922 and 1930 to places such as North Africa, France, Australia, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.³⁶⁵ His was a compulsion of another kind.

Perhaps a glimpse of his duress was intimated many years later when he attempted to explain his experience at the time. The main reasons he acknowledged for settling on emigration was ‘to escape from the clutches of the Catholic Church in Malta and Britain’s suffocating colonial regime’.³⁶⁶ Though this evidently looks too sophisticated a motive for the boy’s experience around 1930, and seems to fit his development of a few years later, nevertheless one should note the expressive language used, such as ‘to escape’, ‘from

the clutches', and 'suffocating'. Elsewhere he uses identical words, saying, for instance, that moving abroad 'will *get me out of the clutches* of our [bishop's] curia',³⁶⁷ and that he wanted to relocate because 'the moral atmosphere on my lovely island got more *suffocating*'.³⁶⁸ Similarly, somewhere else he states that 'I wanted to *escape* from the narrow, conventional morals and make-believe environment of a convent fortress'.³⁶⁹ Apart from whether the Church did any clutching, or whether the regime had been suffocating, all in all the terminology suggests the resurfacing of that phobia of being trapped or cornered with which the child was acquainted for years. Mintoff himself, to be sure, suspected as much. In his memoirs he intimated that further reflection on his impelling compulsion to permanently flee the island brought him to the conclusion that solely blaming the Catholic Church and Britain's colonial regime could not sufficiently explain it away. 'There were other powerful sentiments that [at the time] had escaped my notice,' he confessed.³⁷⁰

What sentiments he had in mind he did not say. Maybe he could not. Nevertheless, he was certain that they were subconsciously entrenched, as he candidly owned up: 'I detect undeniably deeper roots for my troublesome urge,' he stated.³⁷¹ His attempts, however, to get to the bottom of what he defined as his 'great urge to move away from our shores'³⁷² perhaps could never fly. This stands to reason. For displacing the targets one needs to pursue by substituting what is felt to be too dangerous or unacceptable to tackle directly with something safe, thus transferring emotions from one thing to another, is a dead duck from the word go. This possibly transpires when considering what Mintoff thought to be the causes of his obsession to flee. '[While] I was on tenterhooks to leave the island',³⁷³ he shot years later, '[I was continually] blaming others for stodgy narrowness without realising that *the main fault* was the restlessness and the impatience within myself' (Emphasis added).³⁷⁴

Certainly, restlessness and impatience can hardly be considered appropriate words to spell out fully the urgings of a phobia which plagues its victim with anxiety and even fear. Indeed, at least the young Mintoff realised that he had placed blame behind the wrong door, but this apparently did not help him to fathom where it should have gone. In a few years that is exactly what he'll do while embarking on his particular brand of a mission.

¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 510, para. 2.

²*Ibid.*, f. 401, para. 3.

³Sammy Meilaq to the author (15/10/20).

⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 401, para. 8.

⁵See: LRM, 1900/1211, 1902/2489, 1906/1508, 1909/2273, 1909/2552, 1909/2852, 1910/3006, 1911/826, 1911/1620, 1911/1866, 1912/712, 1912/808, 1912/1715, 1913/870, 1913/1142, 1913/1224, 1913/1608, 1914/1309, 1916/620, 1917/456, 1918/1770, 1921/1343, 1921/1696, 1921/1697, 1921/1783, 1922/2445, 1923/1485 and 1925/1430.

⁶See: *Ibid.*, 1923/2907, 1925/646, 1929/937 and 1930/2869.

⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 401, para. 3-7.

⁸*Ibid.*, f. 401, para. 6.

⁹*Ibid.*, f. 401, para. 6.

¹⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 38, 135.

¹¹See: *Ibid.*, pp. 135f.

¹²See: *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 423, para. 1; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 135.

¹⁵*Orig. Mem.*, f. 423, para. 1; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 135.

¹⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 135.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 6.

²⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 35.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 301f; partly reproduced in: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 41f.

²³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 301, para. 6.

²⁴*Ibid.*, f. 424, para. 3.

²⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 27.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 36f.

²⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 829, para. 2.

²⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 518.

²⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 863, para. 5.

³⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 341.

³¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 863, para. 5; f. 829, para. 2; f. 865, para. 12. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 341, 368f., 518f.

³²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 369.

³³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 829, para. 2.

³⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 369.

³⁵*Orig. Mem.*, f. 738, para. 6; f. 829, para. 3. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 341, 534.

³⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 137.

³⁷For the incident, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 141f.; and pp. 368f. for the premonition associated with it. The man in question was William (Gulierm) Ebejer, from Bormla, who was given a cap and half a penny (*sitt babbi*) by Dumink's ever grateful mother as recompense; information by George Ebejer, William's son, to the author (27/11/18).

³⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 369.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 518.

⁴⁰See: Robert Langs (2002), "Three forms of death anxiety", in *Death and Denial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Legacy of Ernest Becker*, ed. by Daniel Liechty, Praeger Publishing, California, USA, pp. 73-84; and Robert Langs (2004), "Death anxiety and the emotion-processing mind", *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 1, American Psychoanalytic Association, USA, pp. 31-53.

⁴¹See: Emanuele Castano, et al. (2011),

"Ideology, fear of death, and death anxiety", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 4, International Society of Political Psychology, USA, pp. 601-621.

⁴²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 170; Mintoiff is rather generic with regard to the exact period of time, once stating 'before I entered the seminary [in February 1927 at 10 years of age]', and elsewhere stating '[in] a period from my infancy' (*Ibid.*, p. 724). These suggest a time frame starting, say, from 1923 (at 6 years of age) onwards.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁵See: *Ibid.*

⁴⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴⁷See: *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁰In one version, in 'a khaki boiler suit' (*Ibid.*, p. 171); in another, 'in khaki shirt and trousers' (*Ibid.*, p. 356).

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁵²See: *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 357.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 355, para. 8, to f. 358, para. 8; bits and pieces of which are reproduced in: *Abr. Mem.*, 109–114. Though Mintoiff does not provide the exact date of this occurrence, only saying that 'I was not yet six', it can be reckoned that he is referring to that quake strongly felt in the Maltese Islands on Tuesday, 18 September 1923, at 7.30 AM (level VI on the EMS-98 scale). At the time he had turned seven just five weeks before. For information on the quake, see: Pauline Galea (2007), "Seismic history of the Maltese Islands and considerations on seismic risk", *Annals of Geophysics*, Vol. 50, No. 6., University of Malta, Malta, pp. 731, 735.

⁵⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 170.

⁵⁹See: Richard L. Gregory (1980), "Perceptions as hypotheses", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Series B: Biological Sciences*, Vol. 290, No. 1038, pp. 181–97.

⁶⁰See: Maria Camilleri, MBS, p. 592.

⁶¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 795, para. 11.

⁶²*Ibid.*, f. 620, para. 12; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 251.

⁶³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 874, para. 13.

⁶⁴Maria Camilleri to the author (21/07/14).

⁶⁵For lack of sports prior to middle-age, see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 252, 469.

⁶⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 888, para. 4.

⁶⁷See, for instance: *Ibid.*, f. 252, para. 6 ('[Father Anselm] won my heart completely when he invited me to join him for a swim'); f. 569, para. 2 ('[Is-Soy] was as keen on swimming as me'); f. 569-71 (swimming at the baths of Saint Rocco Landing Place, Valletta); f. 740, para. 12 (swimming at Ricasoli Beach, Kalkara); f. 773, para. 9 (swimming from Saint Rocco baths to Manoel Island and

back); f.798, para. 6 (swimming at Oxford); f. 835, para. 2 (swimming at Portishead, England); f. 872-4, bits and pieces of which are reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 502f.; and also: *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 252, 374.

⁶⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 371.

⁶⁹See: Maria Camilleri, MBS, p. 594.

⁷⁰*Orig. Mem.*, f. 554, para. 4.

⁷¹See: Joe Grima, ELM, p. 671; also: Zammit, Martin, *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁷²See: Joe Debono Grech, ELM, p. 192.

⁷³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 980, para. 8.

⁷⁴Mary Spiteri, ELM, p. 213.

⁷⁵Vincent Arnaud to the author (12/07/18).

⁷⁶Emmanuel Magrin, son of a stalwart Mintoiff supporter, Joe Magrin, to the author (10/04/06).

⁷⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 980, para. 8.

⁷⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 137.

⁷⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 400-7, bits and pieces of which were reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 118–123.

⁸⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 118. He lived from 1860 till 1924. See also: Pawlu Zammit (2018), "*Mons. Spiridione Penza: Il-qassis tal-fara*" [Rev. Spyridon Penza: Priest of the poor], *Last Supper 2018*, Domus Pio IX, Bormla, pp. 21ff.; Simon Mercieca, BSM, pp. 65f.

⁸¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 405, para. 6.

⁸²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 119.

⁸³Save for the year clearly marked on a contemporary photograph, no record of the event seems to exist at the Bormla parish archive.

⁸⁴Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Confirmation Registers*, Vol. 6, f. 121', for Sunday, 29 April 1923. Dumink's godparent was Pagann.

⁸⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 123.

⁸⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 120, where most of the information given contradicts what was reported by Simon Mercieca, BSM, pp. 59–78.

⁸⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 123.

⁸⁸Dionysius Mintoiff, BSM, p. 66.

⁸⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 123.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁹²*Orig. Mem.*, f. 406, para. 3; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 120.

⁹³She was born in 1888; Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 19, f. 207; her official name was Elisa.

⁹⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 412, para. 2; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 129.

⁹⁵Adolf Agius, a university student with Mintoiff, as reported by Alfred Zammit to the author (24/07/17).

⁹⁶See: Neil J. Lavender and Alan Covaioia (2010), *The One-Way Relationship Workbook: Step-by-step help for coping with narcissists, egotistical lovers, toxic co-workers, and others who are incredibly self-absorbed*, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, California, USA, pp. 38f., 44.

⁹⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 787, para. 13; mostly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 426.

⁹⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 124.

⁹⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 437, para. 3ff.

- ¹⁰²See: *Ibid.*, f. 428, para. 3.
- ¹⁰³See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 137.
- ¹⁰⁴See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 428, para. 2.
- ¹⁰⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 140.
- ¹⁰⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 417, para. 7.
- ¹⁰⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 114.
- ¹⁰⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- ¹⁰⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 440, para. 6.
- ¹¹⁰See: *Ibid.*, f. 425, para. 7.
- ¹¹¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 137 (the original in the *Orig. Mem.* has 'infants' instead of 'children'). Consider also: *Ibid.*, p. 114: '[At the Elementary] the school hours were boring and long.'
- ¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 138.
- ¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 140.
- ¹¹⁴See: *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- ¹¹⁵*Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 137.
- ¹¹⁷See: *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- ¹¹⁸See: *Ibid.*, pp. 138f.
- ¹¹⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 439f., *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 143, 383.
- ¹²⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 430, para. 3.
- ¹²¹See: *Ibid.*, f. 472, para. 6; mostly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 166.
- ¹²²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 143.
- ¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ¹²⁴See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 420, para. 6.
- ¹²⁵*Ibid.*
- ¹²⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 133.
- ¹²⁷Martin Zammit, ELM, p. 282; also: Maria Camilleri to the author (21/07/14).
- ¹²⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 130.
- ¹²⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 566, para. 4–10.
- ¹³⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 132f. The poor vendor's name was Masu.
- ¹³¹See: *Ibid.*, pp. 138f.
- ¹³²See: *Ibid.*, pp. 130f.
- ¹³³Armando Seychell, MBS, p. 568; also: Simon Mercieca, BSM, p. 63.
- ¹³⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 115.
- ¹³⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ¹³⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 138. While Mintoff states in his memoirs that Kiel was 'about sixteen months older than me' (*Orig. Mem.*, f. 430, para. 3), he was in fact older by just twelve months and a half. In the baptismal records of Bormla there is no other Michael registered between January and September 1915 except him. His baptism registration, dated 1 August 1915, states that he was born 'nadius tertius' (the day before yesterday), that is, on 30 July 1915. He was baptised 'sub conditionem' (conditionally), which indicates that he was baptised by the midwife because in danger of death due to some difficulty in delivery. His father was John Mary (Gamm) Debono, and his mother Carmela née Cachia. His full name was Michael, John, Amans, and his baptismal godparents were Francis and Emmanuela Said, son and daughter of John, both from Bormla (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 21, f. 103). A marginal note in the registry states that Kiel married Catherine Grech on 24 July 1954 at the church of St Paul the Apostle, Toronto, Canada, indicating that he permanently emigrated to that country.
- ¹³⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 433, para. 4.
- ¹³⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 138.
- ¹³⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 437, para. 2–5.
- ¹⁴⁰See: *Ibid.*, f. 438, para. 2–7.
- ¹⁴¹See: *Ibid.*, ff. 432ff.
- ¹⁴²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 158.
- ¹⁴³See: *Ibid.*, pp. 141f.
- ¹⁴⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 433, para. 6.
- ¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, f. 434, para. 3.
- ¹⁴⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 143.
- ¹⁴⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 439, para. 4.
- ¹⁴⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 147.
- ¹⁴⁹Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 386.
- ¹⁵⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 164.
- ¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 344.
- ¹⁵²Until 2 April 1925 (since 26 February 1924); see: NAE, ADM 188/544/358912, sheet 2. H.M.S. *Eagle*, with a complement of some eight hundred souls, was the largest aircraft carrier in the world.
- ¹⁵³From 3 April until 6 June 1925, when he retired; see: *Ibid.* 188/544/358912, sheet 2, in which the fort, as mentioned earlier, was referred to as H.M.S. *Egmont*.
- ¹⁵⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 150.
- ¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 497.
- ¹⁵⁶See: Vanessa Moulton, Eirini Flouri, Heather Joshi, and Alice Sullivan (2015), 'The role of aspirations in young children's emotional and behavioural problems', *The British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 6, December issue, British Educational Research Association, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., United Kingdom, pp. 925–946.
- ¹⁵⁷*Abr. Mem.*, pp. 154f. (slightly altered from the original in *Orig. Mem.*, f. 459, para. 6).
- ¹⁵⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 147.
- ¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 144.
- ¹⁶¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 452, para. 4.
- ¹⁶²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 147.
- ¹⁶³See: *Ibid.*, p. 152. The person in question was a Manuel Ellul from the 'Ta' Bondina family, known by one and all as *L-Ghasfur* (The Birdy).
- ¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 150, 152.
- ¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ¹⁶⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 538, para. 7.
- ¹⁶⁹See: *Ibid.*, f. 419, para. 2f. The person in question was a certain Guzi (Joe), known as *It-Tamat* (The Dates).
- ¹⁷⁰See: *Ibid.*, f. 418f. The person in question was known as *It-Mutu* (The Mute).
- ¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, f. 418, para. 5.
- ¹⁷²*Ibid.*, f. 252, para. 2.
- ¹⁷³See: *Ibid.*, f. 253, para. 2; 'I was not yet nine,' Mintoff states, meaning 1925.
- ¹⁷⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 155.
- ¹⁷⁵Victor Mallia-Milanes, *De La Salle College*, 3 vols., De La Salle College Publication, Malta, Vol. 1, *A Study in Growth*, 1979, pp. 13f. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 155. Though Mintoff gives the name as '*Sirada Bnongiorno*' (in Italian), the correct spelling should have been '*Sirada Bongiorno*', the latter being the surname of a Knight of St John who was a great philanthropist who had paid for the building and upkeep of the *Ospizio* or *Conservatorio* (hospital) in Bormla. To make matters worse, the British later erroneously Anglicised the street's name to '*Good Day Street*'. On the street's name, see: Frans H. Said (2008), 'Street Naming is serious business', *The Times of Malta*, 8 October.
- ¹⁷⁶See: Archive of the Christian Brothers, Cottonera, Malta, *Brothers who have worked in Malta*, ff. 1–3; and Victor Mallia-Milanes, *De La Salle College*, 3 vols., De La Salle College Publication, Malta, Vol. 1, *A Study in Growth*, 1979, pp. 81–7.
- ¹⁷⁷Archive of the Christian Brothers' Mother House, Rome, *Etat Nominatif et Statistique*, compiled by Brother Francis Muscat, published by Victor Mallia-Milanes, *De La Salle College*, 3 vols., De La Salle College Publication, Malta, Vol. 1, *A Study in Growth*, 1979, p. 90.
- ¹⁷⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 162.
- ¹⁷⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ¹⁸⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 460, para. 7; and *Abr. Mem.*, p. 166.
- ¹⁸¹Archive of the Christian Brothers, Cottonera, Malta, *Historique*, Vol. 1 (1903–1930), ff. 125f.
- ¹⁸²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 157.
- ¹⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 162; the word 'totally' can only be found in the original (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 468, para. 2).
- ¹⁸⁴See: Archive of the Christian Brothers, Cottonera, Malta, *Historique*, Vol. 1 (1903–1930), ff. 129ff.
- ¹⁸⁵See: *Ibid.*, f. 131.
- ¹⁸⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 155. According to the same source, he 'lived with his aged mother and elder sister in the upper part of *Sirada Toru* [Bull Street].'
- ¹⁸⁷Victor Mallia-Milanes, *De La Salle College*, 3 vols., De La Salle College Publication, Malta, Vol. 1, *A Study in Growth*, 1979, p. 57. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 155.
- ¹⁸⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 155, 158, 167.
- ¹⁸⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 156. For the help given, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 460, para. 9, to f. 461, para. 3; and f. 462, para. 9, to f. 463, para. 2.
- ¹⁹⁰LRM, 1923/2907. For more on this property, see: 'Dom Mintoff family gets compensation for expropriated property', *Times of Malta Online*, 21 May 2004 (accessed: 19/10/13); Chris Mangion, 'Dom Mintoff's relatives get €24,200 for expropriated land: Director of Lands ordered to pay €24,200 to relatives of former Prime Minister Dom Mintoff for a building expropriated from them seven years ago', *Maltatoday Online*, 21 May 2004 (accessed: 29/09/15).
- ¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 1925/646. The tomb was situated at Division West, Compartment C, Letter LA, Number 21. It was bought on 7 March 1925 from Luigi Tabone, a carpenter, born and residing at Bormla.
- ¹⁹²See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 245. One of the families in question was that of the Pisani merchant one (see: *ibid.*);

- another could have been the Licari tobacco importer with whom Cetta worked as a girl (see: *Ibid.*, p. 164).
- ¹⁹³Twice in his memoirs Mintoff writes of ‘my three-year stay at the Frères’ (*Ibid.*, pp. 156, 162), which evidently refer to calendar years rather than to the academic years.
- ¹⁹⁴See: *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ¹⁹⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 463, para. 3.
- ¹⁹⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 164.
- ¹⁹⁷See: *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ¹⁹⁹The French Frères were Brother Felix Tarile (Ambroise Villar), from Largentière, Ardèche (1873-1953), and Brother Maurice Theodoret (Joseph Jonquet), from Millau, Aveyron (1876-1965); the Irish was Brother Leo Alphonsus (William Daunt), from Clonakilty, West Cork (1866-1930); and the Maltese were Brother François Patrice, known as Brother Patrick (Joseph Gambin), from Birkirkara (1899-1964), and Brother Raphael Bonose (Fortunato Polomeni), from Hamrun (1890-1935). See: Victor Mallia-Milanes, *De La Salle College*, 3 vols., De La Salle College Publication, Malta, Vol. 1, *A Study in Growth*, 1979, pp. 80-6; and Archive of the Christian Brothers, Cottonera, Malta, *Brothers who have worked in Malta*, ff. 1-3.
- ²⁰⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 156.
- ²⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ²⁰²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 463, para. 4.
- ²⁰³See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 165.
- ²⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ²⁰⁵See: *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 165, 167.
- ²⁰⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ²⁰⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 474, para. 5; f. 475, para. 7.
- ²⁰⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 167.
- ²⁰⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 474, para. 5.
- ²¹⁰*Ibid.*, f. 474, para. 5.
- ²¹¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 167.
- ²¹²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 474, para. 4.
- ²¹³See: *Ibid.*, para. 6f. This Angelo Ghigo, from Qrendi, lived in Lion Street, Bormla, just a stone’s throw from the Mintoffs.
- ²¹⁴See: *Ibid.*, para. 7.
- ²¹⁵See: *Ibid.*, f. 475, para. 6.
- ²¹⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 158.
- ²¹⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 452, para. 3.
- ²¹⁸*Ibid.*, f. 463, para. 2.
- ²¹⁹Anton Cassar, ELM, p. 655; the occasion was a public concert organised at Bormla by the local St George’s Band Club for Mintoff’s 80th birthday in August 1996.
- ²²⁰Dom Mintoff, meeting at Bormla, 5 May 2003 (Josef Grech Collection).
- ²²¹*The Malta Herald*, 28 September 1927; also: Archive of the Christian Brothers, Cottonera, Malta, *Historique*, Vol. 1 (1903-1930), f. 137. The other boy who made it for the seminary was Joseph Gonzi, a nephew of Bishop Michael Gonzi (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 82).
- ²²²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 144.
- ²²³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 390, para. 8.
- ²²⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 164.
- ²²⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 855, para. 7.
- ²²⁶*Ibid.*, f. 860, para. 11.
- ²²⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 118 (with minor editorial improvements; see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 397, para. 8).
- ²²⁸See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 147, para. 2, 7; also: f. 149, para. 1.
- ²²⁹See, for instance: Henry Frendo (2016), ‘Mintoff, Dominic [Dom] (1916–2012)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, England; and also: Simon Mercieca, BSM, 59–78.
- ²³⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 474, para. 3; also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 168.
- ²³¹The palace housed the minor seminary from 1892 till 1977; see: maltaseminary.org (accessed 26-12-18); see also: Anthony Aquilina (2002), ‘25 sena Tal-Virtù’ [25 years at Tal-Virtù], *Minor Seminary*, Malta, No. 21 (December).
- ²³²AAS, *Rapporti dei Studenti* [Students’ Reports] 1926–27, f. 151, supra. In his memoirs Mintoff wrote that, despite not having any record of the exact date of his admission, he reckoned it must have been ‘only a week or two before the Lent of 1927’ (*Abr. Mem.*, p. 168). Actually it was just four days before; Ash Wednesday falling on 2 March. The weekend of Dumink’s admission was that before Carnival.
- ²³³*Ibid.*, *Ammissioni e Riparazioni* [Admissions and Alterations] 1922–1945; see: ‘*Sessione in Gennaio 1927*’, where it is said that the other boy’s name was Gerardo Pulis. Dumink’s surname is recorded as ‘Mintuf’. The record might indicate that Dumink’s tests were held at Bormla itself, perhaps at 19(?) St Theresa Street (this address does not seem to have anything to do with the Mintoffs; it might have been a priest’s address).
- ²³⁴See: *Ibid.*; and *Orig. Mem.*, f. 475, para. 7.
- ²³⁵AAS, *Ammissioni e Riparazioni* [Admissions and Alterations] 1922–1945; the marks obtained were: Italian and Arithmetic, 88/100 each; English, 68/100.
- ²³⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 168.
- ²³⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 474, para. 4, 6; also: f. 475, para. 7.
- ²³⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 167.
- ²³⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 146, para. 3.
- ²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, f. 475, para. 7.
- ²⁴¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 168.
- ²⁴²*Ibid.*
- ²⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 206.
- ²⁴⁴See: *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ²⁴⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- ²⁴⁶See: *Ibid.*
- ²⁴⁷See: *Ibid.*
- ²⁴⁸See: *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 192; see also part removed from the latter page: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 501, para. 6.
- ²⁴⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 501, para. 6.
- ²⁵⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 167f.
- ²⁵¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 501, para. 6.
- ²⁵²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 170.
- ²⁵³*Ibid.*
- ²⁵⁴See: Joseph Cassar Pullicino (1949), ‘The Order of St John in Maltese folk-memory’, *Scientia*, Malta, Vol. 15, No. 4 (October-December), p. 167.
- ²⁵⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 476, para. 1 and 2.
- ²⁵⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 168ff.
- ²⁵⁷See: *Ibid.*, pp. 168f. In his memoirs Mintoff states that at the time his father ‘was serving Britain on the high seas’, forgetting that by then, in February 1927, Wenzu had already been retired from Navy services for more than a year.
- ²⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 170.
- ²⁵⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 482, para. 4: ‘In [the] dramatic narrative depicting how the words of Jesus transformed the lives of heathens, my grey cells were pure like water in the clouds and, in their small way, shared [in the] fervent rendering of the ordeals faced by the new converts.’
- ²⁶⁰*Abr. Mem.*, p. 170.
- ²⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 497.
- ²⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 240.
- ²⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 497.
- ²⁶⁴*Ibid.*
- ²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 196.
- ²⁶⁶See: AAS, *Ammissioni e Riparazioni* [Admissions and Alterations] 1922–1945; and *Rapporti dei Studenti* [Students’ Reports] for the years 1927 to 1930.
- ²⁶⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 48, para. 3.
- ²⁶⁸*Ibid.*, f. 663, para. 4.
- ²⁶⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 240.
- ²⁷⁰*Ibid.*
- ²⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 179.
- ²⁷²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 480, para. 9, to f. 481, para. 4.
- ²⁷³*Abr. Mem.*, p. 82.
- ²⁷⁴See also to: *Ibid.*, p. 172; and Mark Montebello (2018), *Dimech*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2, Miller Distributors, Malta (1st ed., Publishers Enterprises Group, Malta, 2004), pp. 134f., 141, 157, 158f., 168, 249f., 252.
- ²⁷⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 475, para. 5.
- ²⁷⁶See: *Ibid.*, f. 484, para. 10, and the following para.; and also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 177ff.
- ²⁷⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 181f.
- ²⁷⁸See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 50, para. 2f.
- ²⁷⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 181.
- ²⁸⁰Anton Cassar (2012), ‘*L-esperjenzi tiegħi ma’ Dom Mintoff*’ [My experiences with Dom Mintoff], *L-Abbar Tislima* [The Last Farewell], special supplement of *L-Oriġġon*, 25 August, 2012, Malta, p. X; and also: Anton Cassar, ELM, p. 654.
- ²⁸¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 230.
- ²⁸²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 480, para. 5.
- ²⁸³See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 177ff. The village was Qormi.
- ²⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ²⁸⁵See: *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 179.
- ²⁸⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 484, para. 2; also (for the walks): f. 570, para. 7, and *Abr. Mem.*, p. 185.
- ²⁸⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 171ff; also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 484, para. 2 (on rising at 6.00 AM); f. 542, para. 2 (on washing in cold water).
- ²⁸⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 187ff; also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 569, para. 8 (swimming at Saint Rocco Landing Place, Marsamxett Harbour, Valletta, opposite Manoel Island).
- ²⁸⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 500, para. 6.
- ²⁹⁰See: *Ibid.*, f. 484, para. 6f., and f. 485,

- para. 2f.
- ²⁹¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 538, para. 7f.
- ²⁹²For the academic information contained in this and the subsequent paragraphs, see: AAS, *Rapporti dei Studenti* [Students' Reports] for the years 1927 to 1930.
- ²⁹³*Ibid. Mem.*, p. 180.
- ²⁹⁴*Ibid.*
- ²⁹⁵See: *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- ²⁹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 183f.
- ²⁹⁷For the myth that Mintoff excelled in Latin, see: Dionysius Mintoff, BSM, p. 67. Mintoff average in Latin was just 66% or B according to the British grading, and D to the American (AAS, *Rapporti dei Studenti* [Students' Reports] for the years 1927 to 1930).
- ²⁹⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 196.
- ²⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 185.
- ³⁰⁰For the information in this paragraph, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 186f.
- ³⁰¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 495, para. 6f., and: f. 875, para. 1.
- ³⁰²For this and the following information, see: Francis Joseph Damato (1961), "The fight against trachoma in the island of Malta", *British Journal of Ophthalmology*, London, England, Vol. 51, No. 71, 71-74.
- ³⁰³On Saturday, 29 September 1928, at the Qormi parish church (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 20, f. 303r).
- ³⁰⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 186.
- ³⁰⁵*Ibid.*
- ³⁰⁶On 11 March 1929, at 8.00 PM. At the child's baptism the day after at the Bormla parish, she was given the names Mary Assumption, Dolores, Josephine, Mary Conception, Salvina. Her godparent was Mary Annunciation Bonnici, wife of Saviour, from Bormla (Bormla Parish Archives, Malta, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 24, f. 112v).
- ³⁰⁷The medic who tended to him was Dr Ramiro Cauchi Ingliott, a cousin, three times removed, of the aforementioned Dr Giovanni Felice Ingliott (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 186).
- ³⁰⁸See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 146, para. 7.
- ³⁰⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 240.
- ³¹⁰See: *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- ³¹¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 253, para. 6.
- ³¹²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 196.
- ³¹³This was to her twice removed cousin Carmelo Lautier of Bormla, born on 19 July 1907 at the chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes, Floriana, which belonged to the Franciscan Capuchins, before Rev. Antonio Camilleri and witnesses John Mary Farrugia (Paġann), aged 72, and his son John Farrugia, aged 46, who lived at Pietà (Floriana Parish Archives, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 4, f. 241).
- ³¹⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 186. Unless otherwise stated, for the information contained in this and the subsequent paragraphs, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 190ff., *passim*.
- ³¹⁵For outside walks, the boy additionally donned a cap bearing the seminary's emblem in yellow, and a coat (*Orig. Mem.*, f. 483, para. 5).
- ³¹⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 191.
- ³¹⁷For a reference to mother buying Dominic 'priestly vestments', meaning a cassock, see: Raymond Mintoff, ELM, p. 386.
- ³¹⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 192.
- ³¹⁹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 501, para. 6.
- ³²⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 192. See also: Noel Grima (2019), "Gannmink from Bastjun", *The Malta Independent*, Malta, 14 May. For the recurrence of this rumour, see, for instance: Mario Cutajar (2012), "*Mintoff: Qablu u warajh*" [Mintoff: Prior to him and afterwards], *Dom Mintoff (1916-2012): L-arkitekt ta' Malta bielsa* [Dom Mintoff: The architect of free Malta], special edition magazine, *If-Torja*, ed. by Aleks Farrugia, Malta, p. 11.
- ³²¹For this and the subsequent information, see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 192ff. See also: Melvic Zammit (2018), "Mintoff left the seminary against the wish of his mother", interviewing Yana Bland on the Maltese national TV station, TVM, 11 October.
- ³²²For this last point, see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 206.
- ³²³*Ibid.*, p. 192.
- ³²⁴*Ibid.*
- ³²⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 860, para. 6; and also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 497.
- ³²⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 147, para. 7.
- ³²⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 190.
- ³²⁸See: *Ibid.*, pp. 193f.; and also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 503, para. 2ff.
- ³²⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 193.
- ³³⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 531, para. 5.
- ³³¹See: *Ibid.*, para. 1. Whit Sunday, also called Pentecost, that year fell on 30 June.
- ³³²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 196.
- ³³³See: *Ibid.*, pp. 197f.
- ³³⁴See: *Ibid.*, pp. 186 and 197.
- ³³⁵See: Government of Malta, *Blue Books*, 1931, Section 10, p. 3 (extract from 'The Malta Constitution Letters Patent' of the 14 April 1921).
- ³³⁶*The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 7, 4 March 1931, "List of persons entitled to vote for the election of General Members of the Senate", p. 15, column A, 'Strada S. Teresa ... [door No.] 190', ninth from bottom marked 'Mintuf, Lorenzo (b)'; the 'b' meaning (as indicated on the preceding page): 'Receives Income - *Riċevu Renditá*'. The door No. 190 was later changed to 131, as this property of the Mintoffs was always referred to in subsequent documents. See also: *Ibid.*, No. 8, 5 February 1932, "List of persons entitled to vote for the election of Members of the Legislative Assembly", p. 12, column B, 'Strada S. Teresa ... [door No.] 131', twentieth from bottom marked 'Mintuf, Lorenzo (a)(b)(c)'; the 'b' meaning as indicated above, and, as indicated on the preceding p. 1 of the same document, 'a' meant: 'Is able to read and write'; and 'c' meant: 'Receives income'.
- ³³⁷Already mentioned in Chap. 1 above.
- ³³⁸On 9 April 1929 (LRM, 1929/937), he bought from Carmelo Azzopardi, a master mason and businessman born and residing at Luqa, for £230, today's €100,000 or thereabouts, at Sliema, an unnumbered ground floor maisonette in a new unnamed street (a year and a half later designated at No. 8 in Ponsomby Street; *Ibid.*, 1930/2869), with a perpetual emphyteusis of £0.16 *per annum* (around today's €50), consisting of a spacious room, a porch, a courtyard with a closet, and a small garden.
- ³³⁹On 8 April 1931 (*Ibid.*, 1931/1032) he began renting from the Conventual Franciscans of Valletta, at the price of £4-0-3 *per annum* (today's €250 or thereabouts), and an extra one-time key money (*regalo*) of £14 (today's €1,050 or thereabouts), in Zonqor Street, Marsascula, externally numbered 2, 3 and 4, a development plot (*sito fabbricabile*), known as *Ta' Marsa d-Dghajjes*, measuring some 0.2 of an acre (*canne* 407). Ten months later, on 10 February 1932 (*Ibid.*, 1932/437), he began renting an extension of this property directly from one of the monks, a Fr. Salvatore Tabone, measuring some 0.02 of an acre (*canne* 36.5), for the price of £1-7-4½ *per annum* (around today's €115), and an extra one-time key money (*regalo*) of £5 (around today's €380). Both properties would have cost Wenzu £5-7-5 *per annum* (around today's €390).
- ³⁴⁰On 25 July 1932 (*Ibid.*, 1932/1967) he began renting from Angelo Ghigo, a tailor from Mqabba who resided at Floriana, at the price of £1-8-6 *per annum* (around today's €110), and an extra one-time key money (*regalo*) of £25 (around today's €1,900), a corner development plot in Paola, known as *Ta' Lampuka*, measuring 0.03 of an acre (*canne* 64), with one side, 39.5 metres in length (*canne* 19) on Nazarene Street, and the other, 4 metres in length (*canne* 2) on Dockyard Street.
- ³⁴¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 186. The owners were from the *Ta' Bondina* family.
- ³⁴²The house was bought on 16 September 1933 (LRM, 1933/3058) for £480 (today's €250,000 or thereabouts). It was bought from Giuseppina, widow of Giuseppe Camilleri, daughter of Giuseppe Dimech, born and residing at Valletta. The house's market description was the following: '*Cospicua - casa in Strada Santa Teresa, No. 131 (allora 190), con cantina, con porta per Strada Leone No. 49 (allora 43), avente la detta casa una conserva d'acqua piovana commune con beni adriati*' (Bormla - house in Saint Theresa Street, No. 131 (formerly 190), with cellar, with door in Lion Street No. 49 (formerly 43), in front of which is a shared reservoir supplied by rain water). Nine months later, on 23 June 1934 (*Ibid.*, 1934/2107), the Mintoffs bought back that part of

CHAPTER 2: RELEASE (1923–1930)

the house which had been rented to third parties by the original owners, externally numbered 132-133 (formerly 191 and 192), buying it for £290 (today's €100,000 or thereabouts) from Teresa Camilleri, who was from and resided at Cospicua, and was probably related to the aforementioned Giuseppe Camilleri.

³⁴³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 415, para. 4.

³⁴⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 196.

³⁴⁵*Ibid.*

³⁴⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 186; and *Orig. Mem.*, f. 496, para. 3.

³⁴⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 541, para. 6.

³⁴⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 197; and *Orig. Mem.*, f. 539, para. 9.

³⁴⁹See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 197.

³⁵⁰For all three, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 197f.

³⁵¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 76, para. 2.

³⁵²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 221.

³⁵³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 537, para. 6-12; and *Abr. Mem.*, p. 221.

³⁵⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 202f.; and also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 715f., para. 14f.

³⁵⁵In his memoirs, Mintoff goes to a ridiculous length to acquit himself of any wrongdoing in this matter. See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 196f., 202-5.

³⁵⁶*Abr. Mem.*, p. 231.

³⁵⁷*Orig. Mem.*, f. 75, para. 2. Clare is spelt 'Clara' in the original.

³⁵⁸*Ibid.*, f. 538, para. 9.

³⁵⁹For this and the following couple of sentences, see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 231.

³⁶⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 231; and also p. 252.

³⁶¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 252.

³⁶²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 239.

³⁶³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 40, para. 3.

³⁶⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 3.

³⁶⁵See: maltamigration.com (accessed 26/12/18).

³⁶⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 902, para. 9.

³⁶⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 388 (Emphasis added).

³⁶⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 862, para. 6 (Emphasis added).

³⁶⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 368 (Emphasis added).

³⁷⁰*Orig. Mem.*, f. 902, para. 9.

³⁷¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 381.

³⁷²*Orig. Mem.*, f. 754, para. 9.

³⁷³*Ibid.*, f. 763, para. 3.

³⁷⁴*Abr. Mem.*, p. 3.

CHAPTER 3
MISSION
(1930–1934)

The little admirer watched in awe as Kieli gently folded his flick-knife and spirited it away in the back pocket of his soiled shorts. Staring at him intently, the seven-year-old saw the face of his older chum brighten up as he revealed his tawny teeth across a wide grin. Kieli's eyes twinkled at the chink of a few dirty pennies resting upon his equally dirty hand, happy as pigs in clover. Dumink just gawked in fascination. That's exactly what Kieli sought. For this was a didactic moment. The younger pal of smart Kieli was still wet behind the ears. He direly needed some private tuition of the practical, streetwise type. Kieli had no intention of disappointing him.

The dear pennies on display had just been nicked from a collection box. The two imps had been going around Bormla's long and narrow winding streets and alleys for a couple of hours pleading for money door to door in aid of the lay confraternity of Saint Michael the Archangel. This hugely amused the raucous housewives who especially fell for little Dumink while he knocked on doors and, in his shrill voice, told whoever came up to him how Saint Michael would surely bolster his fight against the devil with the backup of some loose change. Kieli followed on his heels, clutching the sealed collection-box by its handle, rattling its contents, and steadying it while the occasional devotee slid a coin down its slot. The archangel's image on the front, reassuringly thrusting into hell Satan and all the evil spirits which prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls, did the rest.

There went the two boys, all barefoot, smiling gleefully, in threadbare clothes not more than rags, with feet, legs, hands and faces as grimy and smutty as those of any other boy (or girl, for that matter) around them. Theirs was a sacred mission, fighting the devil and all ... for which Kieli expected to have something in return. The collection box should have been returned to the head of the confraternity untampered with; only he had

the key to its lock. Kieli, however, found a way to make amends.

The boys were now huddled in a dark corner of a little-frequented street close to the parish church. Dumink was instructed to keep a sharp look-out for a few moments and give a signal if anyone was approaching. After a while, he was called back. ‘Come and sit down,’ Kieli told him. ‘I’ve finished.’ ‘What have you done?’ asked the perplexed child in an equally hushed voice. ‘Where did the pennies come from?’ And Kieli explained how he had extracted the pennies by inserting the flick-knife’s thin blade through the box’s slot and drew out any coin that was brought to rest on it. ‘Here’s your share,’ he announced while handing Dumink his bit of the booty.

Though the child greatly admired his older friend’s deftness, he was equally taken aback by the pilfering. ‘Ain’t a sin?’ he asked hesitantly. The last thing he wanted was to have Kieli think he was a wimp. To this, his friend laughed heartily. ‘Of course not, you dolt!’ he assured him. ‘The head of the confraternity would have compensated us for our efforts just the same, wouldn’t he?’ he enlightened the little learner. ‘However, just in case he forgets to do so, here’s our payoff. That’s all this is. Now we need no compensation from no one.’

Since Dumink still looked much unconvinced, Kieli decided to go about it in another way by donning the bone with some flesh. ‘Look here, littun,’ he told his young apprentice while taking him in both hands for emphasis’ sake and looking him in the eye. ‘Saint Michael or not, this is business; isn’t it?’ The child nodded. ‘Good,’ Kieli proceeded. ‘Now understand this once and for all: in the Church or outside it, the laws of the market know no morals. You do what you can, not what you may. And the devil be damned!’

This was enough to mollify the child. Thereafter, each time he joined forces with Kieli on his venture around Bormla’s streets on behalf of Saint Michael he thought more of the candy his pennies would buy him than of any other niceties. Business was business, after all. The market knew no morals.

IT WASN’T ONLY THE market or its laws which knew no morals. Neither did most of the Bastjun people. Or rather, to be more precise, they had a morality of their own, one better suited to the surviving skills required in a harsh and unforgiving world. Though they lived in a zealously Christian society, and surely everyone was God’s dear creature, the pervading conviction that man is a wolf to man—*homo*

homini lupus, as Hobbes had eloquently put it—was strongly inculcated in the minds and hearts of one and all. Though Christian through and through, and however protected by Michael and his infinite hosts of angels, the world they lived in, with its abject poverty, its dire lack of education and its strong sense of abandonment, was a tough and brutal one which produced hardened humanity. It was not a question of the laws of the market not knowing no morals; it was a question of outdoing whatever the market's laws compelled one to do in a persistent situation where there was never ever enough food to go around despite the interminable hours of labour. Those laws could barely suffice since they exacted justice in an unjust world; order in disordered living conditions; virtue in a vice-permeated way of life.

In other ambits of Bastjun's kick, especially that of sexual relationships, morality was quite a hard and fast rule. Much tolerance was sometimes exerted whenever the milk was spilt. However, little leeway was given so as to come to that. The mixing of sexes, especially among youths, was very often prohibited and always discouraged. The girls, above all when young, were particularly guarded against the males; the former being considered too tempting, the latter too unresisting to temptation. Though around the harbour area, including Valletta as well as the Three Cities, unwanted pregnancies by foreign seamen were more common than one might have desired, the expecting were very often treated kindly as naïve dupes would. However, there was no tolerance or mercy for the malicious or the lascivious.

On the other hand, then, in commerce, business and the procurement of the basic need of food, cast-iron rubrics could not be taken too seriously. They had to flex to circumstances. Though religious and pious as much as one should expect, Bastjun's inhabitants, as most of the underprivileged and the have-nots anywhere in the world, were obliged by circumstances to draw a hard line between the ought and the expedient. While the former defied the possible, the latter deferred to the impossible. An empty stomach obeys no laws, the market's or any of anyone else, except those of its own growling. These were the foremost laws the Bastjunajri would, or could, act upon and no other. Kielì was no exception, and neither would Dumink once he grasped the benefit and blessing of pragmatism. 'Ain't a sin?' would lose its pertinence,

or rather become impertinent, when survival is at stake.

The learning which came with Saint Michael's box during those grinds with Kieli in the mid-1920s must have been one of the earliest of Dumink's initiation moments into reality. Many years later, when he recalled the story narrated above,¹ he must have thought about it not merely as a kind of childish amusement but moreover as an important lesson of life which corroborated what he later deciphered around him. The occurrence had much of the ingredients which appealed to the growing lad: doing the devil's thing while supposedly fighting him, walking straight upon the hazy line that separated good from evil, acquiescing to the thrill of stealthy moments, coming to grips with a world that seemed intent on browbeating him. In that secluded step-street off the beaten track with Kieli, the pre-adolescent Dumink began to handle the ropes of society in which he had to survive and possibly thrive. At home or outside of it, the world had to be comprehended with a mind that made out of it sufficient sense as to master it. This was not merely understanding the world, but understanding it to one's liking or, better still, to one's needs.

What might have begun with Kieli a long time before in that backstreet became more articulate and sophisticated as time went on, especially when Dumink came face to face with the élite world of the Lyceum and the university. This was a world infinitely more complex and elevated than anything he previously knew, one which by all accounts he was not expected to enter. This time around it was Pawlu Cassar who stood in lieu of Kieli. This time around a new beginning was dawning upon the lad. It was the twilight of his public persona which eventually came to eclipse, or perhaps rather mask, his private one. Here it was that he found out the nature of what he seems to have viewed as a life mission.

IT WAS NOT LONG after his pre-mature decision to emigrate that Dumink had his dreams set on Algeria. It was a sensible choice. Members of his father's family had been settled there for ages apparently making some good fortune.² Dumink would surely have had a good start there with the farming he intended to do, even perhaps going scientific about it.³ Algeria in those days of the early 1930s had no nationalist movements to disrupt the foreign settlers from enjoying their absolute supremacy in farming, mostly

of wine grapes, citrus crops, vegetables, and almost half the wheat production of the land, while most Muslim Algerians, poor and uneducated anyway, were forced to seek work at extremely low wages on European owned farms like the Mintoffs'.⁴ Of course, despite his enthusiasm, the boy's plan could be nothing short of quixotic. His mental image of Algeria must have been typically colonial and simplistic, perhaps gathered from the orientalist prints sometimes available, not even picturing the hardships of a farming life. Starry-eyed, he only dwelled on 'the bucolic life in Algeria,' as he recalled in later life, 'the fertility and beauty of the land, and [the] friendly relations with [the] Arab farmlands'.⁵ His fixation on the closest exit door made him oblivious of what might lie behind it. 'Indeed,' he fantasised elsewhere, 'the direction I had mapped out for my future life lay in romantic Algeria.'⁶

Though Dumink did nothing to bring about this fantastic notion, roughly a year into his pipedream an unexpected visit seemed to give it some substance: Uncle Johnny, his father's much loved and admired brother,⁷ came over to Malta from across the sea for a ten-day visit to his family.⁸ To Dumink this was like a downright flesh-and-blood apparition from heaven. In his dreamy eyes, as he remarked much later, this uncle was 'a man whose life for over half a century had followed the natural course of the stars, and the sun and its planets, in the fulfilment of his daily care of the plants and animals in his possession'.⁹ If this was not enough to give the lad's imagination a wild run, less than a week after Uncle Johnny's departure for Algeria his son Georges came over for a week-long holiday.¹⁰ Though the lad was only a few years older than his cousin, apparently he was well far ahead of him in maturity, back home managing almost on his own an entire farm with many hands. Dumink was understandably impressed, and made it a point to spend as much time as possible with his cousin while he was over. 'The arrival of my cousin Georges from Algeria,' he recalled a lifetime later, 'had an impact on me almost as big as his father's reunion with mine had on our elders.'¹¹ At the end of the vacation, Dumink was absolutely convinced that his future was, as he later expressed it, 'by the side of my cousin Georges Mintoff at his farm in Saint Antoine near Philippeville' in Algeria.¹² For the time being, the North African plan was the only one that seriously loomed for Dumink on the horizon ... until his father shrewdly found a way how to sink it.

IN THAT FASCINATING SUMMER of '30 Dumink's reinvention of himself inevitably also drew him down from his rooftop and took him to mingle with his peers. His small group of Cottonera friends was to give him much warmth and pleasure just for a few years, then peter out. This circle flocked around a recreational open space at Bormla called Ix-Xgħajra which was very close to where Dumink had attended elementary school.¹³ Though a mere ten-minute walk from his slum, the gathering area was a world apart. It was the hub of much of Cottonera's societal life, particularly for young boys and girls from Birgu and Bormla who met there, mingled and hooked up.¹⁴ Foremost amongst these was a fair, blue-eyed teenage slum boy known as Rumanu.¹⁵ Of Dumink's own age, he was slightly shorter, and, though flat illiterate, as streetwise as ever. Nevertheless, the lad had charm and sparkle. Dumink cottoned up to him, and ended up admiring him tremendously in every way possible.

'The more I knew about him,' Mintoff had to confirm years later, 'the more I realised how quickly and eagerly he had cast off the clothes and physical habits of the slum dweller and still more important the narrow mentality.'¹⁶ That was just one of the many things Dumink revered his new pal for. Another was his refined sense of elegance. Justly so, for Dumink's own taste was 'atrocious', as he frankly admitted,¹⁷ and for which his father never stopped rebuking him.¹⁸ A 'dapper', Dumink appreciatively called the lad.¹⁹ In this respect Rumanu must have picked up a thing or two from the fashionable Birgu tailor's shop at which he had a jumble day job. Then, every evening, he would be, as Mintoff fondly recalled a lifetime later, '[always] smarter than any other lad out to kill'.²⁰ Of course, all this was for the sake of some dandy meetups with girls. In this delicate area it seems that Rumanu was held to be some sort of connoisseur. In any case, he was so in Dumink's eyes. As yet a mere tenderfoot himself with the opposite sex, Dumink pompously dubbed his *au fait* chum 'my mentor',²¹ or, even more grandly, 'my master of ceremonies'.²²

Whatever status Dumink chose to bestow on his ever-closer mate, he does not appear to have had the power to resist his magnetism. Here was Kieli all over again; here was Fredu the seminarian. All three—and there will be others still to come—represented in Dumink's mind and heart some ideal for which he insentiently strove, or some refuge he intuitively craved. Rumanu was for him, as

he warmly recalled many years later, ‘the happy-go-lucky extrovert, the ever-smiling lad with a hundred dolls at his command’.²³ Perhaps this description should be taken for the opposite of what Dumink felt he *himself* was at the time, or rather what he wanted to be: carefree, gregarious, cheery, free to love. Instead, he seems to have felt troubled, shy, gloomy, and somehow already espoused. For one smart lass of those days with Italian on the tip of her tongue Rumanu was ‘*l’allegro*’ (the cheerful one) and Dumink ‘*il pensieroso*’ (the sombre one).²⁴ However playful, her observation seems to have been on the mark.²⁵

The likes of Rumanu must have appeared in Dumink’s inner eye the antidote against that ugly and persistent phobia of being trapped or cornered, of being in some way set apart from others, of being detached from reality. Henceforth, for some nine years, Rumanu became for Dumink a sort of anchorage who, as he expressed it later, ‘devoured a slice of my young life bigger than what previously had been devoted by the austere seminary for my spiritual welfare’.²⁶ Rumanu took Dumink to the edge and beyond; he became his confidant,²⁷ he accompanied him to the Bormla cinemas²⁸—most probably also to the small one owned by the Romano family itself²⁹—he guided him through the latest pop songs,³⁰ he introduced him to smoking cigarettes,³¹ and, perhaps best of all, he sought out Cottonera girls for him.³² Dumink appears to have been having the time of his life. ‘Summer holidays without sea and sun bathing, and leisurely lovemaking, would be to me as an after-life without a heaven,’ Dumink pronounced decades later still thinking in theological terms.³³ In any case, it seems that the fresh ex-seminarian was learning pretty fast.

AS THE HOT SUMMER of ’30 moved on, everything seemed to fall in a certain pattern for Dumink. He nonchalantly enjoyed his reading, his friends and his vigorous swimming, but also prepared for his entrance exam for the Lyceum. His intent to go abroad was evidently not strong enough to induce him to enter the Migrants Training Centre where prospective emigrants were given colloquial instruction in either English or French, and were trained in, say, rough carpentry, elementary bricklaying and concrete construction, erection of shelters and fences, land clearing, and the like.³⁴ Dumink’s only other alternative was the Lyceum. Situated in Valletta,³⁵ this

was intended to impart intermediate instruction to students who wanted to embrace the career of commerce, electrical engineering, or marine engineering, to enter the civil service, or to matriculate for admission into the university.³⁶ It was for boys only (the girls had a sort of mirror school close by), and instruction was divided into two courses of studies, the classical (including Latin) and the modern (including French and bookkeeping).³⁷ In 1930, the Lyceum had a complement of 384 students (while the Secondary Schools for Girls that year had 195).³⁸ Dumink sought admission to Class V of the classical course.³⁹ On 16 September 1931 he sat together with another 357 students for his admission exams.⁴⁰ He and eleven other students came forward to fill as many vacant places at Class Five, of whom only four, including Dumink, made the mark.⁴¹ Better still, the lad also got a scholarship exempting him from paying all the year's tuition fees ... this thanks, as one would have thought, to his mother effectively beseeching the 37-year old Lyceum Headmaster, Cyril Leach, to have pity on her large, indigent family.⁴² Dumink thus became one of the fifty-nine students who that year, together with another fifty scholarship winners, were exempted from payment of school fees.⁴³ The ruse also worked splendidly well for the following year; aided by his fairly good performance in the annual exams, during Class Six, the lad's second and final year at the Lyceum, he retained his precious exemption.⁴⁴

Dumink's advancing to the Lyceum was as big an affair as when he entered the seminary, if not more. The entrance exam here was much more difficult, peer competition cutthroat, and prestige lofty. The Lyceum in those days was considered to be the anteroom which prepared Malta's leaders of tomorrow in every field of professional expertise save the ecclesiastic. At any rate, for a Bastjun slum boy to make it to such a bourgeois academic milieu was something off the wall, if not—given the social perceptions of the time—outright perverse. This explains, on the one hand, the awe and elation with which the news was received back home by friends and family alike,⁴⁵ but also Mintoff's carping a lifetime later that 'most of [the students] came from the literate upper middle class',⁴⁶ and that 'most of our classmates came from [the purportedly classy neighbourhoods of] Valletta and Sliema, and no one else from Bormla'.⁴⁷ Dumink appears to have felt that, amongst his more genteel peers, he stuck out like a sore thumb. This may have been more of a partial impression

than anything else. Even if they were in a clear minority, the larger part of the sons of the merchants and the professionals would have been always the most self-confident and buoyant than nearly all of the sons of civil servants and labourers.⁴⁸ Though he certainly had some left-over seminary sophistication, Dumink still seems to have deeply felt a sort of culture shock. This feeling was so crushing that initially he was ready to throw in the towel. 'I do not fit in with the other boys at the Lyceum,' he unhappily had to admit to his family.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he did not quit. Instead, finding himself cut off at the knees he sensibly chose to go in the opposite direction and highlight the differences which set him apart from most of his companions. 'I soldiered [on],' he would never forget, 'as an irksome maverick.'⁵⁰ In other words, however distressing and inconvenient, the leopard couldn't change its spots ... and made its utmost to show them.

Dumink officially joined the Lyceum on 1 October 1930,⁵¹ and again he returned to the Italian name *Domenico*.⁵² This, at least, is how he seems to have entered his name in the application form.⁵³ At the Lyceum he had some of the best teachers on the island, most of them British.⁵⁴ 'My Lyceum teachers,' he conceded decades later, 'taught me much more than I was prepared to acknowledge at the time.'⁵⁵ Amongst the precious things they could have done, but which apparently Domenico foolishly resisted, was to polish his coarse character. 'They failed,' he had to admit with hindsight, 'to have a big enough influence to overcome entirely the social pull of the illiterate [read: crude] world around me.'⁵⁶

One of them, alas, even took the brunt of his fatuity by being 'mercilessly plagued' by him, as he belatedly confessed with some regret.⁵⁷ Anyway, these teachers tutored Domenico and his mates in twelve subjects, including Latin, the history of Rome, Holy Scripture, and drawing.⁵⁸ Since some subjects were excluded from Domenico's curriculum, he opted to learn English shorthand and the French language as extras, both of which he failed dismally.⁵⁹ Above all subjects, Domenico loved geography, which was new to him at the Lyceum.⁶⁰ Also, he adored European history, from which he fancied quite contradictory dispositions, such as those of the anarchist Levellers, the aristocratic Wellington, and the radical Napoleon.⁶¹ Though, unsurprisingly, his family was impressed by the aptitude they perceived in him,⁶² perhaps echoing his bragging on how easily he passed his exams,⁶³ Domenico's achievement in

fact does not seem to have been particularly dazzling.⁶⁴ Though as a whole his class scored the school's best exam results for 1930-31,⁶⁵ in his two years at the Lyceum Domenico himself never succeeded in earning one single prize in any subject.⁶⁶ Neither, it seems, was he among the twenty-five students who founded the Lyceum Debating Society at the beginning of his second year.⁶⁷ At best, just like when at the seminary, Domenico appears to have continued to be an average student.

THIS WAS A TIME in which a couple of very big changes occurred in the life of this fourteen-year-old: one concerned his personal living circumstances, the other had to do with politics. To begin with the former, the change involved Dumink's migration; not from Malta to Algeria, but from Bormla to Valletta.

This, surprisingly enough, was his father's doing. For once, Wenzu seems to have taken the initiative and, by way of what must have appeared to be the most guileless and meekest of promptings, brought about an utterly ground-breaking alteration to his son's life. The red herring was to get his son to avoid the hassle of having to repeatedly voyage to and from Bormla to Valletta so that he attends classes at the Lyceum with God only knows what evils lurking him in between.

In reality, each journey would have employed half an hour at most, and classes conveniently began at 8.00 AM and ended at 4.00 PM.⁶⁸ To get to school Dumink just needed to walk down to the Birgu quayside, take the ferry which regularly crossed the Grand Harbour every quarter of an hour over to Valletta, ride for a few minutes a steel lift 60 metres (200 ft.) high from Valletta's wharf to the upper part of the city, and make a ten-minute walk down to the lower part of Merchants Street.⁶⁹ Anyway, Wenzu suggested—first tactfully to his wife, then considerately to his son—that, since the Castille Signal Station where he worked and resided was just a mere ten-minute walk from the Lyceum, his son could go reside with him.⁷⁰ However preposterous this plan must appear to us, it seems to have won Ċetta's endorsement quite easily. Strangely enough, it looks like some resistance came from the child's side who—certainly still too unripe to count his blessings—preferred his 'newly-gained freedom', as he put it later,⁷¹ which came with his daily peregrinations in the company of friends and some of Valletta's ragamuffins.⁷²

This shift was possible at all because, up on the rooftop kitchen of the Castille palace,⁷³ Wenzu was sole civilian manager of the cooking establishment technically subject only to the British Admiral Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet. Officially he was called the mess man,⁷⁴ for he was in charge of the station's mess or canteen. Addressed as boss by his attending team, and chief by the English personnel,⁷⁵ he looked every inch the part.⁷⁶ His was of course an important if humble job since he had to prepare three meals a day on the dot for all the staff, officers and sailors stationed at, or visiting, the palace for various services needed by the Royal Navy.⁷⁷ The cooking there, as Mintoff impishly recalled many years later, 'was a [mere] adaptation of the formula that prevailed for very many decades in the officers' mess of H.M. battleships'.⁷⁸ This was the navy, after all! Whatever, apart from supplying the stores with anything that was needed for the smooth running of the kitchen, the job gave Wenzu quite some leeway. He had the authority to commercially deal with any vendor he deemed worthy, to dispose of any surplus, leftover or outdated food and stuff on a daily basis, and, equally important, to hire and fire any hand as he saw fit. One needn't look very close to observe how Wenzu made the most of these licences. To begin with, most of the seven men he had employed were Gozitans,⁷⁹ and another two hailed from Cottonera.⁸⁰ Only his right-hand man, a certain Mikiel, known as *Is-Soy* ('*s*' is the article), seems to have been the odd one out; though he came from upmarket Sliema, he lived together with his penurious family in an impoverished part of it.⁸¹ At some time, Wenzu even employed his own son-in-law, Leli Micallef,⁸² his daughter Mananni's husband, and also Leli's brother.⁸³ Next, more or less the same went with the five major retailers whom Wenzu dealt with. Two of the foremost were Xagħra people,⁸⁴ and another was from Bormla.⁸⁵ Only two, the fishmonger and the butcher, hailed from Valletta,⁸⁶ most probably because they had no competitors worthy of the name from either Gozo or Cottonera. With regard to the disposal of foodstuffs, Wenzu consistently sent home to his wife, his mother, his sister Ċensa and heaven knows who else generous portions of mutton and what have you.⁸⁷ Furthermore, in addition to Dumink, he frequently also fed at Castille his younger sons Daniel and Raymond, and also some of their cousins.⁸⁸ All things considered, the arrangement seems to have worked splendidly all around.⁸⁹

It was in the latter part of October 1930, a few weeks after the opening of the academic year at the Lyceum, that the Boss's son packed his belongings and went to reside permanently at Castille with his father.⁹⁰ He was to dwell there for the next nine years,⁹¹ till the beginning of October 1939,⁹² and eventually never return to his parents' home for the rest of his life. None of Wenzu's other hands had any lodgings at Castille; only his son had.⁹³ From his little make-shift cubicle there Dumink attended to his duties at the Lyceum down the road, saw to his studies and reading, met Rumanu on a daily basis at Bormla's Xgħajra to chill out, went to the movies, and had fun with girls, and, perhaps foremost, indulged himself as much as possible in his favourite sport, that is, swimming to his heart's content along the Valletta shoreline all through Malta's long clement seasons.⁹⁴

He even went bathing with his father, which seems to have been a real treat.⁹⁵ These pursuits began to really turn his back on the seminary fiasco and perhaps pour some balm on his still-fresh wounds. 'Whatever weight psychologists might give it,' Mintoff pondered a lifetime later, '[these activities] devoured a slice of my young life bigger than what previously had been devoted by the austere seminary for my spiritual welfare.'⁹⁶ Perhaps that is why his first summer out of the seminary and at Castille seems to have been particularly pleasing to him. 'The summer of 1931,' he in fact confided, 'was one of the happiest in my life.'⁹⁷ It might have made such a happy impression because the lad was finally breaking away from his suppressed boyhood and starting to catch up with himself. All this induced the lad forever afterwards to cherish most heartily 'my nine years' happy stay at Castille',⁹⁸ during which he came to consider the place as 'my second home'.⁹⁹ The imposing building itself fascinated him more and more,¹⁰⁰ even so as it had just been given a new topographical importance by its brand new majestic approach from Floriana.¹⁰¹ Long afterwards, not less than two score years later, Mintoff was to return to Castille as Prime Minister of Malta since he designated it precisely for such a purpose,¹⁰² as it is to this day. As he subsequently reminisced, it was almost uncanny how the place was 'destined to become more inextricably tied with my life than my beloved Bastjun slums'.¹⁰³

At Castille, Dumink was particularly close to a couple of his father's kitchen attendants: a Xgħajra Gozitan called Gjużep, one

of the three Bajada brothers who worked there,¹⁰⁴ and *Is-Soy*, his father's second-in-command, with whom the lad chatted man-to-man.¹⁰⁵ But the one he really wanted to get close to, perhaps for the first time in his life, was his own father. This seems to have actually been one of Wenzu's own desiderata when prompting his son to go and reside with him in Valletta. It could have been a way to finally set things right with his son after so many years that the lad was sequestered by his wife and her family. It seems that the tables had turned for Wenzu, and he wanted to keep it that way. Dumink himself began to realise how much he missed his father when, during his first weeks at Castille, he realised that he hardly knew anything at all about him. Watching him at work, going about his business, relating to others without ever being talked down, being an object of respect, and being a person in his own right ... well, all this was a sort of revelation to Dumink. It must have been the first time that he began to realise how oppressive it really was back at Bormla, for his father as much as for himself, and, most importantly, how liberating his new home could indeed become.

On his part, Wenzu began to open up before his son as never before, slowly revealing to him his whereabouts when off duty,¹⁰⁶ his life in Gozo as a young man,¹⁰⁷ his voyages abroad,¹⁰⁸ his difficult work upon the seas,¹⁰⁹ ... to the point that his son could at long last assert that 'I had [...] become his confidante'.¹¹⁰ This was really something. Father and son had never been so close. Nevertheless, Wenzu gave special attention to be for his son the very opposite of what Ċetta was by never ever imposing himself on the lad. 'Considering how deeply entangled his life was with mine in the 1930s,' Mintoff later reckoned, 'the number of impositions my father made on me was surprisingly small.'¹¹¹ It seems fair to say that, during those delicate years in his son's life, Wenzu dealt with him very wisely by gently exerting upon him a stabilising force.¹¹² 'The final outcome,' Mintoff subsequently said of those years, 'was to bring me and my father closer and make our days at Castille happier.'¹¹³

There could have been more to this. Getting closer to his son, steadying him up along the way, perhaps even distancing him from the excessive influence of the loathed Bormla environment, do not appear to have been Wenzu's only or even his foremost objectives. Since all hands, not to mention the Boss himself, were illiterate and

quite helpless with spread sheets and financial statements,¹¹⁴ what Wenzu badly needed was someone literate enough with whom he could trust his kitchen's accounts.¹¹⁵ These had to be verified and countersigned by a representative of the Naval Mess Committee.¹¹⁶ Wenzu was adamant not to have his son do any kitchen work or act as some kind of server to the Castille personnel, whether it was the Fleet Wireless Officer to the Mediterranean Fleet himself, Lord Louis Mountbatten, or not;¹¹⁷ that was absolutely *not* part of the deal of his coming over.¹¹⁸

What he appears to have wanted most emphatically was that, by having his son as book-keeper, and soon afterwards also as general retail buyer,¹¹⁹ he would introduce his green, scholarly lad to the labour market and its politics without being too obvious about it. In the meantime, by paying the boy some remuneration for his labours,¹²⁰ money was being saved from having to hire a professional accountant.¹²¹ Though the young Dumink initially knew next to nothing about profit and loss accounts, he quickly learned how to go about it from the Committee representative.¹²² Though he sometimes seems to have found his book-keeping 'dreary', as he called it,¹²³ he nonetheless appears to have liked the idea of being, as he charmingly put it later, 'a co-worker with my father at his catering establishment in Castille'.¹²⁴ Whatever the case, subsequently Mintoff claimed that it was this job, dealing with flinty vendors and all, that 'sharpened my innate negotiating wits'.¹²⁵

IF PERMANENTLY MIGRATING TO Castille had to shake Dumink's young life from its foundations, his other big change—the one in the realm of politics—was to be perhaps subtler and slower but much more far reaching, both for him and, in unimaginable ways, even for his country. Though, like the former journey, the change denoted a relocation, it was of a different sort; rather than physical it was of a moral nature, for it primarily had to do with the fundamental principles on which political judgement and conduct would be formed, appraised and followed. The change involved Dumink swapping political allegiances: the comfortably safe one he was nurtured in, with a somewhat risky and as yet still open-ended one he now ventured to put his faith in; the former having been the conviction of his family on his mother's side, the latter, significantly enough, the persuasion on the side of most of his father's family.

To put it bluntly, he switched from fascist to socialist, or what he imagined each to be, the former more or less represented in Malta at the time by the Nationalists of the *Partito Nazjonale* (the Nationalist Party), the latter by the Labourites of *Il-Partit tal-Haddiema* (the Workers' Party; also called the Labour Party).

As one might expect, the shift does not seem to have been abrupt. A period of vacuity preceded the change. At first it appears that Dumink distanced himself from the Nationalists without thinking of approaching the Labourites. During that post-seminary period he looks like drifting along a sort of no-man's land in which, very much aimless and muddled, he withdrew from the sacraments, entered the Lyceum, and left his maternal home to permanently reside at Castille with his father. In the meantime, he seems to have begun shedding any empathy he might have had with the Nationalists, that which was due to his upbringing at Bormla.

This included senior members of his own Bastjun family. Foremost amongst the lot were Grandfather Paġann and his son Ganni. While going about as religious missionaries,¹²⁶ they were simultaneously blatant Nationalist canvassers to the entire Bastjun area. '[They] were prominent canvassers in our neighbourhood,' Mintoff knew perfectly well, 'and helped the Nationalists to win the elections.'¹²⁷ Their intent was both patriotic and religious. 'They did the Nationalist canvassing,' Mintoff appreciated, 'in order to defend Mother Church.'¹²⁸

Of course they both had the unfaltering admiration and backing of their family, Ċetta not the least, and of all their neighbours. 'Although hardly anyone [at Bastjun] had a vote,' Mintoff forever remembered, 'they [*i.e.*, the slum-dwellers] were the most fearless henchmen for the Nationalist Party because my grandfather told them so.'¹²⁹ One must bear in mind that the Nationalists reigned supreme not only at Bastjun or at Bormla but throughout the entire Cottonera district. Their local, uncontested champion was a Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, known as *Il-Gross* (The Ample), a plump, smart lawyer then in his early thirties, who lived in upmarket Bormla just ten minutes away from the Mintoffs; a typical paternalistic politician.

As in every corner of the Maltese Islands—and elsewhere in many parts of the world—the conservatives, *Il-Gross* not the least, were hand in glove with the Church hierarchy, ubiquitously securing their privileged position, universally avowing to be more Catholic than

the pope.¹³⁰ Ever since his Lyceum days, perhaps without knowing exactly why, Dumink felt a deep loathing for them. This certainly included his grandfather and uncle, with whom he stopped speaking at least for as long as he was at the Lyceum.¹³¹ ‘I despise[d] them as fanatical hypocrites,’ Mintoff recalled years later.¹³² Perhaps what he detested most was the mingle of religion and politics, where love of Church and love of Party blended into one confusing mishmash ... just as he abhorred it when love of God and love of Mother became indistinguishable. Here, it seems, *this* Party and *this* Church came to represent to the lad’s mind other facets of the same maternal face which commanded his heart and afflicted his soul. To break free and redeem himself, he must have felt that he had to get rid of both. Though what was to take their place he could not as yet fathom.

At this point, Dumink’s disaffection towards the Church-cum-Nationalists must have created a predisposition to move in the opposite direction. It was just that, a readiness; nothing more. Though it was possibly a sign of disengagement on one side, it does not look like an immediate connexion with anything on the other, including the Labour Party. The reason must have been that as yet Dumink knew next to nothing of local politics and neither does he seem to have been much interested in it.

‘I was then too young,’ Mintoff much later divulged, ‘to understand even what was going on under my nose on the Church’s side.’¹³³ This suggests that the lad’s estrangement from the Nationalist fold, just as his fall-out with the Church, were both possibly unrelated to one or the other, that is, to Conservative or Catholic beliefs; the issue appears to have been rather associated with the family and social ties he had had and what he felt he should do with them.

The political nexus does not seem to have had much of a bearing on his decisions at this point in time. Nevertheless, it looks like it made him politically susceptible to other influences quite different from what he was leaving behind. This suggests that his current exposure was enough to make him receptive to alternative voices. These he appears to have caught from various quarters, perhaps mainly from some of his dad’s mates at Castille, from members of his own family, and, maybe the most decisive, from other lads he met at the Lyceum. All of these must have stimulated his already-present, unexplored predisposition, and concurred in directing it on a definite course. Dumink personally needed to have one most

badly, and seems to have eventually welcomed with passion the new idea that swam into his ken.

One of the possible three alternative voices rang at Castille. Here the kitchen hands with whom, over a nine-year span, Dumink seems to have been closest to, Ġjużep and *Is-Soy*, both appear to have been of a leftist, if not even a socialist, leaning. Though none of them could vote, with them the lad seems to have shared some political talk in which socialist ideas, whatever that might have meant, were discussed.¹³⁴ If they were left-wingers, then they would have somehow followed the Labour Party or been conversant with some of its policies. Could they also have known something about Manuel Dimech, who the Maltese Socialist League, a run-off group within the Labour Party, hailed as their “spiritual leader”?¹³⁵ Could it have been Ġjużep or *Is-Soy*, one might go on asking, who had acquired the copy of Dimech’s 1907 educational publication, *Il Chelliem tal Erbat Ilsna* (The Speaker of Four Languages),¹³⁶ which their boss had lying around in his Castille cabin?¹³⁷ Of course we will never know. What we might speculate with some confidence is that these two labourers, back ‘home’ at Castille, could have provided a good sounding board for socialist or Labour ideas which Dumink might have picked or entertained elsewhere. The lad had become as close to Ġjużep as he had been with *Is-Soy*. It was thanks to Ġjużep, in fact, that in the summer of 1932 Dumink was introduced to his grandmother’s own Xaghra relatives.¹³⁸ He had only heard about them before then.

Apart from the Castille labourers, the left-wing angle was closer to Dumink than one would expect. From here the second beckoning voice could have whispered. For most of his father’s close family relations were Labourites if not outright socialists. Though originally hailing from Gozo, they had been living around Msida for over two generations. Msida is one of Valletta’s sea-shore suburbs which, back in the inter-war period, had a pronounced left-wing mentality amongst many of its inhabitants, not infrequently vented in unionist, labourite, and socialist terms.¹³⁹ The possible reason for this is that a lot of young families of British servicemen and women resided at Msida and its vicinities.

It seems that the Mintoffs here must have been conceptually and politically a world away from Bastjun’s way of thinking. Perhaps it should come as no wonder that Ċetta and Wenzu’s mother Mari

never got along, and apparently neither did any other family member of one side with the other. Dumink's paternal cousins, for instance, never dropped by at Bormla's slum to visit their relatives; it would have been unthinkable to them.¹⁴⁰ And *vice versa*, of course; though for the opposite reasons. It was only Dumink, it seems, who, from an early age, as we have seen, freely shuttled between the two sides. This branch of the family included at least his grandma Mari, his aunt Ġuditta, his other aunt Ġensa, and his uncle Louis, all of whom resided at Msida or close by at Pietà within walking distance from each other.¹⁴¹

Dumink seems to have grown fond of them all.¹⁴² They possibly represented in his eyes an alternative, or perhaps even an upgrade, from the Bormla half of his family. Their left-wing views, whether soft- or hard-core, must have appeared startling to the lad at first, perhaps even scandalous, but possibly also at the same time intriguing. Dumink at first resisted whichever lure they might have presented to him. Before his Lyceum days he appears to have steadfastly stood by his Bastjun's Nationalist creed. One story which came down through family lore might illustrate the point.¹⁴³ Once, Aunt Ġensa boldly advised her nephew to tell his pa to vote Labour in the upcoming elections of the Legislative Assembly.¹⁴⁴ This must have been around 1927, when Dumink was already at the seminary.¹⁴⁵ 'I shall do no such thing!' the child snapped back at her. 'Would it not be a priest who'll stand over me when my time comes up?'

In those days Labour, and perhaps Socialism with it, meant sheer impiousness. Aunt Ġensa must have known this, though she does not seem to have been much impressed. Again according to family lore,¹⁴⁶ she once was audacious enough to answer back her own parish priest who had objected to the support she and her family gave to the Labour Party. He warned her that they were seriously jeopardising the salvation of their immortal souls. 'Well, what of it?' she retorted. 'You priests have already damned yours! So what the heck?' This was no way of speaking to a priest in those days. It would have been as criminal as slapping a police officer.

The third likely voice of summoning to the socialist call, maybe the most convincing to Dumink since it came from peers, would have been heard at the Lyceum, certainly bolstering the two other voices. Despite his initial unhappiness at not being able to

integrate completely with most students at the Lyceum, Dumink understandably managed to make a few good friends.¹⁴⁷ Two, however, stood out, and were for life. One of them was Fortunato Zammit, known as Furtu, a year older and four inches taller than Dumink.¹⁴⁸ Furtu hailed from a well-off Xagħra family known as *Ta' Mira* which engaged in wholesale marketing of agricultural produce from Gozo.

As it happened, Furtu's father, Mikiel, was a good friend of Dumink's own father since childhood, and one of those who regularly supplied his kitchen at Castille with eggs, vegetables and groceries.¹⁴⁹ Furtu and Dumink became thick as thieves in no time.¹⁵⁰ Theirs seems to have been a rather complex friendship. Initially they might have clicked due to their family's old connection. Though their fathers' economic standing might appear at first glance to have been disparate, in reality it was not as much. Despite their different careers and current jobs, both their fathers were well-heeled enough to be included in the 1931 electoral register of people with some immobile property to their name.¹⁵¹ Again, in spite of appearances, neither were they quite dissimilar socially; for Gozo's best would never have been considered on a par with Malta's middle-class but always as somehow inadequate. This would have brought Furtu and Dumink on a level pegging and understanding.

The other of Dumink's Lyceum best friends was Paolino Cassar, known as Pawlu, a youngster from Żejtun who lived at Isla.¹⁵² His father had a clerical job at the Naval Dockyard involving, amongst other things, estimation of works and certifying payments to contractors.¹⁵³ Pawlu and Dumink's close friendship began from the latter's very first couple of days at the Lyceum, and continued unabated throughout their university years, and beyond.¹⁵⁴ Dumink's senior by two years, the sixteen-year-old Pawlu had entered the Lyceum a full four years before his pal, starting in 1926 with Class I,¹⁵⁵ which brought him to the level of Class V by 1930, when the fourteen-year-old Dumink met him. Pawlu appears to have been very different from the close friends Dumink had previously. Perhaps because he was now growing older, or maybe because he felt the need for the kind of stabilising force he also sought in his father at Castille, Dumink seems to have been attracted to Pawlu, as he acknowledged much later, for 'his strictly disciplined mind'.¹⁵⁶ Pawlu was not the outgoing, sociable, extrovert Dumink so much admired

in the likes of Rumanu, or even of Kieli and Fredu before. In this respect Pawlu seems to have resembled his father Wenzu quite a lot. However, it also appears that Pawlu, like Dumink's other close buddies, and perhaps also like Wenzu, but appreciably most *unlike* Ćetta, had a rebellious streak; only in him this trait was smarter than ever, even intellectual.

This was a timely novelty. In relation to him Dumink must have appeared unfocussed to the point of bafflement. Pawlu, on the other hand, seemed as if always in control; and perhaps it was this that Dumink needed mostly: to end the drifting, to finally begin to get on top of things. 'As if to counterbalance my failing,' Mintoff had to finely ponder many decades later, 'my comrade was choosy and cautious. He calculated the time to be devoted to each task with the meanness of an apothecary who counts every drop of a rare substance in his curing potions.'¹⁵⁷

According to people in the know,¹⁵⁸ Pawlu 'had a passion for accuracy, and would take nothing for granted, insisting on a thorough assessment of essential facts as the basis for his decisions and conclusions. He was intolerant of loose thinking and distrustful of word-jugglers and sham.' This meticulousness, especially when considering the great influence that Pawlu was to exert on Dumink in the coming years, particularly in the realm of politics, must have begun to drive home most persuasively in young Dumink the need on his part of a sharper and keener response to his studies and interests. 'Pawlu and I made a good team,' Mintoff had to attest many years later on their Lyceum and university relationship. 'He was the theorist, the long-term planner, the philosopher, the cautious activist. I was the fighter, the restless improviser, the schemer ready to play a major role in student welfare in order to promote wider reforms in our archaic, feudal community.'¹⁵⁹

IT APPEARS TO HAVE been mainly Pawlu who contributed mostly or, perhaps, had been the most crucial to Dumink's conversion to Socialism, however callow this must have been. It seems that what Pawlu initially succeeded in doing, even if perhaps boyishly, was to make young Dumink somehow partake in his 'socialist dream' and his 'socialist ideals'. There seems to have been more than a whiff of a mission inferred in Pawlu's exposés, something which must have appealed to someone like Dumink who had entertained for so long

the ardent aspiration of being some kind of missionary. '[Pawlu] also devised the means of pooling our efforts and resources to improve our socialist views and bind us together until we might jointly fulfil our dream,' Mintoff related many years later. 'He was sure that only after being solaced by our profession and being comforted by more time and money at our disposal did we stand a chance to recruit more adherents to help implement our socialist ideals.'¹⁶⁰ What socialist dream, and what socialist ideals, could these have been?

To begin with, what Dumink would have known until then about Socialism could not have been but tinged by what he had drummed into him at home and, more so, at the seminary. This narrative was most likely to be scanty, one-sided, flawed and almost certainly emotionally charged. Up till his Lyceum days, it seems that in Dumink's mind Socialism was more or less tantamount to atheism, anticlericalism or merely anti-Catholicism. It must have seemed as if Socialism existed precisely to plague the Church and for no other reason. Of course there seems to have been no attempt whatsoever at home or at the seminary at distinguishing variants of Socialism, or its difference from Communism, or perhaps Anarchism.

'We were regularly fed with stories of horrible atrocities against Catholics in Mexico,' Mintoff recalled of his seminary days, 'and still more horrible were those about the Bolshevik revolution in Russia that devoured all the good people and left the land in the hands of assassins and marauders.'¹⁶¹ People like the anticlerical President of Mexico, Plutarco Calles, for instance, were spoken of, as Mintoff always remembered, 'with contempt and with the same superiority we addressed the devil, feeling cosily protected by God the Almighty'.¹⁶² Napoleon, not better than any socialist, was another favourite *bête noire*.¹⁶³ The politics taught to the young future combatants of the Church Militant at the seminary seems to have been unapologetically intended to provide them with what Mintoff elegantly later dubbed 'biased enlightenment'.¹⁶⁴ This had probably not been said cynically, for Mintoff would have understood that the clerics recited their political narrations in deep earnest, and that there almost certainly would have been no attempt at deliberate deception on their part.

Young conservative lads like Dumink must have shared their point of view and fully sympathised with it. This included takes on local politics. 'At the seminary,' Mintoff would recall well enough,

‘all hearsay about Strickland being an anti-Catholic freemason were [*sic*] taken as gospel truth.’¹⁶⁵ Gerald Strickland, the sixtyish Maltese leader of the conservative, pro-British Constitutional Party, and also Prime Minister, was considered in those late-1920s nothing less than the local version of the malign Porfirio Díaz, the Mexican statesman whose very name was not allowed to be mentioned at the seminary of Dumink’s time.¹⁶⁶ Strickland, together with all Labourites (*i.e.*, socialists), was in clerical eyes the fiend of Maltese politics.¹⁶⁷ ‘Still carved in my memory as a teenage seminarian,’ Mintoff called to mind ages later, ‘is the sight of socialists going around with the tips of red handkerchiefs peeping out of the breast-pockets of their Sunday coats or wrapped as scarves round their necks, and the Prefect, shepherding us in our walk, murmuring his disgust.’¹⁶⁸

Socialists, Communists, Labourites, Anarchists, Constitutionlists and any other scallywag of that sort deserved revulsion since all, according to Catholic thinking, were in error, poor things. Either that or they acted in bad faith. Anyway it goes, they were dangerous at best and sacrilegious at worst. ‘I shared the conviction of the illiterate man-in-the-street,’ Mintoff would confess about his pre-Lyceum days, ‘that all local politicians were hypocrites if not outright rogues.’¹⁶⁹ He not only showed no interest whatsoever, even an abhorrence, in ever pursuing a political career but, as he confessed years later, ‘this aversion induced in me a great lassitude and lack of interest in the [...] political scenario’.¹⁷⁰ All events connected to politics or political economy, locally or abroad, ‘were to me,’ as Mintoff colourfully expressed decades afterwards, ‘of no greater significance than a Beethoven symphony at La Scala to a stone-deaf audience’.¹⁷¹

If not at Milan’s La Scala, one such event occurred at Saint John’s Cathedral in Valletta towards the end of Dumink’s stay at the seminary. It happened on Whit Sunday (Pentecost), 8 June 1930, while the bishop was celebrating his regular high mass there.¹⁷² The local political situation was explosive.¹⁷³ At the very moment that Domenico and other seminarians were serving mass, thousands of stalwarts of every political persuasion were marching and brawling outside while a legion of policemen, fully arrayed with horse and truncheon, was trying to keep them from murdering each other.¹⁷⁴

At one point, a few Labourites succeeded in trouncing the cordons, stormed the cathedral and broke the devotional hush of

the divine service with yells of *'Abbasso l-Papa! Abbasso l-Isqfjiet'* (Down with the Pope! Down with the Bishops!), and the like.¹⁷⁵ Quickly mastered and lugged out, two were subsequently arraigned and sentenced.¹⁷⁶ However, despite all of this general fracas, Mintoff could placidly declare later: 'None of us [seminarians] had the *slightest idea* what the religious row was about.'¹⁷⁷ He and the other acolytes merely looked on bowled over. 'I saw many faces going white with fright,' Mintoff never forgot in the succeeding years. As for him: 'I felt detached and superfluous,' he admitted, adding that he 'overcame my fear' only by behaving so.¹⁷⁸ Not only did the Labourite cause carry no weight with him but a 'thick wall of ignorance,' as he called it later,¹⁷⁹ barred him from knowing any better. 'My knowledge of politics was so abysmally low,' Mintoff much later ingenuously divulged on this period of his life, 'that I did not know there was such a thing as a Labour Party in existence.'¹⁸⁰ However extraordinary this must seem, perhaps it fittingly indicates both the lad's own disinterest as much as the Labour Party's then political inconsequentiality. Mintoff later said of the Labourites of those days: 'Beyond a commonly-expressed desire to help the oppressed masses, there was no cohesive social doctrine or a definite political orientation to bind them together.'¹⁸¹

So, after all, what could Pawlu Cassar have impressed upon his green chum? To cut to the chase, it seems that the one single important trump card was Mussolini. Those were the days when he was admired, imitated, adulated, even loved, throughout the Maltese Islands, but also universally. Since his rise to power eight years before, in October 1922, and more so since barely two years previously, in February 1929, he aligned himself with the Holy See through the concordat, the Italian fascist dictator was the undisputed great man of the moment. His apparent economic and political miracle was heightened by the Wall Street crash later that year, in October 1929, and the great depression which immediately followed.

Many Maltese could not but be enthralled by his success, and for some good reasons: Italy was too close to Malta to be possibly ignored; contacts between the Italians and the Maltese in every aspect of society and the economy were numerous, long-standing and strong; almost all voyages for whatever reason were still done by sea and land through Sicily and Italy; the absolute adulation by the Maltese of Italian baroque permeated the whole national cultural and

religious fibre for centuries; Catholicism and Italy were practically synonymous; Italian Scholasticism was the ubiquitous intellectual and academic system in Malta's educational and artistic milieus; the Maltese political Italophiles had the strongest of grips on the most long-established and influential institutions of the land ... Mussolini himself was romanticised as a uniquely charming political leader the likes of whom had never been seen before, perceived as he was as being matchlessly smart, witty, virile, sharp, healthy, stanch, sportive, vigorous, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*.

He was also dangerous. The name of Giacomo Matteotti, the Italian socialist politician murdered six years before, in June 1924, was certainly not enough to expose the extent and depth of fascist criminality. Perhaps worse still was the momentous boost given to fascists by Mussolini throughout Europe and Latin America ... in Germany, Hungary, Romania, France, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Brazil, Chile ... in Malta and Gozo none the less. Their capo here, at the head of the *Partito Nazionale*, was the dandy, forty-something, handsome Enrico Mizzi, something of a personal acquaintance of Italy's *Grande Capo*.

Young as he was, at just sixteen years of age Pawlu's firm anti-fascist instincts seem to have thrust his political boat deep into socialist waters. He appears to have twigged that the Malta Labour Party needed serious energising,¹⁸² apparently resolving that Socialism was the needed antidote against the party's dispiritedness, the country's maladies, and the fascist threat.¹⁸³ He seems to have kept his ear to the ground, fostering in the process a sharpened discernment and alertness for foreign news, especially those coming from the front where fascists were pushing against the barricades.

'He shared with me,' Mintoff would recall about his friend decades later, 'many hours of passionate discourse on the international events which made our young hearts bleed with grief.'¹⁸⁴ Bleed, that is, with Fascism's victims and successes. Dumink seems to have been drawn to this political scenario while being 'impressed immensely,' as he subsequently put it, by Pawlu's 'almost scientific analysis' when often making 'a full evaluation of the local and international political situation'.¹⁸⁵ It looks like the young introvert friends found not only solace in each other, but also mutual nourishment for their driven minds. 'He believed that our studies should come first,' Mintoff recalled about his friend's common sense many years later,

‘and whatever time he could spare from his [studies] he discussed with great thoroughness the socialist doctrine best suited for our country.’¹⁸⁶

Through this process there seems to have been no fundamental transformation of character or mode of mental processing in young Dumink. Thanks to Pawlu and possibly others, there appears to have been a mere substitution of one set of beliefs for another—the socialist for the Catholic—though apparently both retained fully the same religious fervour and the same sense of mission. The new Dumink now learned to call himself agnostic. The old belief was truly out, and like a newly-converted Saul fresh from Damascus he scurried to proselytise his hapless peers at Bormla’s Xghajra, some of whom were intent on joining the priesthood.¹⁸⁷ There he hotly exposed, as he later narrated, ‘straight from the shoulder, all the reasons which prompted me to stray from the Catholic fold and become a hardened agnostic’.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless, however exuberant the new Dumink seemed to be, his internal struggle does not seem to have been straight-forward, swift or easy. ‘During my two years at the Lyceum,’ Mintoff would attest, ‘fresh perceptions jostled with and overpowered the old, and I was sixteen [read: quite grown up] before the spiritual change was completed and I became a confirmed agnostic.’¹⁸⁹ Despite the jostling and the suffering, Dumink appears to have been pleased that, with Agnosticism minted on one side of the new coin and Socialism on the other, ‘the seeds of social rebellion were flowering,’ as he gleefully decided.¹⁹⁰

At last, his vagrancy seems to have begun coming to an end. His rebellion against what must have felt to be a stolen childhood could now proceed with the dim though encouraging prospect of possible triumph. The opposing forces which were since childhood intuitively discerned as ‘I’ vs. ‘mother’ now seem to have been given new socially acceptable names which could unabashedly engage in full public view as appropriate substitutes of what could not be named, could not be spoken of and could not be faced directly: on the one side—the ‘I’ line-up—there gathered together Agnosticism and Socialism (later also Labourism); on the other side—the ‘mother’ side—Catholicism, Clericalism, and Fascism were apparently massed. Along the way, it seems that the isms keep changing and taking on new names; even so, the forces they represent down under never

change, and will forever be the same.

The most intolerable feeling for the lad would have been that of *not* engaging the threatening opposing force; for this would subliminally mean giving in, admitting defeat, having the ‘I’ destroyed. This could never be. Hence it was a relief for Dumink that, following the danger of remaining without weapons to fight his battle, Agnosticism and Socialism came along to furnish him with both. ‘Socialism,’ he would say in the new terminology of his combat, ‘redeemed my soul and put me again on the rebellious path.’¹⁹¹ While engaging on one level—the social, political, public, acceptable level—the other level—the more fundamental, basic one; and also the most important—is engaged too.

This change of names, this engagement on a substitute, relief level is a sure sign of the lad’s growing maturity and social awareness. Without ever mentioning (naming or defining) the vital, unconscious engagement, the new projection can be taken on without hesitancy. This is possibly why Dumink’s new agnostic Socialism—even if as yet very much undefined, or rather ill-defined—seems to have emerged as a sort of dogmatic negation, in reaction to, as he later said, ‘the pro-Catholic-Church, pro-Italian, pro-Fascist menagerie’ he began to identify around him.¹⁹² Apparently full of confidence, the new Dumink was now marshalled behind his new banner, and feeling perfectly secure. As he could vouch later on: ‘Their fascist conviction was anathema to my socialist faith.’¹⁹³

WHILE DUMINK’S POLITICAL AWARENESS being roused by the Duce’s *Camicie Nere* and *squadristi*, his loyal politicians and thugs, something quite different was setting his hair on fire. This was not in Pawlu’s sphere of influence at all (‘I doubt,’ Mintoff intimated years later, ‘that Pawlu would have turned his eyes and mind away from his [...] textbooks if naked Calypso sang her most enticing lyric in his ear.’)¹⁹⁴ It certainly was in Rumanu’s. Of all the blessings that his charisma brought upon his pal in that summer of ’31 perhaps the greatest of all was finding him a steady sweetheart. She came after various attempts, it seems;¹⁹⁵ however, when it happened, she struck a deep note in Dumink’s heart. ‘I fell madly in love [with her],’ Mintoff would vouch many years later, ‘and she reciprocated my love in full.’¹⁹⁶

Melita Lucchese, known as Lita, was just twelve and a half years

old at the time, eighteen months younger than Dumink.¹⁹⁷ She lived with her hard up family at Birgu,¹⁹⁸ and caught Rumanu's eye while strutting at Xghajra with a friend; he then dexterously choreographed the first exchange of looks and smiles between the future lovers.¹⁹⁹ Forever afterwards, as Mintoff would remember for many a year to come, Rumanu 'made our encounters easy, patched up our quarrels, and shielded our privacy'.²⁰⁰

Lita and Dumink's love affair lasted nine years. 'My girl and I lived entirely for the thrill of the day,' Mintoff mulled a lifetime later, 'and had no thought for the morrow.'²⁰¹ Nine years was an exceptionally long period in those days for a relationship with no knot tied at the end. Indeed, the lovers were but babes when they set off on their amorous course. Dumink would not have been of a marriageable age until sixteen, that is, two years after meeting Lita. Nonetheless, this alone cannot sufficiently explain a marriage delay or an infinite deferral.

Years later Mintoff contended that there was never a question of marriage *at all*,²⁰² and that this rejection came from his part only. The reasons he later thrust for this dismissal, however, were frankly not only quite lame but also rang untrue. One of them, as he repeated ever so often, was that he had made up his mind to emigrate in good time. ('I seek my future shifting from pillar to post with no fixed plan or clear ambition beyond living as a rebel.')²⁰³ If this was not enough, he was also convinced that he would die young; so why the bother? ('It was this uncanny foreboding [of dying young] that had prevented me from making any long-term sentimental commitments with Lita or anyone else.')²⁰⁴ Elsewhere he also tried to plug the argument that the arrangement somehow suited Lita herself because, five years into their relationship, she had qualified as a teacher;²⁰⁵ knowing full well that only unwed women could be employed as teachers in government schools,²⁰⁶ she wanted to keep the job.²⁰⁷

While stating these excuses, Mintoff clearly decided to overlook that, like many thousands of others, he and Lita could have emigrated together, that widows could teach in public schools, and that his eventual income would have been enough to support both. Evidently, the real problem was another. It looks quite plausible that, already from that early stage in the lad's life, a long-term sentimental commitment appears to have posed some serious problems to him.

One significant indication of this might be how Dumink involved his mother in this relationship. That was by keeping her out. In fact, in nine whole years he never brought himself to as much as *inform* her of his relationship with Lita. This seems astonishing. Dumink would have been perfectly aware that in the Maltese Islands unto this day mothers would be amongst the first to be apprised of their sons' or daughters' steady relationship. It appears to be more so in this case since it was virtually *not possible* to hide such a thing in a place like Cottonera where everybody knew everyone else and where gossiping was incessant. And furthermore, of course, with a mother such as Ċetta how could her favourite's liaison possibly go undetected? And wouldn't she have seen it written all over his face, anyway?

If Dumink knew the first thing about his family and his neighbourhood, he would undoubtedly *not* have been under any illusion that his relatives, certainly his mother, had been unaware of his relationship with Lita. In fact, as he later had reason to believe, *everyone* in his family knew about it.²⁰⁸ Dumink could also have detected hints of it from his own mother when she proposed to arrange not one but two *rich* matches for him (Lita categorically excluded), but he chose only not to speak to her for an entire week.²⁰⁹

Anyway, if one and all knew of his romance, what of it? He surely had nothing to be ashamed of; Lita was unquestionably a decent girl from a respectable family. Many years later, he too admitted that he had been 'unreasonably secretive' about his relationship with Lita.²¹⁰ The question is: why all the mystery, the deception, the lying? Years later Mintoff tried to explain these by appealing to the fact that Lita and he were unwilling to share any of their love with anyone. 'All we wanted,' Mintoff revealed, 'was to be happy together from day to day and love each other exclusively. We were terribly possessive,' he added, 'and the slightest trespass caused pain. We suffered pangs of irrational jealousy if some outsider happened accidentally to ruffle our insecure love nest.'²¹¹

This flimsy explanation would have held water if nobody else were involved; but others *were* in the know, such as Rumanu, Lita's girlfriends, and other friends of Dumink. It was *only* his family—or rather, to be more precise, his mother—that Dumink was intent on keeping in the dark. It seems that he absolutely could not break to her the news that he was being unfaithful to the privileged love

they—that is, he and his mother—shared. As with his private secession from the Catholic Church, loving Lita must have felt like an act of infidelity towards his mother. Mintoff himself perhaps suspected as much: ‘My relationship with Lita,’ he acknowledged, ‘was not on an even keel. Although it was more than I had given anyone else,’ he proceeded, ‘I only surrendered *part of myself*.’²¹²

Indeed, the other part—the lion’s share, for sure—had already been made to commit itself permanently long ago, and could not do so again; it had previously been appropriated in a wedlock which was, on a subliminal level, indissoluble. If Dumink could—or would—be honest with himself on this score, his instinctive disinclination to enter into a long-term sentimental commitment had nothing to do with protectiveness, emigrating, dying young or any other pretext. It was rather bound to his inability, now and forever, to commit himself totally to the affections of another person because he already was sort of hitched. There never would be enough room for anyone else. The damage wrought by his surrogate marriage continued to cause havoc now and forever, as we shall see.

This sense of perceived adultery must have intensified due to Dumink’s sexual intimacies with Lita. At first the couple seems to have made their best to resist the temptations of the flesh as they had learnt to do in their catechesis. ‘We caressed, petted, kissed, embraced, pressed our bosoms,’ Mintoff described years later, ‘and, like all healthy teenagers on the loose, satisfied all our cravings, short of hard-core intercourse.’²¹³ However, as the nine long years dragged on, the inevitable of course ensued.

‘Ours was not a platonic love,’ Mintoff then openly conceded a lifetime later.²¹⁴ Catholic teaching considered extra-marital love-making most immoral. ‘My youthful crimes’²¹⁵ – this is how Mintoff subsequently defined ‘the longed-for silent yet eloquent body-to-body contacts’ between Lita and him.²¹⁶ ‘My goings-on with Lita,’ as Mintoff obliquely described their intimate relations, were carried out at concealed nooks: a charcoaled doorway at Birgu;²¹⁷ a dark lane at Paola.²¹⁸ On his part—though he willingly yielded, and had Lita yield, to ‘my daily late evening sieges’²¹⁹—he also conceded that ‘Lita was much more to me than a flesh pot’.²²⁰ Magnanimous, indeed. On her part, at least according to Mintoff long afterwards, ‘Lita felt happy to reject motherhood, and defy sin, traditions, and conventions’.²²¹

Whatever the case, again according to him, ‘Lita and I found our way of defying the State/Church edicts and our people’s traditional taboos on sexual relations.’²²²

Many years later Mintoff’s assessment of his long liaison with Lita would be that ‘it was a sweet and bitter experience’.²²³ This was more than a bit unfair on her. While it seems that she very often took the brunt of his fluctuating whims and moods,²²⁴ she remained faithful to him all through their nine-year courtship. On his part, not only did he repeatedly betray her loyalty but also blatantly lied about it.²²⁵ This set a pattern of a lifetime.

AS HIS LYCEUM TWO-YEAR study-course progressed, Dumink’s only viable route to successfully terminate it was to sit for the strenuous but prestigious Matriculation Exams.²²⁶ In his case these were to be held in July 1932. The Matric, as it was called, provided him with the possibility of enrolling at the University of Malta, the only public university in the Maltese Islands. For him, as he expressed it later, the Matric was thus ‘the undeserved passport to another world for which initially I felt not the slightest yearning’.²²⁷ However, if the university wielded supposedly scant attraction, another goal did, perhaps more than the other: vanity. According to his own admission, Dumink felt with vigour ‘the outwardly suppressed pride of the Bastjun boy who had found it [in himself] to smash into the intellectual stronghold reserved for the elite’.²²⁸ Considering from where he had come, this is perfectly reasonable and understandable. Nevertheless, vanity apart, it still was Dumink’s firm intention to emigrate to Algeria immediately after the Matric;²²⁹ and if this venture were to unhappily fail, the Matric was considered acceptable for a teaching post in the government primary schools.²³⁰ Quite comprehensibly, Domenico’s parents disapproved of their son emigrating to some God-forsaken desert. However, for once it seems that Ċetta was unusually clueless as to how her son could apply himself productively in the immediate future. Since her long-thought plan had gone astray she seemed to have lost her footing. Though to her the thought of him leaving for good for Algeria must have been as sour and perturbing as acid rain, she does not seem to have worked out how she could possibly dissuade him.

Her husband Wenzu proved to be much more perspicacious than his loquacious wife. It was about time for him to begin taking matters

in hand. Not only did he not try to talk his son out of emigrating—he understood that that would have the opposite effect—but on the contrary he actually *encouraged* him. He only urged him to do the sensible thing first and finish the Matric. ‘If you fail the Matric and still want to work the land in Algeria, I will give you my full backing,’ Wenzu concluded after a hearty pep talk with his fourteen-year-old son. ‘Shall we give it a try?’ The lad thought it over in two seconds, nodded, and they clinched.²³¹ That did the trick.

The syllabus for the June 1932 Matric was issued towards the end of the preceding April.²³² Domenico prepared to sit for four obligatory subjects, a further subject out of a choice of nine, and an oral exam in Religious Doctrine which was mandatory for Catholic students. The compulsory exams were in Latin, English, Italian, and Elementary Mathematics, and the further subject picked by Domenico was Elements of Physics. In this case, the whole exam, held in Valletta,²³³ and spread over all mornings and afternoons of one working week, involved ten arduous written papers of three hours each, and some half hour of several oral assessments in each of the three languages.²³⁴

Since the Matric was in itself very wide-ranging and laborious, there was indeed no necessity for any *numerus clausus*.²³⁵ Domenico must have found the exams gruelling; his results prove it.²³⁶ These were announced at the beginning of July.²³⁷ Domenico passed all exams but one—English Paper 1—at which, since it was just one fail, he could have another go in September.²³⁸ Arithmetic and geometry were his strong suit; English his weakest.²³⁹ Despite the hitch, which could be soon remedied anyway, the slum-boy’s success at the Matric instantly made him the super hero of family, friends, the entire Bastjun horde,²⁴⁰ and even the Castille wholesale vendors.²⁴¹ ‘Acting in unison,’ Mintoff recalled decades later, ‘they lifted my image above the Bastjun standards and closer to what [was] expected for my new undeserved junior academic status.’²⁴² The result seems to have made Wenzu somewhat more bashful than usual as if his son had suddenly outrun him somehow.²⁴³ By contrast, Ċetta glowed and bellowed before all her neighbours as only the proudest and happiest mother in the world could. ‘There was no stopping her from boasting,’ Mintoff still remembered a lifetime later.²⁴⁴ This was quite understandable. Come September,²⁴⁵ with all the pressure gone, Domenico passed the final three-hour exam quite easily.²⁴⁶

However, that unforgettable night in early July after the results came out, having finally left his friends with whom he had a drink too much, the teenager began to fathom what had just happened. That night he slept over at Bormla. There, up in his rooftop balcony, he fell asleep gazing fixedly at the stars.²⁴⁷ Strange feelings seem to have crossed his mind. For one, he unexpectedly sensed that his bosom friends, Rumanu and Furtu—the latter having sat for the Matric too and failed,²⁴⁸ the former perfectly amiable and illiterate²⁴⁹—were now somehow both left somewhere behind, though the severance was never entire. What's more, there seems to have returned quite out of the deep blue that ominous feeling of entrapment he now knew so very well. 'The moral atmosphere on my lovely island,' Mintoff reflected decades later on his Matric feat, 'got more suffocating and my hankering to shake its dust off my shoes grew stronger.'²⁵⁰ Was Wenzu's stratagem slipping, after all?

WITHOUT ABANDONING AS YET his resolution to permanently run off to Algeria, following the Matric achievement Dumink went nowhere. Lodging at Castille, he simply bided his time. After all the talk, he had decided 'to give the university a try', as he brought to mind years later.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, he could not do so immediately since intakes of new students at the University of Malta were only done every three years; the next due in October 1933.²⁵² This gave Dumink an entire intervening year on his hands.²⁵³ At first he thought of applying to be a temporary teacher but discovered that one needs more than a mere Matric to do that job; he therefore immediately gave the idea up completely.²⁵⁴

He then seems to have decided to simply stay put. 'Never before or after the intervening year before my university enrolment,' he disclosed years later, 'did I display such an enthusiastic initiative in exploring the physical and intellectual scenes of the little world around me.'²⁵⁵ Now, having come far beyond any reasonable expectation, and beginning to dare to have his tail up, it looks like his intent on pursuing the university course was to establish himself, locally or abroad, professionally. '[I] entered half-heartedly the realm of tertiary education,' he confessed timidly, 'as a means to another narrow end, the acquisition of a profession to earn a decent living.'²⁵⁶

For the time being, then, all Dumink appears to have done, career-wise, was to prime himself for launching. One way of doing

this was by beginning to really focus. ‘After my matriculation,’ he could avow later on, ‘I took my studies more seriously.’²⁵⁷ Indeed, he needed to do so in order to shake off paying any tuition fees at university. Up till now, right through elementary, primary and secondary schooling, the Mintoffs’ expenses for Dumink’s education appear to have been practically nil or almost so; it was intended to remain so. Dumink was expected to work hard as his part of the deal; and so he seems to have done. Nevertheless, he also claimed some elbow space for his efforts. ‘Mine was not, however,’ he quickly assures us of his studying, ‘the dreary solicitude of the bookworm and his stiff-necked discipline that keeps him chained to his chair for interminable hours.’²⁵⁸ Dumink seems to have been intent on enjoying himself, especially during months apt for swimming. ‘Summer holidays without sea and sunbathing and leisurely lovemaking,’ he pronounced affably, ‘would be to me as an after-life without a heaven.’²⁵⁹ Put another way, this apparent recklessness looks more like a decision to make favourable circumstances grist for the mill. With his university ticket firmly tucked in his pocket, Dumink now appears to have been determined to claim his adulthood. In the 1930s there was one unequivocal way for a lad to do so: by doffing his shorts and donning long trousers. Up till then, all through Lyceum, whether at Castille or at home, with family, pals or girlfriends, Dumink went in shorts, as believed proper for his age and station.²⁶⁰

Now all that had to change as the child obsessed with nothing else. The day his slacks came out, complete with hat, appeared to him as the grandest political event of the age! ‘What I remember clearest of those days during which my country’s freedom was being strangled,’ Mintoff excitedly acknowledged decades later, ‘was one hilarious Sunday morning when Rumanu and I visited the Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta. We did not go there,’ he continued brazenly, ‘to join other Maltese youths in some anti-British demonstration: it was the first time we were wearing long trousers and felt hats, and we had our photo taken by the itinerant photographer.’²⁶¹ Dumink looks surely dandy in that shot (see photo in the pictures section), perhaps incongruously so, playing the grownup which he clearly is not. Rumanu, on the other hand, is himself; the teenager from head to toe, with an impish look and perhaps telling a Mona Lisa smile that befitted him splendidly.

DOMENICO—AS OUR LAD’S name once more became in high society²⁶²—joined the University of Malta on 2 October 1933. He stayed there for six years until 1939,²⁶³ during which, in 1937, this 350-year-old institution was granted royal patronage and the ‘Royal’ title.²⁶⁴ However momentous the opening day must have been for our lad, he skipped the official ceremonies,²⁶⁵ preferring to read at the National Public Library instead.²⁶⁶ Could he have thought that he was unworthy of the occasion? Indeed, this was a titanic leap for him from the gutter to the stars.

He must have been quite conscious that his life would henceforth never be the same again. At the moment, his road-map showed a three-year course (1933–36) leading to a bachelor of science degree (B.Sc.), and subsequently a four-year course (1936–40) for the acquisition of an architect and civil engineer degree (A.&C.E.).²⁶⁷ Initially having ‘not the slightest idea what university course to join,’ as he confessed later,²⁶⁸ without consulting his parents or anyone else he chose his line of study through a simple process of elimination—dismissing law, theology, and medicine offhand—and going for what promised to deliver a maximum of physics and maths.²⁶⁹ What seemed to have been more important than the learning subject was how much of a bite this could chomp off in terms of money. On this account the Mintoffs need not have worried at all because Domenico’s flying colours made sure that all tuition would be on the house. In fact, by dint of sheer hardwork he succeeded in winning government scholarships for five years running and, additionally, grants equivalent to today’s US\$7,050 or so spread over as many years.²⁷⁰

Unlike his exam results at the seminary and the Lyceum, which were rather mediocre, his grades at the university soared, most of them approved ‘with honours’ or ‘*cum laude*’ (with distinction).²⁷¹ An ‘A’ student by today’s British standards (‘B’ by the US’s), throughout all the six years of university Domenico placed *always* first in his course; quite something when considering the stiff competition around.²⁷² He also seems to have done well enough with the joint projects he was assigned to do on the outside to acquaint himself with floor and site plans, elevations, measurements, detail drawings, and the like,²⁷³ as likewise with his work at the Public Works Department during his last year.²⁷⁴ What of this apparently sudden improvement? It might have been that the lad was more

academically motivated now than when merely achieving grades to pass exams: a career was now at stake. It could have additionally been, however, something even more deep-rooted. During these years of his late teens and early twenties it seems that the youngster began to personally assert himself as never before. Now socially hovering well above his friends, family and neighbours, moving about in a grander world which for all intents and purposes should have been barred to him, he appears to master his life with a new self-confidence which proclaimed to the world his individualism and self-determination, at least externally.

I am no longer a child, he seems to have been saying; no longer anyone's ward; I am my own boss. This was a sure sign of finally breaking loose. Such self-possession could have come from various quarters. One of these might have been the income, however meagre, which he began to make from giving private lessons to Matriculation students.²⁷⁵ Though at first scared of the responsibility,²⁷⁶ he more or less succeeded in overcoming his sense of inadequacy and got going.²⁷⁷ Eventually, his buoyancy made him add, free of charge, higher mathematics university students to his complement.²⁷⁸

Another sign of his self-assurance could be detected in the efforts he made to deliberately widen the distance between himself and his parents. He did not keep his mother in the loop anymore,²⁷⁹ and he slowly began to ignore his father despite continuing to live with him at Castille for the duration of his stay at the university.²⁸⁰ On his part, Wenzu attempted to keep 'pitiless vigilance' over his son, as the lad recalled,²⁸¹ and expected to be obeyed, especially when both occasionally slept over at Bormla.²⁸² Dumink, however, seemed to be quite averse to relinquishing gained ground. As he recalled years later, although his father 'understood and tolerated my heathen ways,²⁸³ sometimes he just lost it, as when he frequently locked his son out at night for returning too late.²⁸⁴

Once, Wenzu completely lost his cool, and went mad with rage. 'To my perennial shame,' Mintoff could not help remembering long afterwards, 'we resorted to blows and ended up rolling on the floor.'²⁸⁵ This perhaps was not the first time that father and son went for each other; it certainly was not the last. In those days Dumink was adamant that his privacy be fully respected by his parents, even if they could clearly see that, with 'my varied and heavy agenda', as he subsequently explained,²⁸⁶ he was 'defying fatigue, nourishment,

and sleep'.²⁸⁷ As he disclosed later about his life as a university student, 'I indicated [to them] that it was entirely my own patch, and my parents merely lent a blind yet full cooperation'.²⁸⁸

Perhaps one of the most iconic changes which our lad seems to have deliberately made in those years, probably early on in the 1933-34 academic year, was to begin using a shortened version of his name instead of Domenico, Dominic or Dumink. 'I cut it short to Dom,' he dryly always recollected.²⁸⁹ Of course, knowing perfectly well that using an Italian or English version of one's name had a political implication, with his new name the lad avoided both while retaining the Maltese version for friends. Moreover, there seems to have been a certain musicality to the shortened version when coupled with his surname, vocalizing a three-syllable rhythm which, in the distant future, would prove quite catchy to the masses. The change of name, however, was not immediate. At first, say up till around 1936, our university student continued to sign his name Domenico whenever it was needed, perhaps still aspiring to be part of the sophisticated class.²⁹⁰ Then this was changed to Dominic,²⁹¹ and soon to Dom by the end of 1937.²⁹² It thus remained forever afterwards, even sometimes on official state documents.

Emblematically this version of the name would accompany another uncommon feature which Dom also began in those first university months:²⁹³ the pipe. It was his father who encouraged him to take up pipe-smoking when once during the Lyceum days he caught him with a cigarette.²⁹⁴ Wenzu himself smoked the pipe, one which had a very long shank.²⁹⁵ His son took the idea like a duck to water. With a tobacco pouch and matches always at hand,²⁹⁶ together with a chicken's feather for cleaning the bowl, draught hole and bore,²⁹⁷ for the next forty years or so 'the fumes flow[ed] perpetually from my pipe,' as Dom could merrily pledge.²⁹⁸ Not many people smoked the pipe in those days, especially the young; if so, it was done privately, not very much sported publicly. Not so with Dom. He brandished his pipe like a flag, apparently fully conscious that with it he looked somewhat deliberate, refined, scholarly, perhaps even wise.

Certainly there might have been some image handling in the practice, not excluding status. Accompanied with some purposeful facial expression and body language, Dom could well enough convey non-verbal messages with his smoking instrument, such as dislike or

irritation when claspings his teeth hard around the bit; pensiveness, possible disagreement or change of mind when removing it from his mouth to pause smoking; preparing a talking-to when placing it carefully on the table; deep pleasure and approval when enjoying hearty puffs; or contemplation when taking his time to fill the bowl for reuse. It may have been also known, perhaps from some print, that Stalin was an avid pipe smoker.

UNSURPRISINGLY, AS HE MIGHT have half-expected himself, one of Dom's very first poignant impressions at his new university environment was the smug, sometimes pompous, Italian-speaking stick-in-the-mud students. While probably all were local Nationalists or right-wing Constitutionalists, most of them enjoyed toying with the idea of being somewhat even fascist sympathisers — though they probably could not even imagine what that was like in reality. Dom hated them. Of course, they were all he could never be. To compensate, he had at least solace in the fact—and much relief it was—that Pawlu too, his socialist buddy, began university with him despite having also initially failed in one subject in the Matric.²⁹⁹ 'Paul Cassar and I,' Mintoff would gush years afterwards, '[were] the only two active socialist students at the Royal University of Malta.'³⁰⁰ Later they were joined by Furtu, who re-sat for the Matric and also joined the Faculty of Science.³⁰¹

Apart from these, just as at the Lyceum, Dom hardly had any other really close friends at the university; he always seemed to shy away from being on intimate terms with more than a handful of people. A few of his new companions at the university were really little more than acquaintances;³⁰² others nearer could be counted on the palm of one hand. Amongst the latter were his good friends Sonny Privitera, Wigi Portelli, Victor Muscat, and Eddie Vassallo, all of whom remained close to him for life.³⁰³ Years later Dom pledged that among the seventy-four science students 'the spirit of student camaraderie had over-ridden all other allegiances'.³⁰⁴ This is questionable since the pro-British vs. pro-Italian sentiments and divisions seeped into every fibre of Maltese society, the university included, even if one rated them low, as Dom might have done.³⁰⁵

This could not have appeared clearer than in the students' self-made group, called the *Comitato Permanente Universitario* (University Permanent Committee), which seemed to exist solely to organise

occasional dressed-up dances and Monet-type picnics.³⁰⁶ Elected representation here was not proportional; it ceded the aspirant priests, doctors and lawyers—all pro-Italian to the core—a double or even triple take and say.³⁰⁷ Dom could get a closer look at them since in the last week of November 1933 Pawlu and he were both elected by their peers to the *Comitato* as the representatives of the science faculty.³⁰⁸ But even before that happened, the intrepid young socialists were busy working themselves up against their perceived foes. It looks like the initiative and brains were all Pawlu's, who sat down with Dom to pen a letter to *The Malta Chronicle* and together took it to the paper's offices in Valletta to have it published.³⁰⁹ 'I remember very clearly our surprise,' Dom vented afterwards, 'when the acting editor, after checking our identity, made no attempt to doctor our piece.'³¹⁰ Without mentioning the young sources by name, the information they gave was included in the editorial of 25 November 1933. After moaning at length about how in the *Comitato* the likely pro-Italianites were over-represented, the contribution ended on this prompting:³¹¹

If Italian poison is to be eliminated from the University, it is up to the powers that be to eliminate any Committee that claims to be representative but has to descend to such patent tricks in order to keep the Comitato the colour it is. At present it represents nothing but gives certain people an excuse for labelling our University as italianate [*sic*].

This seems to have been Dom's first public political action and, most certainly spearheaded by Pawlu, his first-ever published thought. It would by no means be the last. Even if this studentesque piece was, in reality, nothing more than chinwag, the lad seemed elated with it and must have envisaged himself as a sort of socialist combatant on some revolutionary front against the forces of evil. 'Ours was essentially a political task,' he blurted out years later.³¹² A very modest one, if so. Whatever the case, being part of the *Comitato*, however trivial, appears to have been to young Dom a somewhat political baptism of fire. In the midst of so much so-called 'Italian poison', tussling with peers whom he was convinced were dangerous fascists—which they most likely were not—he fancied himself facing the world's enemy directly. How fortunate for him that he had by his side his *au fait* dogmatic mentor.³¹³ From day one at the *Comitato* Pawlu and Dom were instructed to speak

only Italian—which they, of course, refused on principle³¹⁴—and the hullabaloo began, most of it callow and quite childish, lasting for an entire academic year. ‘We were convinced,’ Dom afterwards said of Pawlu and him, ‘that confrontation was inevitable and we might have to rely heavily on my Bastjun apprenticeship.’³¹⁵ This sounds as bad as it was in real fact. For the freshmen took no time at all to embroil themselves in a colourful free-for-all brawl right there in the august university corridors.³¹⁶ Needless to say, Dom made for himself a hearty reputation of ‘a very rowdy member’ of the *Comitato*, as he himself confessed much later.³¹⁷ His barks were shortly followed by yet another nibble at his peers’ heels just a fortnight or so after the first published salvo. Again he had assisted Pawlu to make it into *The Malta Chronicle’s* editorial of 11 December 1933, part of which stated.³¹⁸

In the University the “Comitato Permanente” likes to believe that it represents the Students of the University though it sees to it that it elects itself in a way that will keep it always pro-Italian in influence and always completely unrepresentative. Further, it is definitely formed of people who are elected on an avowed Nationalist or Constitutionalist basis, so that it is a body responsible for bringing Party Politics into our University.

As it happened, the *Comitato* survived Pawlu and Dom’s one-year tenure by just another year; then it was abolished. This was probably part of an effort by the British authorities to diminish, in the light of Mussolini’s growing threat, the ever so worrying Italianate influence at the university and everywhere on the islands.³¹⁹ The students most probably did not know how hot was the fire they played with. *I nostri padroni ed i loro odiosi satelliti*,’ goaded the *Comitato* in a 1934 appeal to students, ‘*sperano che una vita molle abbia a snervare le nostre facoltà. Ma noi non siamo nati schiavi*,’ they spurred. ‘*L’italianità della nostra cultura e della nostra stirpe, la coscienza dei nostri naturali diritti, la libertà, la resistenza all’oppressione ci sono sacre*’ (Our rulers and their loathed cronies believe that they can weaken our strengths by pacifying us. But we were never owned by anyone. The Italian [Latin] character of our culture and our lineage, the awareness of our natural rights, [our] freedom, [and] resistance to oppression have always been sacred to us).³²⁰

In later months it was probably Pawlu alone who continued an unrelenting onslaught on the *Comitato’s* ostensible futility,³²¹ and deceit,³²² in *The Chronicle* to bring it down; however it was, he

succeeded. To fill the void left by the *Comitato*, in 1935 an official students' council was created, which was like unto its forerunner minus the Italian language.³²³ Dom was immediately elected by his peers as its first secretary.³²⁴ Pawlu was not, however, but this did not stop Dom's further steps in the social and political arena without his pal's direct prompting. On his own for the time being, Dom helped in the organisation of students' visits to factories,³²⁵ to archaeological sites and museums,³²⁶ and to theatre lyrical performances, some of which were, ironically enough, sent over by Mussolini's government.³²⁷

Most of all, Dom seems to have largely enjoyed the incessant bickering, much of it most fatuous, with the presumed Fascist students while distancing himself as much as possible from them, as he insisted with the university rector.³²⁸ Anyway, thus actively engaged Dom gained some experience with handling people and situations.³²⁹ 'It was my first experience in articulate leadership,' he recalled in the twilight of his career, 'I learned that, given the right conditions, it was possible to reform a society piecemeal by renewing or mending the old social fabric step by step.'³³⁰ Whatever that was supposed to mean, particularly with regard to his university days, Dom seems to have begun to accumulate a bit of social capital.

In the meantime, to further have the students under control at a time when nothing was being left to chance, the British authorities had a large old building close to the university in Valletta transformed into a club where the students could hang out.³³¹ This was inaugurated at the beginning of 1936.³³² Though Dom considered the whole thing as a 'Greek gift-horse,' as he indicated years later—precisely because it kept the students under a watchful eye³³³—he took over for himself one of the building's rooms and set up a sort of private office there in which he also gave his lucrative private lessons.³³⁴ He managed this by befriending the club's caretaker, one Michelangelo Buhagiar, a Gozitan known to Dom as Mike,³³⁵ who was constantly at his beck and call.³³⁶ 'My friend was sensitive to my moods,' Dom would say of him appreciatively. '[His] words were balsam flowing from [the] heart when my aching spirit called for company.'³³⁷

With such a help, and with an all-day 'workshop', as Dom named his almost private area at the club,³³⁸ he spent less and less time at Castille, where he went only to sleep, always getting up too late or not at all for his first lecture.³³⁹ At least once he even failed to

turn up for a whole day of lectures, and had to pay a fine of two shillings sixpence in lieu of a suitable explanation.³⁴⁰ His behaviour seems to have been otherwise impeccable; the only complaint some of his lecturers sometimes had was of his ‘intemperate haste’, as Dom educed afterwards,³⁴¹ together with his ugly handwriting, as always.³⁴² What some liked most about him, however, was his ease with mathematical problems,³⁴³ the subject closest to his heart,³⁴⁴ for which he was keenly sought by other students.³⁴⁵ In some other areas, as in the draughtsman’s technique, for example,³⁴⁶ Dom seems to have had to struggle to keep up with some of his peers.³⁴⁷ Sometimes he complained of ‘occasional bursts of malicious jealousy,’ as he called it later, which some student or other displayed towards him.³⁴⁸ Apparently, his general method of study was to read through the required texts with some rapidity and absorb what he could, then mind for the clarification of obscure points in the classroom.³⁴⁹ It was a system he seems to have found useful later even outside the lecture room.³⁵⁰ His reading was done in his ‘office’ at the club, where he also gave his private lessons, met his peers, and ruminated on the politics he began to get involved with more and more. There were many ropes he needed to learn.

¹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 438, para. 2–7.

² See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 41.

³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴ See: fsmitha.com (accessed 13/04/19).

⁵ *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 234f.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁷ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 262, para. 1.

⁸ This must have been in August 1931.

See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 231f.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹⁰ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 234f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹² *Orig. Mem.*, f. 611, para. 8 (see also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 240).

¹³ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 201.

¹⁴ Lawrence Ancilleri to the author (11/10/16).

¹⁵ For information given in this paragraph on Rumanu, see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 201f. The nickname is most probably a dialect rendering of ‘Romano’, the family’s surname.

¹⁶ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 202.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁸ See: *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 562, para. 6.

²⁰ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 202.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁵ A curious cartoon that appeared in the *Sunday Times of Malta* on 4 July 1971, p. 11, drawn by ‘Vanni’, shows Mintoff as a philosopher (with pipe) sitting in a garden with the word ‘Il Penseroso’ written beneath. Would the cartoonist know of the nickname of forty years previously?

²⁶ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 562, para. 6.

²⁷ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 202.

²⁸ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 219.

²⁹ Carmel Cauchi to Lawrence Ancilleri (1992; Ancilleri Collection). This cinema seems to have been in the street leading up to the parish church from Piazza Paolino

Vassallo.

³⁰ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 221.

³¹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 246. Wills’ Flags were generally smoked.

³² See: *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³³ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 666, para. 7.

³⁴ See: Government of Malta, *Blue Books*, 1931, Section 17, p. 4. The school was at Tal-Hammieri, limits of Qormi, and was run by government for an annual cost of £1,393 (some €100,000 today).

³⁵ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 531, para. 6.

³⁶ See: Government of Malta, *Blue Books*, 1931, Section 17, p. 3. The government kept the Lyceum for an annual expense of £8,517 (roughly today’s €700,000) or for the annual cost of £15-14 per student (approximately today’s €1,100).

³⁷ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 531, para. 6–10.

³⁸ In Gozo the Secondary School for Boys at Victoria, provided an education similar to that of the

- Lyceum for 50 students (1930 data; see: Government of Malta, *Blue Books*, 1931, Section 17, p. 2). There was no educational equivalent for girls in Gozo.
- ³⁹ See: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions*: 1907–44, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under ‘*Mintufj Domenico*’.
- ⁴⁰ See: Government of Malta, *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 1, 13 January 1932, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1930–31”, pp. 4f.
- ⁴¹ Years later Dumink admitted that he only passed because he ‘had been lucky [...] in guessing the questions put to us’ (*Abr. Mem.*, p. 206).
- ⁴² See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 146, para. 8. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 196, 206. The academic year 1931–32 was incidentally the final year that Mr. Leach was Head of the Lyceum and Director of Secondary Schools. He had served secondary school education in Malta for thirty-eight years since 1 August 1913, voluntarily retiring from service on 7 September 1932 (see: Government of Malta, *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 190, 28 November 1930, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1930–31”, p. 6; and also: Government of Malta, *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 88, 24 October 1934, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1932–33”, p. 1). A Merchant Navy Officer, Leach was born at Peckham, Surrey, in March 1893, and died in Malta on 18 August 1947 (see: tolliss.com; accessed 27/05/19). On 3 June 1932 he was made part of the Imperial Service Order by King George V (see: *The London Gazette, Supplement*, 31 May 1932, p. 3583b).
- ⁴³ Government of Malta, *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 1, 13 January 1932, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1930–31”, p. 5. None of the scholarship winners eventually completed the course that year, and sixteen of the others—Dumink was not among them—had their non-payment dispensation revoked at the end of the academic year for having failed to pass the annual exam.
- ⁴⁴ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 231. Dumink was one of the 107 scholars free of charge that year (1931–32), 54 of whom were scholarship holders and 53, including Dumink, exempted from payment of fees (see: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 138, 29 November 1933, “Report on the workings of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1931–32”, pp. 5f).
- ⁴⁵ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 229.
- ⁴⁶ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 578, para. 9.
- ⁴⁷ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 206. Out of the other three boys in his class who entered the Lyceum with him that year, two hailed from labourers’ families, that is, Michel Angelo Bonnici of Żurriq whose father, Francis, was a ship fitter, and Pancrazio Piscopo of Żebbuġ whose father, Michael, was a baker. The fourth boy, Fortunato Zammit, was the son of a wholesale contractor from Xagħra, Gozo, and, as we shall see further on, Dumink’s almost only best friend in the entire school. For the source of the above information, see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III.
- ⁴⁸ Just to have an idea, amongst the 103 boys of the 1930 Lyceum intake, only 34% (31 students) came from the professional (61%) or merchants (39%) classes. Out of the rest, 18% (16 boys) came from the civil servant class, and almost half (48%; 44 boys) came from the labourers’ classes. In the records, ten of the fathers’ professions were not stated, and two fathers, one dead and another a pensioner, are left without qualification. Amongst the professional fathers, one may find the manager of the Bank of Malta (Louis Fiteni), the editor of *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette* (Joseph Bartolo), and a judge (Giacomo Depasquale). Interestingly, amongst the labourer fathers, there was another messman like Dumink’s father (Salvo Coppola of Sliema), and even two stewards (Joseph Barbara of Bormla, and Vincent Scerri in England, the latter an officers’ cook). One may also point out that one of the boys was the son of the Bormla tobaccoist (Michael Licari) with whom Dumink’s mother worked in her youth (see: Chap. 1 above). For the source of the above information, see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III.
- ⁴⁹ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 235.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 228.
- ⁵¹ NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under ‘*Mintufj Domenico*, [born on] 16.8.16, [son of] *Lorenzo*, [a] *messman*, [from] *Cospicua*’.
- ⁵² See: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 138, 29 November 1933, p. 2. Here the surname is spelt ‘Mintof’.
- ⁵³ As appears clear in the registry. See: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under ‘*Mintufj Domenico*’.
- ⁵⁴ Such as the ‘first graders’ or full-timers: Mr. Richard Bamber (mathematics), Prof. Giovanni Calabritto (Italian), Mr. Arthur D. Calnan (history, and then mathematics); and the ‘visiting’ teacher: Rev. Prof. A.E. Mattocks (Holy Scripture). Amongst the Maltese there were the first graders Mr. V. Tonna Barthelet (French) and the Rev. Prof. Paul Vella (Latin); and the ‘second grader’ or part-timer Mr. Rogatino Cachia (geography). See *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 222–8, *passim*, and p. 261 (for Calabritto); and also *Orig. Mem.*, f. 622, para. 9 (for Tonna Barthelet). See also: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 1, 13 January 1931, p. 1; *ibid.*, No. 138, 29 November 1933, p. 1; and *ibid.*, No. 88, 24 October 1934, p. 1. In passing, perhaps it should be mentioned that in his memoirs Mintoff also spells the surnames Calabritto and Calnan incorrectly (*sic*: Calabretto, Culnan).
- ⁵⁵ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 228.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 228. The teacher in question was Mr. Arthur D. Calnan.
- ⁵⁸ The other subjects were English, Italian, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, history, geography, and religion (see: Government of Malta, *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 1, 13 January 1932, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1930–31”, Appendix 3, p. 14.). Drawing was taught by the well-known Maltese painter Ramiro R. Cali (see: *ibid.*).
- ⁵⁹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 622, para 9f. (for French), 6 and 8 (shorthand). Apart from these subjects, the class neither had physics, book-keeping, business routine, Italian shorthand, and typewriting, all of which were included in the curriculum of other classes.
- ⁶⁰ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 224.
- ⁶¹ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 227f.
- ⁶² See: *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ As yet no records of students’ results at the Lyceum of those days were found to have survived.
- ⁶⁵ V Classical obtained twelve passes in all the obligatory subjects out of thirteen (see: Government of Malta, *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 1, 13 January 1932, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1930–31”, p. 3).
- ⁶⁶ For 1930–31, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 6f.; and for 1931–32, see: *ibid.*, No. 138, 29 November 1933, “Report on the working of the Lyceum and the Secondary Schools of Malta and Gozo during the Scholastic Year 1931–32”, pp. 6f.
- ⁶⁷ The inference is made from Mintoff’s exclusion of the society in his memoirs. As the students, together with three of their teachers, stipulated in the Statute, the society intended ‘to provide a training ground in debate calculated to equip the future citizens of Malta, whether they become public men or not, with that comprehensive outlook which is created by forming

judgements as a result of balancing all sides of an argument' (see: *Ibid.*, pp. 8f.).

⁶⁸For the time schedule at the Lyceum, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 536, para. 4.

⁶⁹See: *Ibid.*, f. 531, para. 6. On the distance of the Lyceum from Castille, see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 209.

⁷⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 210f.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁷²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 536, para. 6. See also the parts which follow up till f. 539, para. 2.

⁷³Descriptions of Wenzu's place of work at Castille may be found here: *Ibid.*, f. 535, para. 11, f. 556, para. 2ff.; and *Abr. Mem.*, p. 211.

⁷⁴See, for instance: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907-44*, Alphabetical listing, III, father's profession corresponding to entry under 'Mintoff Domenico'.

⁷⁵See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 213.

⁷⁶See: *Ibid.*, p. 43: 'fresh, clean-shaven, smiling, [with] his ironed, creamy-white pinafore [tied] at the back.'

⁷⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 204, para. 3. See also: f. 132, para. 5.

⁷⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 32.

⁷⁹Three were brothers from Xaghra, Wenzu's own hometown, Bajada by surname, one of whom, Gjuzeppi, will be mentioned further down. It seems that they were known, at least in Gozo, as 'Ta' Karmen (Carmen's; as per Marizo Portelli to the author on 15/08/16). Another was a certain Grezzju, though no surname or nickname is provided (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 553, para. 3). On the number of employed staff ('six or seven'), see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 210. For Wenzu's preference of Gozitans working on his watch at Castille: Yana Bland to the author (18/03/14).

⁸⁰One was from Birgu, and had the surname Magrin (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 553, para. 3f.); the other, called Karmnu, known as In-Nanna (the granny), was from Bormla (see *Ibid.*, f. 744, para. 8-12; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 33).

⁸¹See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 212f. In his memoirs Mintoff always spells Mikiel's nickname as *Is-Soy*, the meaning of which is unclear; it is certainly not a Maltese term.

⁸²See: *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁸³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 548, para. 3.

⁸⁴One was Mikiel Bartolo (see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 245, 246); the other Mikiel Zammit, known as 'Ta' Mira (see: *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 236, 246, 246).

⁸⁵Run by the Pisani brothers (see: *Ibid.*, p. 245).

⁸⁶The fish wholesaler was a Mr. Farrugia (see: *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 246), and the meat merchant was a Mr. Derek (see: *Ibid.*, p. 245).

⁸⁷See: *Ibid.*, p. 218. Also corroborated by Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).

⁸⁸Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).

⁸⁹For a much later reference to about this time, certainly obtained from Mintoff himself, see: Charles Mizzi,

"Ma 'Thallex Jidhol mill-Bieb Principali", *Fid-Dawl tat-Torċa, It-Torċa*, 18 April 1972, p. 7.

⁹⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 537, para. 13 to f. 538, para. 6.

⁹¹See: *Ibid.*, f. 549, para. 6; f. 985, para. 10; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 210. See also: *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁹²See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 493f.

⁹³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 363, para. 2.

⁹⁴See: *Ibid.*, f. 569, para. 1-8.

⁹⁵See: *Ibid.*, f. 570, para. 7.

⁹⁶See: *Ibid.*, f. 562, para. 6.

⁹⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 231.

⁹⁸*Orig. Mem.*, f. 549, para. 6.

⁹⁹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 535.

¹⁰⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 535, para. 2-8, and ff. 552ff. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 210.

¹⁰¹See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 558, para. 7. The foundation stone of the Duke of York Avenue (today Glormu Cassar Road) was laid on 17 June 1927 by Prince Albert, Duke of York, the future King George VI, and was inaugurated by Prime Minister Gerald Strickland on 3 April 1930 (see: *Il Progress*, supplement of *The Times of Malta*, 27 May 1930, p. 4, col. 3).

¹⁰²This was on 4 March 1972. See: "Auberges of Malta", *Malta History & Heritage* at vassallohistory.wordpress.com, under "Auberge de Castille" (accessed: 07/02/19).

¹⁰³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 385, para. 3.

¹⁰⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁵See, for instance: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 557, para. 3, till f. 558, para. 9.

¹⁰⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 571, para. 2.

¹⁰⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹⁰See: *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹¹²See: *Ibid.*, pp. 249f.

¹¹³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 568, para. 13.

¹¹⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 228.

¹¹⁵See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 132, para. 5.

¹¹⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 249. One representative in question was a Mr. Sabine, a leading signalman, and apparently the secretary of the Mess Committee.

¹¹⁷In *Mabel Strickland* (1996, Progress Press, Malta, p. 86), Joan Alexander reports that Rosamund Fisher, daughter of Admiral William Fisher, the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet between 1932 and 1936, told her that while dining with the Mountbattens at his flat in Guardamangia Hill, Pietà, they were served coffee by the 6-year old son of the cook, these being Dumink and his father Wenzu. At best, the episode could have happened at Castille when the boy was fourteen years old because Mountbatten, appointed Fleet Wireless Officer to the Mediterranean Fleet in August 1931 (see: *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 2 October 1931, p. 1, col. 7), took up office in Malta, precisely at Castille, for the next couple of years starting in October/November 1931 (see, for instance, all of 13 November 1931: *Western Daily Press*, p. 10, col. 7; *Northern Whig*, p. 6, col.

5; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, p. 8, col. 1; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, p. 6, col. 1; *Western Mail*, p. 9, col. 4). However, in his *Orig. Mem.* (f. 662, para 7, till f. 663, para. 2), Mintoff categorically denies that this ever happened. According to Mintoff, in those years Mountbatten and he only ever came face to face 'in our occasional encounters up or down the many steps [of Castille]' (*Abr. Mem.*, p. 296).

¹¹⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 228.

¹¹⁹See: *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹²⁰See: *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹²¹*Ibid.*

¹²²*Ibid.*

¹²³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 204, para. 3.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, f. 769, para. 2.

¹²⁵*Abr. Mem.*, p. 246.

¹²⁶See: *Ibid.*, pp. 20f.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

¹²⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 14, para. 6; see also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 23.

¹³⁰See: *Ibid.*, from f. 271, para. 7, up till f. 273, para. 6, where

Mintoff provides an interesting interpretation of the historic alliance between the Maltese conservatives and the local Catholic Church.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, f. 612, para. 5.

¹³²*Abr. Mem.*, p. 241.

¹³³*Orig. Mem.*, f. 529, para. 9. For similar avowals, see: *Ibid.*, f. 503, para. 5; and f. 578. 8-10.

¹³⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 296.

¹³⁵See: Ghakda Proletaria Maltija (1926), *L'Idea Socialista*, John Bull Press, Malta, p. 4; and: Giuzè Bonnici (1931), *Storia tal Partit tal Haddiema* [A History of the Labour Party], Tipografia Ellul, Vallereta, Malta, pp. 19f.

¹³⁶On this publication, see: Mark Montebello (2018), *Dimech*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2, Miller Distributors, Malta (1st ed., Publishers Enterprises Group, Malta, 2004), pp. 66ff.

¹³⁷See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 132, para. 5; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 65.

¹³⁸See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 349.

¹³⁹Lino Bartolo to the author (14/08/17); and: Gużè Cassar to Lawrence Ancilleri (23 June, 1, 14, 28 July, 4 August, 7 October 1993; Ancilleri Collection).

¹⁴⁰Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).

¹⁴¹Grandma Mari and Aunt Guditta lived together behind the Msida parish church, Uncle Louis lived at Msida too, and Aunt Censa lived in Guardamangia Hill, Pietà.

¹⁴²References for Mari, Guditta and Wigi have been given above. On Aunt Censa, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 772, para. 10; and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 27, 232. When Georges was vacating in Malta, he stayed with Censa, though he visited Mari and Guditta daily (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 234).

¹⁴³Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).

¹⁴⁴Censa was born Mary Mintoff at Victoria, Gozo, in 1868 (27 September; Saint George Parish

- Archives, Victoria, Gozo, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 11, f. 294; see also: NAG, *Giuliana Masini*, Vol. 8, f. 34r, where it is stated that the girl is known as Censa), and, at the parish of Msida on 12 June 1888, before the Parish Priest, Rev. Saviour Caruana, with witnesses Vincent Fiorini, son of Natale, and Paul Zerafa, son of Saviour, both of Msida, married Joseph Aquilina of Msida, son of Paul and Mary Rose née Galea (Msida Parish Archives, *Marriage Registers*, Vol. 1, No. 400).
- ¹⁴⁵ The general elections that year were held from 7 to 9 August (see: Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver, *Elections in Europe: A data handbook*, Nomos, Germany, 2010, p. 1302; and: Michael J. Schiavone, *L-Elezzjoniġiet f'Malta: 1849–1981* [Elections in Malta: 1849–1981], Bugelli, Malta, 1987, p. 190).
- ¹⁴⁶ Walter Aquilina to the author (16/02/14).
- ¹⁴⁷ Apart from the two who will be presently mentioned, there were also the following four: (1) one was from Birgu (nameless in *Orig. Mem.*, f. 538, para. 6); (2) another one was a certain Vella from Birzebbuga (without first name in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 206), whose place of birth in the Lyceum lists must have been other than the one stated here (see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entries under 'Vella'); (3) one more was a certain Piscopo from Haż-Zebbug whose first name was probably Pancrazio (though no name is given in *Orig. Mem.*, f. 537, para. 6–12; and *Abr. Mem.*, p. 206); though, having been born on 10 July 1914, Pancrazio, the son of a baker, was two years older than Mintoff, like him he entered the Lyceum with the intake of 1930, and also set in the Year V Classical class (see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under 'Piscopo Pancrazio'); and finally (4) John Bartolo, the son of Mikiel Bartolo, one of the Xagħra buddies of Dumink's father since childhood, and the wholesale vendor mentioned above (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 242f), born on 21 January 1917, and entered the Lyceum for Class I on 1 October 1928, two years before Mintoff (see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under 'Bartolo John').
- ¹⁴⁸ See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 206ff.
- ¹⁴⁹ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 236, 245f. The Ta' Mira business had its warehouses at Ta' Liesse on the Valletta side of Malta's Grand Harbour (see: *Ibid.*, p. 43).
- ¹⁵⁰ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 536, para. 5f; and f. 538, para. 3 (where Furtu is called 'my faithful friend'). Furtu lived with his father at a place called *Ir-Raggett l-Abmar* at Rinella, limits of Kalkara, on the outskirts of Cottonera (see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 207f).
- ¹⁵¹ See: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 7, 4 March 1931, "List of persons entitled to vote for the election of General Members of the Senate", p. 15 (*Mintoff, Lorenzo*), and: *Ibid.*, No. 6, 1 March 1931, "List of persons entitled to vote for the election of General Members of the Senate", p. 8 (Zammit, Michele, Ta Mira).
- ¹⁵² In the Lyceum admission registers he is recorded to have been born at Senglea, i.e. Isla (see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under 'Cassar Paulino'), whereas he only resided there, as Mintoff asserts (*in Orig. Mem.*, f. 538, para. 3). A few years later, when he was studying at the University of Malta, he moved to Sliema (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 288), living with his parents and two younger sisters at Old College Street (Christine Cassano, 2019, Paul Cassar's daughter, to the author). That he was from Żejtun is given in all his biographies (see: Robbie Mifsud Bonnici, 1960, *Diġġunjarju Bijjo-Bibliografiku Nazzjonali* [A National Bio-Bibliographical Dictionary], Department of Information, Malta, p. 118; Michael Galea, 1995, *Diġġunjarju ta' Kittieba Maltn u Għanvċin Il-bierah u L-lum*, Bugelli [A Dictionary of Yesteryear's and Today's Maltese and Gozitan Authors], Malta, pp. 56f; Michael J. Schiavone and Louis J. Scerri, 1997, *Maltese Biographies of the Twentieth Century*, Publikazzjoniġiet Indipendenza, Malta, p. 163; and Michael J. Schiavone, 2009, *Dictionary of Maltese Biographies*, Vol. 1, Publikazzjoniġiet Indipendenza, Malta, pp. 528–32; and: *The Times of Malta*, 17 January 2006, 'Medical historian dies'). See also: Mary Samut-Tagliaferro and Charles Savona-Ventura (2007), *Dr Paul Cassar (1914–2006): A bibliography*, University of Malta Library, Malta.
- ¹⁵³ He was called a 'Recorder of works' (see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under 'Cassar Paulino').
- ¹⁵⁴ For their first encounter on the Birgu-Valletta ferry-boat at the beginning of October 1930, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 538, para. 3.
- ¹⁵⁵ Pawlu was born on 29 June 1914 (see: NAM, *Lyceum Admissions: 1907–44*, Alphabetical listing, III, entry under 'Cassar Paulino'), and also the above-mentioned biographies).
- ¹⁵⁶ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 653, para. 1.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 652, para. 6.
- ¹⁵⁸ Edward and Mark Cassola (2006, 22 January), Paul Cassar's nephews, "Appreciation - Dr Paul Cassar", *The Times of Malta*.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 859, para. 10.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 288.
- ¹⁶¹ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 503, para. 5.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 505, para. 3.
- ¹⁶³ See: *Ibid.*, f. 137, para. 3.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 578, para. 8.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 509, para. 9.
- ¹⁶⁶ See: *Ibid.*, f. 505, para. 3. For more on Gerald Strickland, see: Harrison Smith (1974), *Mussolini and Strickland*, Progress Press, Valletta, Malta; *Ibid.* (1985–86), *Lord Strickland: Servant of the Crown*, 2 vols., revised and edited by Adrianus Koster, Progress Press, Valletta, Malta.
- ¹⁶⁷ See, for instance: Mgr. Enrico Dandria (1930), *The Malta Crisis*, with a preface by Rev. Francis Woodlock, The Rotary Press, London, UK.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Org. Mem.*, f. 589, para. 7.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 255.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- ¹⁷² For a long description of this incident and its import, see: *Orig. Mem.*, ff. 503–10.
- ¹⁷³ It was the culmination of weeks of high tension. It all started a month earlier when the bishops of Malta and Gozo, with the full blessing of the pope, decreed it to be a mortal sin to vote, or have the intention of voting, for any candidate contesting the impending general election on the side of Prime Minister Strickland. In those days, these included the Labourite candidates since the Labour and Constitutional Parties formed a coalition government (called the Compact). The only candidates not included in this ban were those of the Nationalist Party. The bishops later also declared to be a mortal sin for anyone to buy, borrow or read the Strickland newspapers (though not the Labour ones). According to Catholic belief, dying in mortal sin without due confession would incur the then-horifying punishment of eternal damnation. Due to this ruling pandemonium followed with the lamentable result that the governor had to go to the extreme length of cancelling the election and prohibiting public political meetings. To make things worse, barely two weeks before Whit Sunday the Prime Minister survived a firearm assassination attempt. For a full account of events, one might see: Joseph M. Pirotta (2005), *L-Astorja Kostituzzjonali u l-Isfond Storiku: 1800–1942* [Constitutional History (of Malta) and the historical context], Sencsela Kulturali, No. 64, Publikazzjoniġiet Indipendenza, Malta, pp. 215–24.
- ¹⁷⁴ See: *Il-Berka*, 12 June 1930, p. 4.
- ¹⁷⁵ See: *Lehen is-Sewwa*, 14 June 1930, p. 3.
- ¹⁷⁶ The ringleaders were identified as Karmenu Ciantar and Nestu Laviera (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 509, para. 5–8). After the incident, the bishops formally protested with the governor for failing to control the crowds (see: *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 12 June 1930, p. 18; *The Times of Malta*, 19 June 1930, p. 1).
- ¹⁷⁷ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 503, para. 5 (emphases added). The bracketed word 'seminarians' substitutes the words

'in the Middle Hall', referring to those seminarians of the same formative level of Mintoff.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 504, para. 3f.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 510, para. 2.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 509, para. 9f.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, f. 579, para. 7.

¹⁸² See: *Orig. Mem.*, p. 288.

¹⁸³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁸⁷ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 147, para. 2.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 146, para. 7.

¹⁸⁹ *Ab. Mem.*, p. 240.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁹² *Orig. Mem.*, f. 859, para. 9.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, f. 899, para. 10; partly reproduced in *Ab. Mem.*, p. 521.

¹⁹⁴ *Ab. Mem.*, p. 348.

¹⁹⁵ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 860, para. 6.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ She was the daughter of Carmelo Lucchese and Vincenia née Galea, born at 8.30 AM on 30 January 1918 at Birgu, and baptised with the names Melita, Angela, Carmela, Margarita, Laurentia, two days later, on 1 February, at the parish church before her godparents Joseph Lucchese, son of Carmelo (her elder brother), and Maria Vella, widow of Lawrence, both from Birgu (Birgu Parish Archives, *Baptismal Registers*, Vol. 15, f. 58r; with thanks to David Lanfranco to locate this source). In his memoirs it seems that Mintoff was adamant not to disclose the girl's family name by always using the abbreviated Lita (which can be the shortened form of many a first female name, such as Lolita, Belita, Carmelita, Adelita, etc.), and merely tendering that she 'had an Italian surname' (*Ab. Mem.*, p. 319). This resolve would have been fully respected in this present biography had it not been flouted when the abridged version of Mintoff's memoirs was published in 2018, which, together with the girl's full name and surname, even went to the extent of reproducing her 1948 passport portrait kept at NAM (see: *Ibid.*, p. 320).

¹⁹⁸ When Mintoff states in his memoirs that 'Lita was an orphan' (*Orig. Mem.*, f. 862, para. 12), he wanted to say that she had lost her father at a very young age; not both parents. Her father, Carmelo, died when Lita was three years old, on 6 July 1921 at 45 years of age (Birgu Parish Archives, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 8, f. 3v). Her mother, Vincenia née Galea, died on 19 December 1978 at the venerable age of 97 years (Paola Parish Archives, *Burial Registers*, Vol. 5, f. 42) – just a mere 13 and a half months before Lita herself. Vincenia lived and died at 54 Dockyard Street, Paola (*Ibid.*).

¹⁹⁹ For general information on Lita, see: *Orig. Mem.*, ff. 862, para. 12f; 866f, para. 1–14, 1; and *Ab. Mem.*, pp. 317–20. At Birgu the family lived very close to the drawbridge leading

to Kalkara (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 690, para. 3, 5, where 'shortcut' and 'low barrel vault' are used to indicate the drawbridge; and *Ab. Mem.*, p. 11, though here the 'Polverista' [Gunpowder depot] mentioned should probably have been the 'Armeria' [Armoury]).

²⁰⁰ *Ab. Mem.*, p. 317.

²⁰¹ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 862, para. 7.

²⁰² See: *Ab. Mem.*, p. 253.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

²⁰⁴ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 738, para. 6.

²⁰⁵ See: *Ab. Mem.*, p. 321.

²⁰⁶ On the change in legislation in September 1979 (under a Mintoff government), see: Civil Court of Appeal, Malta, 781/96, Helen Borg *et al.* vs. the Prime Minister *et al.*, 9 February 2001, No. 34.

²⁰⁷ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 861, para. 10f.

²⁰⁸ See: *Ab. Mem.*, pp. 344, 845.

²⁰⁹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 863, para. 3.

²¹⁰ See: *Ab. Mem.*, pp. 344.

²¹¹ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 862, para. 8.

²¹² *Ibid.*, f. 865, para. 11 (emphases added).

²¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 890, para. 6. Consider also: f. 705, para. 2 ('We appeased our corporal passion in all manners short of total sexual consummation').

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 746, para. 3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 690, para. 1.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 747, para. 8.

²¹⁷ See: *Ibid.*, f. 690, para. 3, 5 (possibly the pathway between It-Torri ta' San Gwann and Il-Kwartier); and *Ab. Mem.*, p. 320.

²¹⁸ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 708, para. 14 ('Sardinia Lane'; possibly today's Saint Anthony Lane); f. 711, para. 3f.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 728, para. 8.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 705, para. 9.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 863, para. 5.

²²² *Ibid.*, f. 861, para. 10.

²²³ *Ibid.*, f. 860, para. 6.

²²⁴ See: *Ab. Mem.*, p. 319.

²²⁵ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 730, para. 9 ('I was so loyal to her ...'); and *Ab. Mem.*, p. 406 ('Unfounded was Lita's suspicion that my heart had warmed towards other girls.')

²²⁶ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 480, para. 8.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 611, para. 8; partly reproduced in *Ab. Mem.*, p. 240.

²²⁸ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 611, para. 9; partly reproduced in *Ab. Mem.*, p. 240.

²²⁹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 768, para. 14; f. 862, para. 4f; and *Ab. Mem.*, pp. 235, 240, 381.

²³⁰ See: *Ab. Mem.*, pp. 240f.

²³¹ *Ab. Mem.*, p. 235. See also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 611, para. 9; f. 768, para. 14; f. 862, para. 4f; and *Ab. Mem.*, p. 381.

²³² See: *The Malta Government Gazette*, 28 April 1931, "Syllabus of matriculation examination for 1932", pp. 390–4.

²³³ The examination hall was situated at 178, Cristoforo Street (see: *Ibid.*, 14 August 1931, "University of Malta", p. 688), close to the Lower Barakka Gardens (where the 'Diuballi' apartments stand today).

²³⁴ The Latin exams included translations

from and to English or Italian prose and verse, translations together with comments and explanations of historical and mythological allusions of texts from Virgil's *Aeneid*, the elegies of Tibullus and of Ovid, and Cicero's *Pro Quinto Ligario Oratio*, and grammar, syntax, and prosody. The English and Italian exams included grammar, rhetoric, and explanations with reference to context and to allusions of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Tasso's *Gersusalemme Liberata*, Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*, and the poems of Tennyson, Parini, Alfieri, Monti, Foscolo, Manzoni, Leopardi, Giusti, Prati, Zanella, Carducci, and Pascoli. The Elementary Mathematics exams included various branches of arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. The Elements of Physics exam included topics related to physical matter, atmosphere, temperature, sound, light, and voltaic cells. The Religious (Catholic) Doctrine oral test touched upon the Apostles' Creed, the commandments, sin, Church precepts, the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Hail Mary (See: *Ibid.*, 28 April 1931, "Syllabus of matriculation examination for 1932", pp. 390–4).

²³⁵ 67 boys had sat for the ordeal, of whom only 14 passed in all subjects (21%), and of these none obtained the 75% aggregate to win the government's £20 award (more or less today's US\$1,100 purchasing worth). Seven of these students hailed from the Birkirkara's Jesuit Saint Aloysius College, six from the Lyceum, and one had been given private tuition. nineteen students failed in just one subject, seven of whom came from the Lyceum, four from Saint Aloysius, three from the Seminary, two from Valletta's Flores College, another two had been given private tuition, and one hailed from Gozo's Secondary School. Amongst the rest, nine failed in two subjects, eight in three, ten in four, and seven in all (see: *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 2 July 1932, p. 18).

²³⁶ In adulthood Mintoff tried to give the impression that the Matric was for him like a piece of cake (see, for instance: *Ab. Mem.*, p. 235). This contradicts the clear evidence of the middling results obtained by this average student (see the note after the next).

²³⁷ The announcement was made *in situ* *voce* by the Acting Rector of the University of Malta, Senator, and Carmelite priest, Prof. Anastasio Cuschieri, at the university's Aula Magna in Valletta on the morning of Saturday, 2 July 1932, and published the day after (see: *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 2 July 1932, p. 18). They were officially published in *The Malta Government Gazette*, 19 July 1932, "Result of the matriculation

- examination held in June 1932”, No. 41 in the list (*Mintoff Domenico*), pp. 700f. See also, *Abr. Mem.*, p. 236.
- ²³⁸The English Paper 1 required a composition together with a paraphrase of some surprise texts. In it the lad obtained 73 out of 200, which, on average with the 107 marks over 200 in Paper 2, amounted to a total of 180 marks, just 23 marks short of the 200 minimum (45% of the maximum). In Latin, the results for Paper 1 and 2 were 135 and 150 respectively, both out of 200, with an average of 285 over 400 (71%). In Italian, the results were 125 and 140 for Paper 1 and 2 respectively, both out of 200, with an average of 265 over 400 (66%). The lad had a pass in all three oral exams. In Elementary Mathematics, the result obtained was 101 out of 120 for Paper 1, 98 out of 140 for Paper 2, and 111 out of 140 for Paper 3, together averaging 310 marks over 400 (78%). For the single paper of Elements of Physics, the lad obtained 280 out of 400 (70%). The total average, though 1,320 out of 2,000, i.e. a 66% pass, did not count since there could be no fail in any of the subjects (see: *The Malta Government Gazette*, 19 July 1932, “Result of the matriculation examination held in June 1932”, No. 41 in the list – ‘Mintoff Domenico’, pp. 700f).
- ²³⁹In the percentage order of achievement, his results show up like this: Arithmetic 84%, Geometry 78%, Latin 71%, Algebra 70%, Physics 70%, Italian 66%, English 45% (see: *The Malta Government Gazette*, 19 July 1932, “Result of the matriculation examination held in June 1932”, No. 41 in the list – ‘Mintoff Domenico’, pp. 700f).
- ²⁴⁰See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 236ff.
- ²⁴¹See: *Ibid.*, p. 245f.
- ²⁴²*Orig. Mem.*, f. 621, para. 13; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 252.
- ²⁴³See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 236.
- ²⁴⁴*Orig. Mem.*, f. 577, para. 2.
- ²⁴⁵The exam was held at the same place as before around the beginning of September (see: *The Malta Government Gazette*, 14 August 1931, “University of Malta”, p. 688). See also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 236.
- ²⁴⁶See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 578, para. 3.
- ²⁴⁷See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 238.
- ²⁴⁸See: *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- ²⁴⁹See: *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 238.
- ²⁵⁰See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 862, para. 6.
- ²⁵¹*Abr. Mem.*, p. 240.
- ²⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 241.
- ²⁵³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 622, para. 5; and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 241, 245.
- ²⁵⁴See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 241.
- ²⁵⁵*Orig. Mem.*, f. 622, para. 5; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 252.
- ²⁵⁶*Orig. Mem.*, f. 625, para. 3; partly reproduced in *Abr. Mem.*, p. 258.
- ²⁵⁷*Abr. Mem.*, p. 304.
- ²⁵⁸*Ibid.*
- ²⁵⁹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 666, para. 7.
- ²⁶⁰See: *Ibid.*, f. 862, para. 2; and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 216, 245, 246.
- ²⁶¹*Orig. Mem.*, f. 624, para. 14f. The ‘we’ here means ‘I’, for in the photograph taken, reproduced in the pictures section of this book, only Dumink is wearing long trousers and felt hat; Rumanu is not.
- ²⁶²See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 629, para. 11; see also, for instance: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 7, 23 January 1935, “Report on the working of the University for the period 1st October, 1933, to 30th September, 1934”, p. 59.
- ²⁶³See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 644, para. 13; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 258.
- ²⁶⁴The university was granted the King’s Patronage in June 1937 (see: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 1, 14 January, 1938, “Report on the working of the Royal University of Malta for the period 1st October, 1936, to 30th September, 1937”, p. 1). The title ‘Royal’ was conferred by Government Notice No. 454 of 22 October 1937 (see: *Ibid.*, No. 35, 14 March, 1939, “Report on the working of the Royal University of Malta for the period 1st October, 1937, to 30th September, 1938”, p. 362). See also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 258, where Mintoff states that, ‘of all the English universities I had heard of, ours was the only one called royal’, which must be understood to exclude the Royal University of Ireland, so named since 1882.
- ²⁶⁵These were done at the Jesus Church, Merchants Street, Valletta, the university’s Aula Magna. The opening ceremony was presided by the British colonial governor, Sir David Campbell, and included an oration in Italian. It was followed by a Catholic service. See: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 7, 23 January 1933, “Report on the working of the University for the period 1st October, 1933, to 30th September, 1934”, p. 49; and: *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 16 October 1933, p. 3, col. C. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 258, 260.
- ²⁶⁶See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 258.
- ²⁶⁷‘He still has to undergo in Malta his final examination for the Degree of Bachelor of Engineering & Architecture’ (UOM Rector R.V. Galea to A/Lt. Governor Nunn, 28 June 1943, UMA, Rhodes 2, Red. 66, Extract from File 2520/38 Red 193).
- ²⁶⁸*Abr. Mem.*, p. 253.
- ²⁶⁹See: *Ibid.*, pp. 253, 255.
- ²⁷⁰The lad received £20 grants for each of the first three years, and half this for the subsequent two. These latter £10 awards, called the ‘Lorenzo Gatt Prize’, was instituted in 1933 by a member of university’s academic body in the Faculty of Engineering & Architecture, the Hon. Lorenzo Gatt, C.M.G., A.M.I.C.E., A.&C.E., who donated £1,300 to government, equivalent to today’s purchasing value of some US\$108,000, for the purpose of the grants (see: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 7, 23 January 1935, “Report on the working of the University for the period 1st October, 1933, to 30th September, 1934”, p. 52; see also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 368).
- ²⁷¹See: UMA, File No. 360/38–39, Biographical No. 307, Rhodes Scholarships 1939/40–1941/42, I, Red 22a, folio bearing certification dated 25 November 1938 by the Secretary and the Rector, Joseph L. Pace and Robert V. Galea respectively, of the Royal University of Malta.
- ²⁷²In the three years 1933/34, 1934/35 and 1935/36, while his exam percentage in the preparatory course for admission to the Faculty of Engineering & Architecture were 75.3, 77 and 85 respectively, those in the academic course of science were 75.3, 86 and 91 respectively. In the two years 1936/37 and 1937/38, the percentage in the academic course of engineering and architecture were 78 and 79.9 respectively. For all this, see: UMA, File No. 360/38–39, Biographical No. 307, Rhodes Scholarships 1939/40–1941/42, I, Red 22a, folio marked ‘Statement’. See also: *The Malta Government Gazette Supplement*, No. 7, 23 January 1933, “Report on the working of the University for the period 1st October, 1933, to 30th September, 1934”, p. 59.
- ²⁷³One was at Saint Bartholomew’s Hospital, at Luqa, today’s Saint Vincent De Paul Long-Term Residence for the Aged (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 682, para. 1–11); another at Valletta’s Mandragg (see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 363f). A third, more theoretical project involving an elevated circular reinforced concrete water tower was left unfinished (see: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 403f). Around 1934, perhaps in the summer of that year, Dom spent some time on projects with architects Giuseppe Lia and Karmnu Micallef (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 638, para. 5–12). Lia had just finished structural works on the parish church of Marsaxlokk (see: “Our Lady of Pompei, Marsaxlokk”, *Times of Malta*, 6 October 2011; and Carmelo Lia, “Marsaxlokk parish church”, *Ibid.*, 13 October 2011).
- ²⁷⁴This was begun on 15 September 1938, and conducted under the guidance of the Chief Draughtsman and Engineer Carmelo Micallef, B.E.&A., on the following works: one month in the Drawing Office; erection of a Milk Centre at Hamrun; the Marfa breakwater; the Ta’ Qali aerodrome; the Msida Milking Centre; the War Memorial Monument, Floriana; the children’s playground, also at Floriana; and various repairs in palaces (see: UMA, File No. 360/38–39, Biographical No. 307, Rhodes Scholarships 1939/40–1941/42, I, Red 22a, folios 1 and 2 of the document marked

- 'Statement').
- ²⁷⁵ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 666, para. 3, 7; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 316.
- ²⁷⁶ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 667, para. 1.
- ²⁷⁷ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 316.
- ²⁷⁸ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 740, para. 7.
- ²⁷⁹ See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 290f.
- ²⁸⁰ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 707, para. 2ff; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 291.
- ²⁸¹ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 251.
- ²⁸² See: *Ibid.*, pp. 250f.
- ²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- ²⁸⁴ See: *Ibid.*, p. 290.
- ²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250.
- ²⁸⁶ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 686, para. 11. See also: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 290.
- ²⁸⁷ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 456.
- ²⁸⁸ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 855, para. 8.
- ²⁸⁹ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 207.
- ²⁹⁰ See, for instance: UMA, R1 – *Register of Voters*, unnumbered folios, list for the election held on 31 May and 1 June 1935, third folio, signature No. 66 ('*Domenico Mintoff*'); and *Ibid.*, list for the election held on 11 and 12 December 1935, first folio, signature No. 40 ('*Domenico Mintoff*').
- ²⁹¹ See, for instance: *Ibid.*, list for the election held on 4 and 5 December 1936, first folio, signature No. 35 ('*Dominic Mintoff*').
- ²⁹² See, for instance: *Ibid.*, list for the election held on 10 December 1937, second folio, signature No. 61 ('*Dom Mintoff*'); see also: *Ibid.*, list for the 1939 election of the Civil Engineering & Architecture Course, signature No. 6 ('*Dom Mintoff*').
- ²⁹³ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 488.
- ²⁹⁴ See: *Ibid.*
- ²⁹⁵ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 217.
- ²⁹⁶ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 712, para. 8; f. 874, para. 3; and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 462, 488, 502.
- ²⁹⁷ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 319.
- ²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹⁹ He had failed in Elementary Mathematics (see: *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 2 July 1932, p. 18), specifically in arithmetic (53 out of 120) and algebra (62 out of 140), but then, having made the September resit, passed through (see: *The Malta Government Gazette*, 19 July 1932, "Result of the matriculation examination held in June 1932", No. 47 in the list – '*Cassar Paolino*', pp. 700f).
- ³⁰⁰ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 102, para. 4.
- ³⁰¹ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 260.
- ³⁰² These included Jimmy Chetcuti (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 628, para. 10), Leo Ganado (see: *Ibid.*), Albert Hyzler (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 644, para. 15 till f. 645, para. 10), and Tommy Agius Ferrante (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 284).
- ³⁰³ See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 271–9. For more on Privitera, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 687, para. 4; f. 752, para. 4; and: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 272, 308f., 317, 348, 363ff., 369f. For more on Portelli, see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 666, para. 10, to f. 667, para. 2. For more on Muscat, see: *Ibid.*, f. 644, para. 8, till f. 645, para. 10. For more on Vassallo, see: *Ibid.*, f. 682, para. 1–13.
- ³⁰⁴ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 645, para. 2.
- ³⁰⁵ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 277.
- ³⁰⁶ These were called the Dansants (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 258). See also: Editorial, *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, "The University: The 'Comitato Permanente'", 11 December 1933, p. 3, col. C.
- ³⁰⁷ Most of these students, if not outright fascists, were staunch Nationalists or right-wing pro-British Constitutionalists (see: Dennis Castillo [2006] *The Maltese Cross: A strategic history of Malta*, Greenwood Publishing Group, California, USA, p. 151); they were quite popular amongst the other students (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 279). The *Comitato* was not officially recognised until 1932 by the pro-Italianite government led by Enrico Mizzi (see: The Editor [following Dom Mintoff & Paul Cassar], *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 25 November 1933, p. 3, col. C; 11 December 1933, p. 3, col. C; 15 March 1934, p. 3, col. C; and 23 May 1934, p. 8, col. A).
- ³⁰⁸ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 628, para. 13. The date was Tuesday, 28 November 1933 (see: The Editor [following Dom Mintoff & Paul Cassar], *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 25 November 1933, p. 3, col. C).
- ³⁰⁹ 'The *Chronicle's* editorial offices,' Dom informs us, '[were] situated above Porta Reale or Kingsgate, as it had just been rechristened' (*Abr. Mem.*, p. 287). On 15 December 1938, the newspaper *Malta* reported that these offices 'erano stati in questi ultimi tempi prudenzialmente trasportati sugli spalti delle vecchie fortification di San Giovanni [Valletta], e delle casemate in cemento armato, dell'epoca bellica, si trovano vicino all'ingresso [della città]' [were in recent times prudently transported to the old fortification of Saint John, and to the firing concrete constructions of war time, close to the entrance of the city (of Valletta)].
- ³¹⁰ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 859, para. 9–11; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 287, where it is said that the 'letters' were signed 'Blacksmith One' and 'Blacksmith Two', though of course none of this was eventually published.
- ³¹¹ *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 25 November 1933, p. 3, col. C, entitled: 'They play the game: By making the rules to suit as they go along'.
- ³¹² See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 651, para. 9.
- ³¹³ The cherry on the cake was the *Comitato's* president (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 402; and also: *Ibid.*, p. 279): Giorgio Borg Olivier, the 22-year-old, Valletta-born law student of 'polished finesse' (*Ibid.*, p. 402), as Dom vouched for him, 'who was already a great master at agonizing repetitions' (*Ibid.*, p. 280). Giorgio would go on to be the leader of the Nationalist Party (1950–77), and a long-time opponent of Mintoff. Other members of the *Comitato* included Eddie Sammut, the secretary (see: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 649, para. 4), and Victor Mercica, the treasurer (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 281).
- ³¹⁴ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 629, para. 3; and: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 402.
- ³¹⁵ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 280.
- ³¹⁶ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 280ff.
- ³¹⁷ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 528, para. 11.
- ³¹⁸ *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 11 December 1933, p. 3, col. C, entitled: 'The University: The "Comitato Permanente"'.
³¹⁹ A further initiative was to disenfranchise Italian from a foremost teaching language (see: 'Language report at the university', *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 8 January 1936, p. 3, col. C; and 'English in the university', *Ibid.*, 2 April 1936, p. 3, col. B).
- ³²⁰ UMA, "Appello alla gioventù studiosa Maltese", 3 September 1934, signed by E. Magri, President, and Ivo Leone Ganado, Secretary, '*Comitato Permanente Universitario*', File No. 62/1931-32, Reports etc., Accession No. 250.
- ³²¹ The '*Comitato Universitario*' (unsigned), *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, 15 March 1934, p. 3, col. C; which in part stated: 'Surely the time has come to burst this pro-Italian bubble and to make it clear that the *Comitato* [...] serves no useful purpose whatsoever and is very dangerous in that it may exert an influence upon young students who may be taught to believe that the University is a place that encourages fanatical pro-Italianism.'
- ³²² The '*Comitato*' goes to the Palace! What next in the University?' (unsigned), *Ibid.*, 23 May 1934, p. 8, col. A; which in part stated: 'No one of any weight takes the slightest notice of the "*Comitato*" either inside or outside the University. There would appear to be some hidden influence that tries to keep this pro-Italian body in existence for it is given well-appointed accommodation in the University while other Societies get little. Its impertinence is tolerated when it should be rooted out altogether.'
- ³²³ See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 283f.
- ³²⁴ See: *Ibid.*, p. 284. The elected chairman was a Tommy Agius Ferrante.
- ³²⁵ Such as the Wills cigarette factory at Valletta, and the Farsons brewery at Mriehel (see: *Ibid.*, p. 285).
- ³²⁶ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 651, para. 4.
- ³²⁷ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 285. See also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 650, para. 10.
- ³²⁸ See: UMA, Dominic Mintoff and Pawlu Cassar to Rector, 21 January 1936; and also: Giorgio Peresso (2015), *Giuseppe Donati and Umberto Calusso: Two Italian anti-fascist refugees in Malta*, Sencsela Kotba Soċjalisti, No. 156, Malta, p. 120.
- ³²⁹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 645, para. 3–9; and also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 287, 297 and 339f.
- ³³⁰ *Orig. Mem.*, f. 645, para. 10.

CHAPTER 3: MISSION (1930–1934)

- ³³¹ This was at No. 220, Saint Paul's Street, Valletta. For more on the club, see: *The Malta Chronicle and Imperial Services Gazette*, "University activities: The Union's opportunities", 20 February 1936, p. 3, col. B.
- ³³² On Thursday, 20 February (see: *Ibid.*, "The University of Malta Union: Opening of club premises tomorrow", p. 6, col. A). See also: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 728, para. 4; and *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 281–4, 316.
- ³³³ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 283.
- ³³⁴ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 666, para. 9; and also: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 316f.
- ³³⁵ Known to everyone else as Ċanċu (see: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 313f).
- ³³⁶ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 686, para. 11.
- ³³⁷ *Abr. Mem.*, p. 316.
- ³³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³³⁹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 707, para. 11.
- ³⁴⁰ See: UMA, *University Defaulters' Book: 1902–[none]*, M section, relative to 'Mintoff D', note for 16 October 1937 (the only disciplinary action taken against Mintoff recorded). The fine mentioned is equivalent to today's US\$10.
- ³⁴¹ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 681, para. 7–11. This was a complaint made by Prof. Joseph Colombo, architecture teacher, who was frustrated with Mintoff's constant haste which somewhat spoiled his academic and personal performance.
- ³⁴² See: *Ibid.*, f. 630, para. 3. This was an objection particularly made by Prof. Vincenzo Laurenza, an Italian teacher of Italian, author of *Il Primo Rettore e i Primi Statuti dell'Università di Malta: Discorso commemorativo letto nell'Aula Magna dell'Università il 27 Novembre 1933*, Government Printing Office, Malta, 1934.
- ³⁴³ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 664, para. 3: 'Most of my fellow students [were] slower than me in solving mathematical problems.'
- ³⁴⁴ See: *Ibid.*, f. 663, para. 12.
- ³⁴⁵ See: *Ibid.*, para. 3–4, 6–7.
- ³⁴⁶ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 681, para. 5.
- ³⁴⁷ See: *Abr. Mem.*, p. 304: 'Many of my colleagues were more hardworking and scrupulously diligent than me.'
- ³⁴⁸ See: *Orig. Mem.*, f. 644, para. 14: 'One or two other runners in the scholastic race showed occasional bursts of malicious jealousy at my easily attained achievement.'
- ³⁴⁹ See: *Ibid.*, f. 672, para. 2–7; and *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 304, 306.
- ³⁵⁰ As in parliament years later. See: *Abr. Mem.*, pp. 306f