Lund University
Department of Sociology

Stories of persistence and desistance

A study on Maltese ex-inmates' pathways in and out of crime

Author: Jolin Mifsud
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// Abstract

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This thesis investigates five ex-inmates' narratives on their pathways in and out of crime in Malta. In-depth interviews were conducted to generate their stories. Previous studies on criminal pathways tend to prioritise either the persistence or desistance path and present each path as a linear process. Within this context, the complexities of a criminal path and barriers towards desistance tend to be ignored. To contribute to the body of works aimed at minimising this gap, I analyse past, present and future identities in relation to individual agency and social influences. Additionally, barriers and pains of both desistance and persistence were also considered to exemplify multifaceted criminal paths further. Therefore, the theoretical framework expands on narratives, identity and symbolic interactionism to illustrate how past, present and future identities and social actors influence a persister or desister identity.

Keywords: desistance, persistence, identity, criminal pathways, narratives, social interactions

Popular science

Recidivism continues to be prevalent in Malta, and at 66%, it is one of the highest in the world (Borg, 2018). Previous studies within the field of sociology have presented a variety of explanations for persistence in criminal careers. They portray a variety of environmental and social constraints that limit the individual from moving beyond their criminal behaviour. This notion makes one wonder, how do individuals manage to move away from crime? Why do they choose to persist with crime involvement? What changes need to be made? What influences impact their choices and decisions? This study presents five unique stories of ex-inmates in Malta to answer these questions. The data gathered recognises their pathways as complex and constantly evolving. The main contributors to their pathways in and out of crime were identity shifts and influences from social actors. Past, present and future identities were discovered to be interconnected in determining a persister or desister identity within my sample. Meanwhile, social actors such as the family, peers, role models, NGOs and the prison aided or restricted progress in their criminal paths, whether towards or away from crime. This study also recognised a criminal label's impact on their criminal path. Also, a multifaceted perspective is presented, and a bridge between the various theories and concepts on pathways in and out of crime was generated. Central to my study are the stories generated through time, and the interviews aided this process by offering the ex-inmates a chance to share parts of their stories.

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Chapter 1 – **Introduction**

> "My mama always used to tell me: If you can't find somethin' to live for, you best find somethin' to die for" (Tupac Shakur, 1971-1996)

This quote was repeated back to me during one of my interviews. My interviewee had come to terms that the thing he wants to die for is a successful career in crime. Not because it was his only option, but rather, because it was the life that appealed to him most, and, at present, he had nothing to live for. The reasons why are imbedded in his self-narrative that is influenced by meaning-making and outside forces; in other words, his criminal path. Thus, before coming to this conclusion an entire process needed to take place. This case is just one out of the five individual paths this study focuses on; some have chosen to pursue a career in crime while others have decided to move away from it. But, before getting into that, I want to tackle the question of why I selected Malta as my site of study.

The recidivism rate in Malta is one of the highest in the world and as of 2018 sits at 66%, and 72% of the country's prison population originated from "intergenerational crime families" (Borg, 2018). These rates are quite high for a small country consisting of a population of 443,826 (Malta Population 2022, 2022) with only one main prison structure; the Corradino Correctional Facility situated in Paola. The small size of the country, as Clark (2012) noted, signifies "a high degree of social visibility" (p.3) that exposes one's behaviour to become the hot topic of the day within the many "strong gossip networks" (p. 2) found all over the country. This picture, along with the fact that most inmates come from a bloodline of individuals involved in crime provides a unique narrative, especially since such individuals "cannot escape to another town or city and start afresh and are forced to live in a community which is outcasting and stigmatising" (p. 4). Thus, not only is it relevant to look at entry into crime but also a continuation in it given the labels imposed by the criminal justice system and Maltese society. Furthermore, the constraints imposed also shed curiosity on the individuals who managed to break the recidivism cycle they once made part of.

Therefore, the interest is to look at pathways in and out of crime. Similar to many other studies concerning criminal pathways, this study was influenced by Maruna's (2001) Liverpool Desistance Study – more specifically his c*ondemnation* and *redemption* scripts that focus on the narratives of persisters and desisters. But even such a thoroughly researched study has been criticised for its major focus on subjectivity and the disregard of outside

factors influencing one’s identity concerning crime such as influences from social and institutional actors, and support from social networks. Therefore, the findings in Harris’s (2011) and Clark’s (2011) studies will be discussed to give insight into the missing factors in Maruna’s study. Furthermore, concepts of identities will be used to address how identities are constructed or changed over time based on meaning. Another area of interest this study aims to contribute to is that of the pains in criminal pathways. Hence, Nugent and Schinkel’s (2016) influence will also be visible in this study.

Moreover, this study also aims to add to the limited number of works on ex-inmates in Malta – specifically relating to pathways. By merging the abovementioned studies this research seeks to provide an honest and complex picture of the pathways in and out of crime of Maltese ex-inmates. The intention is to also highlight who the main protagonists in the ex-inmates’ stories are so as to be able to analyse which social groups have been of major influence. By taking into account narratives, identities, and symbolic interactionism the goal of this study is to also showcase stories as lived, generated, and understood by the five interviewees – Julie, Sam, Scott, Tobey and Will – from entry into crime till their situation at the time of this study. Thus, there are three research questions this study needs to answer in to meet the abovementioned aims:

How do ex-inmates in Malta portray their pathways in and out of crime?

How do they narrate their identity in different processes of their criminal path?

Who are the main actors in the stories about their criminal careers?

Delimitations

This research solely focuses on the perspectives of ex-inmates and thus inmates’ perspectives were not taken into consideration. This decision was necessary for this study to shed light on the path away from crime. Moreover, following Covid-19, conducting research at the Corradino Correctional Facility was limited by a lengthy process and for this reason, the decision to only conduct interviews with ex-inmates was deemed the most appropriate to minimise the stress of obtaining interviewees. Finally, only interviews were used for the gathering of data on the basis that narratives were to be generated from them. In this case, the use of focus groups would not have been ideal for two main reasons – the crime orientation of

the interviewees differs in various ways and they would have prevented the in-depth nature of the interviews.

Outline

This thesis consists of a totality of 6 chapters. Chapter 2 aims at providing insight into previous studies on pathways in and out of crime, as well as to define certain terms useful to the production of this study. Chapter 3 looks into theoretical frameworks and concepts with a specific focus being on narratives and symbolic interactionism. Chapter 4 discusses the methods used for the production and distribution of this study. In Chapter 5 I analyse the narratives provided by my interviewees about their pathways in crime. Lastly, Chapter 6 aims to bring together all the chapters of this study in a final discussion and conclusion where the research questions will be specifically addressed, suggestions for further research will be provided and limitations will be addressed.

Chapter 2 – **Previous Literature**

This chapter consists of two main sections. The first section looks at studies on pathways in crime, while the second on pathways out of crime. Studies on entry and persistence in crime are discussed below to shed light on the aspects of life that influence such a path and a potential crime commitment. Then, studies on pathways out of crime focus on desistance to give insights into the trajectories toward a prospective or sustained life without criminal involvement. Thus, both of these sections indicate that a criminal path can be influenced by a complex array of factors stemming from the actor themselves to influences from outside forces. The information in this chapter also encapsulates what is meant by pathways, persisters, and desisters in relation to crime and on the basis set out by this study.

Pathways in crime

Simply put, pathways in crime include "how and when [individuals] first came to be involved in crime" (Byrne & Trew, 2008, p. 241) and how and why they chose to proceed with a criminal path. Hence, persistence will represent "continuity" (Laub & Sampson, 2003, p. 13) in illegal participation. Within this context, if an individual does not present a desisting future self (Harris, 2011), they will be considered to still be persistent within the criminal path.

In a study of twenty-eight individuals in re-entry programs, Harris (2011) shed light on "structural-cultural explanation as reasons for criminal behaviour" (p. 70). The sample showcased a criminal lifestyle supported by their surroundings and whose income was dependable on. This lifestyle was the norm, not just for them but also for their close social relations; it was their culture, which means that the non-criminal lifestyle was seen as the unconventional path. Maruna's (2001) sample in The Liverpool Desistance Study also showed how such criminogenic backgrounds could lead to instabilities in childhood that push individuals to develop a "sense of injustice as young people" (61), contributing to their entry into crime. Clark's (2011) research also aimed to add "to an understanding of the processes of becoming and remaining a criminal" (p. 563) and, just like this thesis, is situated in Malta. Clark's sample of inmates noted how the context of imprisonment could also contribute to a life of crime since "placing young offenders with criminally experienced inmates has important consequences for criminal career development" (p. 574). Thus, the structural (or

lack thereof) conditions of being incarcerated "often serve to reinforce a person's antagonistic worldview and disconnection from mainstream society" (Maruna, 2001, p.139), especially when they already had significant influences in their childhood and outside of prison. Also, in her analysis, Harris (2011) presented that a lack of role models or having a criminal role model, limited employment possibilities, and stereotyping and shaming from others (especially employers) led to crime persistence. And Clark (2011) said that judgements from "conventional people and offender[s]" (together with self-reflections) promoted "feelings of differentness '… [that] espoused a criminal identity" (p. 578). Furthermore, "Malta's small size makes it difficult for the stigmatised person to start afresh in a place where nobody knows [them]. [Their] reputation is likely to follow him wherever [they go]" (Clark, 2012, p. 13). Thus, the isolation of individuals with criminal affiliations can be a major contributor to criminal persistence, especially in a place (or country) where physically changing one's environment won't make much difference.

Hence, although Harris (2011), Clark (2011) and Maruna (2001) presented a sample who took some accountability for their crimes, the influences from their environments and social networks were presented to limit their free will (Scott and Lyman, 1968). Or, as Maruna put it, seeing "their life scripts as having been written for them a long time ago" (in short, condemnation scripts, p.75). However, differing from Harris's analysis, Clark and Maruna presented the perceptive of individual agency; for instance, having a lack of non-criminal social networks can also be a personal choice. A common factor within Clark's study was independence – in the sense of not wanting to be tied down to a job or a partner. Maruna also stated that such individuals are less likely to follow orders and more likely to show resistance when it comes to "happily accepting a menial, low-paying job" (p. 59). Hence, connections that could provide stability outside of a criminal career were put to the side because the actors felt that they impinged on their freedom and also "crime can provide them with so much" (Clark, 2011, p. 571), especially in terms of financial and individual success. Therefore, Harris's perspective on criminal lifestyle opposes her findings on possible clean future selves (explored further in the below section). While applying the notion of possible selves to illuminate the desires for a crime-free path, her study somewhat neglected the notion of individual agency and foreground factors concerning criminal entry and commitment.

Thus, the notion of possible selves can include future positive crime orientations such as seeing crime as a good and easy source of income (Byrne & Trew, 2008), gaining respect in a criminal identity, having a higher status within a criminal group, being seen as a badass, or

simply for sneaky thrills (Katz, 1988). Katz gave an in-depth insight into this perspective by focusing on the seductions of crime - the foreground factors of a criminal lifestyle that make it attractive (p.3). From this perspective, one is *seduced* by the benefits of a criminal lifestyle. This perspective sheds light on the attractions of crime and why an individual might want to pursue a criminal career. For instance, in Copes et al.'s (2008) study, a hustler is seen as a superior attribute, whereas a crack-head identity is seen as a low-status label. The hustler group identity in this context provided individuals with a higher social status within the drug scene and amongst their peers, as well as a better financial future (p.267). Thus, some individuals might be motivated to pursue a criminal career because that lifestyle is viewed as more appealing. In Clark's (2011) study, individuals also reported that the initial objectives of illegal activity were mainly for leisure purposes that gradually shifted to financial acquisition for drug use. Hence, we see how the foreground factors shift with the identity change within this perspective. Where previously individuals saw themselves as participating in crime for fun, criminal participation (and persistence) was substituted with financial attainment for drugs. This shift emerged from the notion that drug use had become "an intrinsic part of the criminal lifestyle" (Hammersly 2008; Clark 2010 as cited in Clark, p. 568), leading to addiction. Maruna (2001) also noted how drug use became prevalent after criminal participation and incarceration. Yet, seeing crime as leisure and an exciting activity was still a contributory factor for some persisters, even in adulthood. As one of Clark's interviewees reported, "I was always looking for excitement. Many things that I have done were for excitement and not for money" (p. 569). Consequently, criminal status, substance use and abuse, and leisure can contribute to criminal activity and persistence; while, foreground factors of criminal participation can change with time.

From the above text, entry into crime and persistence can present contradictory identities (Åkerström et al., 2011). For instance, Maruna (2001) highlighted how most persisters fit deCharms' (1968) *pawn* identity where their criminal behaviour happens as a causality of outside factors such as a criminal environment. This self is also supported by Clark's (2011, 2012) and Harris's (2011) findings. Meanwhile, Katz (1988) talked about how one can be seduced by crime and focused more on its thrilling aspects. Similarly, Byrne and Trew (2005) made use of positive crime orientations "whereby crime is accepted, positively valued, and forms a coherent part of one's identity" (p.190). In this case, the balanced contradictory identities would be (1) the individual who is influenced by outside factors and (2) the individual who is attracted to crime. As Åkerström et al. (2011) pointed out, this situation indicates "the actual handling of such multiplicity when the selves at stake seem to contradict

yet situationally come into contact with each other" (p. 105). Åkerström et al. give accounts of masculinity and victimhood. Therefore, when describing the event of the crime, her interviewees emphasised that they were victims of that crime but at the same time ensured that they were not seen as weak (Åkerström et al., 2011). Burcar's (2013) study also presents a narrative similar to the one proposed by Åkerström et al., where individuals might want to be seen as having control over the situation and try to minimise their victimhood. So, for example, taking into account Åkerström et al.'s, Burcar's research and the studies mentioned above, when faced with situations that cause them to take accountability for their actions, individuals involved in crime might use a victim of society narrative to explain their behaviour. But, at the same time, when recounting their stories, they would also want to be perceived as a capable criminal who is skilful or badass.

These writings provide a foundation for the factors (mainly social and individual) influencing individuals' criminal path and commitment to it. Additionally, combining background and foreground factors can generate a better understanding of the rationale for this path. Other than that, these studies can also be used to exemplify the complex nature of desisting. The abovementioned influences notably indicate that moving away from crime is by no means an easy or a linear task. They also leave the lingering questions: why do individuals choose to move away from crime when they face such limitations and influences? How do they manage to maintain desistance in such environments? The aim of the below section is to answer these questions through works on desistance and its barriers.

Pathways out of crime

Williams and Schaefer (2021) highlighted that one problem desistance research still encounters is that of defining the term. Laub and Sampson (2001) came to an understanding that desistance is the cause leading to the outcome of termination from criminal activity. Thus, it is "the causal process that supports the termination of offending" (p. 11). For Harris (2011), this process starts when "identity shifts" occur and individuals start showcasing a desire for a new "possible self" that is crime-free, which can stem from communicating said desire, plans of action, and taking action (p.68). However, as Nugent and Schinkel (2016) pointed out, such definitions can portray desistance as a linear process of "time or importance" (p.570). Nugent and Schinkel (2016) also applied "the terms 'act-desistance' for

non-offending, 'identity desistance' for the internalization of a non-offending identity and 'relational desistance' for recognition of change by others" (p.570) to both conceptualise and clarify the "desistance process" (Weaver, 2018, p. 643). Even so, while this study recognises the usefulness of the terms proposed by Nugent and Schinkel, it will not apply such terms. Instead, the focus will be to present a non-linear complex processes toward a crime-free path influenced by various circumstances connected to one another. This decision was made because, following Laub and Sampson's (2003) description of desistance and Harris's (2011) application to studying desistance, this study finds that the term desistance would fit better to signify an individual's account of the desire to or the maintenance of a crime-free path. For instance, if an individual wants to continue participating in criminal activity but is not currently committing any crimes, they will not be seen as having a desire to desist. At the same time, an individual who is still awaiting trial but shows the intent to abstain from crime will be considered to have started their desistance process. Thus, the literature below will also be applied to understand better how desistance occurs and why and the complexities that can be attributed to said process.

One of the most influential studies on desistance is The Liverpool Desistance Study by Maruna (2001), as presented in his book Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives (and as mentioned above) and that paved way for self-identity research on desistance. Whereas entry into crime and persistence were connected to condemnation scripts, desistance was linked to redemption scripts enabling "the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life" – hence, making good. In this context, persistent offenders feel defeated because "they do not want to offend… but feel that they have no choice" (p. 74). The redeemed self can then be associated with the notion that individuals work towards their real self; most often "empowered from some outside sources" (Maruna, p.95). Moreover, as previously mentioned, drug use can become a part of a criminal lifestyle. The Professor of Criminology explained how drug use and criminal lifestyles tend to be intertwined, and termination of one is likely to result in termination of the other. "The study of desistance, therefore, is almost necessarily a study of abstaining from both types of behavior" (p. 64). Williams and Schaefer (2021) support Maruna's findings as 58% of their sample presented a desire or an action to get clean. However, they also encapsulated the importance of new social networks that act as both supports and distractions towards a crime and drug-free path. With that being said, although Maruna's study did acknowledge that outside forces influenced desistance, it focused heavily on a lack of individual agency where individuals who were persisters were seen as doomed to such a life, whereas desistance was

seen as being positive. Harris (2011) noted that past research mainly focused on three main perspectives (separately) – cognitive transformation, structural forces, or maturation and connections with social networks such as family and employment; and failed to connect or take into consideration the structural and social barriers individuals can face when attempting or maintaining desistance. Nonetheless, Maruna's continues to be exemplary as an introduction towards subjective studies on crime and desistance, and further within the narrative field – both of which will be explored in the theories section.

Thus, since Maruna's publication, various studies have tried to bridge such gaps. Harris (2011) made use of past accounts (as applied by Scott & Lyman, 1968) and possible selves (as applied by Markus & Nurius, 1986) together with structural contexts to "illustrate how excuses for past behaviour provide a way for people to distance themselves from their past selves in attempts to preserve or re-create a possible self still worthy to be redeemed in the future" (p.64). And, in their study, Williams & Schaefer's (2021) applied an action theory approach to studying desistance. A sample of 53 probationers and parolees was recruited in order to connect the "theoretical gap between socio-situational structures and the individual and their agency" (p. 20). Similar to Maruna (2001), Williams and Schaefer (2021) also noted that having a new purpose, a routine, financial stability and set goals are major contributors to moving away from crime; such factors were said to most likely emerge from parenthood and conventional roles (such as employment) (p. 24-25). Nonetheless, differing from Maruna's (2001) study, Harris combined the past accounts of her sample with structural-cultural influences to produce a richer insight into the pathways towards desistance or a possible future self. Using the concepts of turning points, "hooks for change", and epiphanies (Goffman, 1963; Giordano et al., 2002; Denzin, 1987), Harris (2011) also explained how critical incidents such as loss, sobriety, imprisonment, and religion motivated individuals towards the desisting path. Whereas Williams & Schaefer analysed the use of actions, strategies and motivations to abstain from crime and the barriers they face when doing so. Thus, while Harris's study mainly focused on desisting possible selves, Williams and Schaefer consider actions. Both of these studies, together with Maruna's (2001), showcase the complexities of desisting by presenting diverse individuals within the desisting path, that is; individuals who wish to abstain from crime in the future, individuals who keep going back and forth, individuals who are actively working on it, and individuals who actively maintain it.

Moreover, in Harris's study, a distance from fakers was established in order for "real" desisters to avoid being associated with others who were "manipulating the system to gain freedom and material support" (p. 77). The *them* and others concept in Maruna's study was presented as a means "of protecting themselves against shame" by separating themselves from "real criminals" (p.136-138). Hence, indicating that they were not the same as individuals who were incapable of terminating their participation in criminal activities. Harris's participants also said they had to cut ties with past relations within their criminal lifestyle to move away from crime successfully. Alternatively, similar to Harris, they needed to build new social relations that supported their desisting self and acted as vehicles of safety within their journey to criminal abstinence. This divide was seen as a necessary step towards a desisting self. Hence, cutting ties with certain peers can be used to let go of the criminal past. Williams and Schaefer (2021) referred to this as knifing off and explained it as having a "symbolic significance for some, as it enabled the participants to create a distinction between their past misbehaviours and the present self with aspirations for going straight" (p. 23). Additionally, voluntary isolation was seen as a positive step toward a desisting path as it shows that the individual is more self-aware about their outside influences (p.22). Thus, disassociating from others can also represent a change in identity (Harris, 2011, Williams & Schaefer, 2021) that allows ex-offenders to "protect themselves from the internalisation of blame and shame" (Maruna, 2001, p. 95).

Nonetheless, barriers are still present in the desisting process. Harris's (2011) study included scenarios of the complex nature of desistance, such as qualifying for assistance when incarcerated that might trigger one to re-start their offending path (p.78) or only being able to stay clean within the program (p. 81). Williams and Schaefer (2021) also presented "socio-situational barriers to desistance" to emphasise that "choice alone is not enough to prevent reoffending", and barriers such as "unemployment, difficult supervision conditions, and criminal labels highlight some of the ways that individuals may feel as though their trajectories are being moulded by factors beyond their control" (p.27). Nugent and Schinkel (2016) stated that "desistance for some is not just a 'process' but rather more like an endurance test with little to no reward for their efforts" (p. 580). Thus, differing from the other studies, their research focused on the pains and limitations of desisting or going straight rather than the positive aspects of desistance. From their findings, Nugent and Schinkel presented three main pains of desistance: isolation, goal failure, and hopelessness. These pains indicate that setting goals, building new social networks, and having hope are not necessarily easy tasks and can hinder one's motivation to desist. Hence, although a desire to

change is present, loneliness, hopelessness and demotivation might take over, and their vision to terminate their criminal behaviour is blurred. Thus, we see how condemnation scripts, as presented by Maruna (2001) can be challenging to successfully transform into redemption ones, especially when support from others is limited. Moreover, the two groups in Nugent and Schinkel's study, long-term imprisoned men (who are on license – conditional release) and short-term offenders (mostly involved with gangs), showed similarities in their processes to desist and in the pains that emerged from it but displayed differences in the barriers encountered. For instance, in terms of isolation, the latter group found that spatial dynamics were their main barriers, while the former group found that the impacts stemmed from "institutionalisation and a sense of surveillance" (p. 579). Additionally, the authors noted that if one of the structures of desistance (act, identity and relational) is not in place or maintained, it can be detrimental to the success of desistance, or as this study presents, towards ones self-esteem/confidence and mental health (Burns, 2012; Cotterell, 2007; Griffin, 2010 as cited in Nugent and Schinkel, 2016, p. 579).

Thus, desistance is not possible if identity change is not supported by the individual (mainly through actions and possible selves), their surroundings, and social networks. That means that positive cognitive transformations towards desistance require hope, optimism and authenticity that are supported by new social networks and structural conditions (Harris, p.74-75). These studies are thus valuable for showcasing how these factors all need to be present for desistance to occur and how painful this process can be. Thus, they elucidate how specific individuals might portray their pathway out of crime and why some might stop their desisting process.

Chapter 3 – **Theories**

This chapter will build on Chapter 2 above to provide a theoretical ground for my study. Firstly, an introduction to narratives and identity, as presented by Presser (2012), will be provided to formulate the structure of this chapter. Then, Maruna's (2001) condemnation and redemption scripts will be discussed in relation to persister and dersiters. Mead's (1934) and Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism perspectives will be briefly discussed to lead the way to the linkage between symbolic interactionism concepts and narratives, focusing on how meanings can drive change. Finally, labelling and emotion will be discussed in connection with one's public identity.

Presser on Narratives and Identity

This study applies Presser's (2008) notion of narratives and identity as they seem to fit the scope of the research best. Moreover, this perspective will also serve as a building block for the other theories and concepts. The author defines narrative as "an oral self-narrative, a spoken rendering of one's personal experience as an agent in the world" (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992 as cited in Presser , chapter 1, section 1, para. 1). Being ex-inmates, the interviewees were asked to tell stories on about themselves and their pathways in and out of crime – hence the term or "oral self-narrative" fits well within this research. In this context, as Presser pointed out, these narratives aim to examine an individual's perceptions and experiences. That is, following Presser's glass of water analogy (chapter 1, section 1, para. 1), within my study, a description of the prison would not account as a narrative but rather how being imprisoned encouraged their criminal behaviour and had an impact on their criminal path would.

Furthermore, this study will also consider the three main conceptualisations of narratives within criminology as presented by Presser (2009): records, interpretations and constitutive (p.182-186). The former two, although closely linked, can be differentiated in terms of subjectivity. Records are seen as "indicators of criminal behavior and related (say, contributing) experiences" while, interpretations seek "to illuminate how people see (or saw) their world" (p.182). Constitutive conceptualisation refers to the notion that "one makes choices on the basis of a self that is conjured as the protagonist of an evolving story" (p. 184).

For instance, Katz (1998 as cited in Presser, p.184) suggests the possibility that individuals make use of moral tales to come across as a certain type of individual, such as a badass. Additionally, Maruna (2001 as cited in Presser, p.185) found narrative differences between crime desisters and persisters. Desisters took responsibility for their choices although acknowledging the impact of outside sources, whereas persisters considered themselves passive agents limited by external factors. "Thus, whereas Katz begins the narrative (quite intentionally) at the crime scene, the narratives of Maruna's informants concern whole lives" (p.185).

Presser's (2008) definition provides a basis for identity negotiating in criminal pathways. She defines *identity* as "one's sense of who one is" (chapter 1, section 1, para. 2) and moves beyond the classical definitions of identity. Influenced by Somer (1994), Presser wrote that "identity is not communicable in single terms but rather in the past, present, and future tenses. The stuff of identity is lived social experience—the subjective past and present—as well as the desired future." My research focuses on the past, the now, and the future of ex-inmates, as will be further discussed in the analysis chapter. The selves change in each scenario; thus, this definition best fits my research. Additionally, it gives further theoretical ground and connects Markus and Nurius's (1986) possible selves and Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) positive future and feared past self that will be discussed further below. However, Presser still recognised that "the self cannot be known without reference to other people" (chapter 1, section 1, para. 2). As will be seen in the below sections, the meanings individuals give to diverse actors across their paths can be vital in shaping their identity.

Shadd Maruna's Condemnation Scripts and Redemption Scripts

As seen above, Presser explained that offenders tend to create multiple selves to explain their behaviour – "usually the bad person they were with the good and responsible agent they must now be" (McKendy, 2006; Presser, 2008; cf. Abbott, 1981 as cited in Presser, p.180). This notion is closely in line with Maruna's (2001) depictions of *condemnation scripts* and of *redemption scripts*. These scripts thus encapsulate parts of the pathways in and out of crime relevant to this study.

In *condemnation scripts*, individuals not only felt doomed to their, in this case, criminal fate but also accepted it. Hence, the main narrator of a condemnation script is the ***pawn self***.

Maruna used this persona developed by deCharms (1968) to explain how "pawns feel that life outcomes are largely dependent on circumstance and chance events" (p.76). Within this context, individuals persistent with criminal activity are seen to lack agency that promotes their criminal behaviour and generates different roles within the narrative. Maruna also pointed out that there can be a variety of selves within these narratives. Some of these include the victim of society, where imprisonment can be seen to "reinforce and even enhance one's sense of self-victimization" (p.77); and the person who fights authoritarian control in order to free themselves from moral constraints and "as a way of avoiding the burden of responsibility" (p.77-78). Condemnation scripts also reflect the lack of goal attainment prospects that are rather replaced by less realistic dreams such as winning the lottery. As Maruna (2001) stated, "the myth of winning it big or making the 'big score' is an internally consistent element of a passive self-narrative" (p.80). Still, this big dream represents the road to happiness driven by *hyperconsumption*, where "the active offender seeks to stave off this emptiness primarily with experiential thrills" (p.81). The use of drugs and alcohol also fits under the umbrella of thrills obtained from excessive consumption. In this regard, the delinquent also falls victim to "pleasures of hyperconsumption" supported by mainstream society and the media (p.82). Thus, condemnation scripts can serve to understand better the entry into crime and continuation in it within my sample. However, although quite fruitful in showcasing how an individual might become the victim of society, Maruna fails to give importance to subjective viewpoints that shed light on the attractions of crime. Instead, we see that his sample consists of hopeless individuals who have accepted their fate.

On the other hand, *redemption scripts*, as proposed by Maruna (2001), show the differences between individuals who want to desist and others who actively act toward their desistance. The author emphasised how the desire to desist is not enough. Thus, narratives in the form of redemption scripts needed to take place primarily because "ex-offenders need to have a believable story of why they are going straight to convince themselves that this is a real change" (p.86). While acknowledging the individuality of each participant, Maruna said that within the desisting sample there are similarities in the plots of their stories. The redemption script sets out to bring forward the goodness of "the narrator – a victim of society" caught up in cycles of deviant behaviour, and once released from such constraints, outside forces empower them to reach their elite self. They then return their gratitude through acts that "give something back to society" (p.87). This process is what Maruna termed as making good and allows individuals to rewrite their past.

The *real me* narrative within this context is vital to the desisting process as the individuals reach back to their old selves to re-enter their roles of "the loving parent, working-class hero, loyal friend… [which] suggest that they were just normal people all along" (p.89). On the other hand, the less accepted parts of the past self were described as "products of the environment" (p.92). The deviant behaviour becomes something that happened to them. Thus, within redemption scripts, linguistic forms such as *it*, developed by Petrunik and Shearing (1988) and as applied by Maruna, emphasised the distance individuals set between their deviant and authentic selves. Whereas the term *we* was used to diminishing blame, and *you* signified "the universality of the behaviour… [and] a connection between the speaker and the audience" (p.94-95). Maruna also explained that individuals took from their past negative experiences and became a better person for it. Thus, optimism was central in creating a lesson-learned narrative. In this case, one would argue that "former offenders tend to recast their lives as being "planned" or orchestrated by a higher power for a certain purpose" (p.97). Additionally, meaning-making also becomes an essential process toward desistance. For instance, while persisters focus on hyperconsumptionism, the would-be desisters "expressed a desire for more lasting accomplishments" (p.100). Maruna's final main difference between active offenders and desisters is that of generativity. Coined by Erikson (1968), this notion aims to signify a social role that benefits the generations to come. This social role can be in the form of a role model, volunteer or even a book author. However, "a person might be initiated into generative behavior in much the same way that one is thought to be initiated into deviant behaviour" (p.125). Thus, individuals learn that they can be this alternate version of themselves. In my research, one of the main aims is to understand the identity shift of ex-inmates who choose to move away from crime. The redemption scripts, as presented by Maruna, provide a basis as to the reason why such changes occur. And although it is greatly appreciated since it can provide an understanding of the maintenance of desistance within my sample, it fails to look into what triggers such a change.

Mead's and Blumer's Symbolic interactionism perspective

Greatly influenced by Mead's (1934) principles on the self and society, symbolic interactionism emerged within sociology, focusing on the interactions between people and society from a micro-level. It was developed as a response to the positivist's top-down approach; conversely, such a theoretical framework takes a bottom-up stance. This approach

thus sheds light on "the individual as agentic, autonomous, and integral in creating their social world" (Carter & Fuller, 2016, p. 932). Hence, subjective viewpoints are mainly taken into consideration. Moreover, having developed the term, Blumer (1969) presented three main foundations of symbolic interactionism: (1) actions based on the meanings given, (2) how such meanings came to be, and (3) how they are interpreted (p. 2). Hence, what makes symbolic interactionism stand out is that the meanings given within this context derive from one's social interactions, and they are continuously transformed to act "as instruments for the guidance and formation of action" (p.5). The symbolic interactionism perspective will be used within this study to pave the way for the other applicable theories and concepts.

Combining Narratives and Symbolic Interactionism

Narratives, together with symbolic interaction, can present how hooks for change, the possible self and the feared self can motivate individuals towards change – in this case, desistance. Thus, the focus is on how individuals seek to change their surroundings to achieve a new identity within society (Weaver, 2019). Following symbolic interactionism, identity theory emerged and focused on "Mead's theories on the reflexivity of self and society… to understand how identities motivate behavior and emotions in social situations" (Carter & Fuller p. 945). Additionally, such changes can also represent the impact socio-structural forces have on an individual's "personal and social identities" when moving away from crime (Weaver, 2015, as cited in Weaver, 2019). For instance, Giordano et al.'s (2002) study of a theory of cognitive transformation included the concept of hooks for change. The intention behind this notion was to build on "Mead's notion of opening the door to certain stimuli and closing it to others, to emphasize the actor's role in latching onto opportunities presented by the broader environment", and to establish how narratives have plots as presented by the narrators' perception (p. 1000). Hence, discourse and identity transformation are vital in establishing the most influential factors towards change. Furthermore, Giordano et al. developed four main cognitive changes that need to occur for desistance to happen: the individual's will to change; being subjected to hooks for change; visualising and acting towards the desired "replacement self"; and altering one's perception on deviance and criminal lifestyles (p.1000-1002). Thus, both the need and desire have to be present, along with societal opportunities to make such a change (Farrall et al., 2014, p.33).

Similar to Giordano et al.'s (2002) theory, the identity theory of criminal desistance was developed by Paternoster and Bushway (2009) to present how offenders terminate their criminal behaviour by "wilfully changing [their] identity… working toward something positive in the future and steering away from something feared" (p. 1108). Thus, the concept of possible self, as applied by Markus and Nurius (1986), is taken into consideration within this theory to shed light on how future selves, objectives and fears guide the future. Possible selves "can be viewed as cognitive bridges between the present and future, specifying how individuals may change from how they are now to what they will become" (Markus & Nurius, p.961). This theory adopts said notion to help further understand why individuals choose to desist. Paternoster and Bushway also indicated that such possible selves are "influenced by the social and cultural environments within which action takes place" (p. 1114). From this perspective, when a person successfully desists, they are no longer connected to their past because the meanings of things shift with the identity change. Such theory thus considers identity to be the driver of change – the self is seen "as an active subject intentionally pursuing lines of activity that makes human beings agent" (p. 1112).

However, Giordano et al.'s hooks for change were criticised for constituting a lot of effort and repetition and can occur only once "new conventional roles" have been established (Giordano et al., 2003 as cited in Williams & Scharfer, 2021, p.19). Meaning that the possibilities to shift identities continue to be restricted "by the options available" (p. 19). Thus, differing from Griordano et al., Paternoster and Bushway recognised identity change as the main factor contributing to desistance; if such a change did not occur (i.e. possible crime-free self), it is unlikely for structural surrounding and social relations to change; resulting for individuals to continue on their criminal path (p.1153). Conversely, it must also be noted that "offenders' personal strivings express their sense of who they are and what they would like to become" (Ward & Marshall, 2007, p.279). Thus, personal goal attainment is one of the main foundations of narrative identities for persisters (Bruner, 1990; Singer, 2005, as cited in Ward & Marshall, 2007) and brings forward the notion of individual agency. For example, Katz (1988) applies this concept by bringing to the forefront the foreground aspects of crime where crime can be viewed as an exciting venture. Therefore, unlike the above studies, in my study, concepts relating to past feared self and future positive self will also be used to elaborate on the continuation of crime participation.

Other scholars have also found alternative means to explain identity shifts in terms of desistance. For instance, Laub and Sampson (2001) assert that integration in societal and conventional roles (mainly through marriage and employment) motivate desistance – “men made a commitment to go straight without even realizing it” (p. 51). Their *age-graded theory of informal social control – bonds* can be used to explain the link between social bonds and the “onset of and desistance from criminal behaviour” (Laub and Sampson, 2001, p.19). They noted that strong ties with social networks such as marriage and employment are more likely to result in desistance, whereas weak ties can contribute to crime participation. However, the relationship alone is not enough. For instance, employment must also be accompanied by “job stability, commitment to work, and mutual ties binding workers and employers” for criminal participation to be affected (Sampson & Laub, 1993, p.146). Nonetheless, “Sampson and Laub’s work does run the risk of presenting desistance as something which happens as a consequence of other social processes, with very little input from the desisters themselves” (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, as cited in Farrall et al., 2014 p.31).

On the other hand, Maruna (2001) contends that cognitive transformations and desistance coincide. Even so, the above concepts and theories –hooks for change, possible selves, feared selves and identity theory of criminal desistance – help fill in the gaps in Maruna’s (2001) study by presenting instigators of change away from the criminal path which will be used to understand the narrative data within my study better. Nonetheless, subjective stances have been criticised as they “neglected consideration of how opportunity structures prompt those internal changes and (dis) allow the individual from exercising them” (Williams and Schaefer, 201, p.19). Thus, although fruitful in exemplifying how internal change occurs as a driver towards desistance, these perspectives ignore how certain opportunities are limited to those labelled by others and society in general. Finally, it is also important to note that contrary to Paternoster and Bushway, “desistance is not simply a matter of choice” rather, it can be a process that can include various barriers and temptations restricting individuals from moving away from crime (Farrall et al., 2014, p.28).

Tainted Social Identity – on labels and emotions

Labelling, as Ferrell et al. (2008) stated, "not only imposes meaning but removes it, precluding other options for status or identity" (p.38). Thus, being a child of symbolic

interactionism, labelling can be useful in understanding meaning-making (and taking) concerning crime. Ferrell et al.'s scenario of alcohol use best fits the direction of this thesis. In their example, if an individual is labelled an alcoholic, they will be pushed towards treatment and sympathised, and their close relations' well-being will be considered. If the criminal label were to be imposed, the individual's self-perception and life direction would be different and, most likely, related to crime. The criminal label is also established by other factors, such as the legislation on driving under the influence. This latter type of label construct stems from formal processes as it is the authoritarian organisations that establish what individuals should be labelled as. Consequently, the individual conforms to such a label and acts in a "criminal" way. For instance, in this thesis, the criminal justice system and imprisonment formally label one as a criminal. This label is then strengthened by limited employment and housing possibilities, as well as informal social channels such as the gossip enthusiasts Clark (2012) talked about in her study about shaming in Maltese communities. Thus, as Becker (1963) wrote, "being caught and branded as deviant has important consequences for one's further social participation and self-image. The most important consequence is a drastic change in the individual's public identity" (p.32-33).

Katz's (1988) grasp on emotions and criminal behaviour also presents the influences on public identity. Of particular interest to this study is his interpretation of humiliation and rage on identity which can be useful in understanding the aftermath of any activity (not just homicide) that stems from (or results in) mostly adverse reactions from others. As Katz wrote:

> In both humiliation and rage, the individual experiences himself as an object compelled by forces beyond his control. That is, his control of his identity is lost when he is humiliated... Suddenly, he realizes that his identity has been transformed by forces outside his control in some fundamental way…
>
> A loss of control over one's identity may seem irremediable when injury has been inflicted on one's public image; image or reputation is social and, therefore, outside one's personal control. The experience of public degradation carries the fear of bearing the stigma of disgrace eternally (p.24).

With this in mind, we can acknowledge that it is not the activity per se that establishes conflicts in one's behaviour but rather the reactions from others that fuel such emotions. As Ferrell et al. (2008) wrote, "emotions are complex and mysterious – yet we must attempt to understand them and to investigate the emotive states that contribute to criminality" (2008).

Within this thesis, they will be applied in the analysis chapter to possibly understand certain emotions expressed by individuals that lead to a drastic change in their lives. Katz (1988) also noted that humiliation could then change into a rage where one's future is so blurred that they seek comfort in the significance of the present situation where "the occasion for a destruction…become[s] an eternally significant creativity" (p.31). Hence, the interest here would be how to see this past behaviour is narrated by the ex-inmates.

Chapter 4 – **Methods**

This chapter aims to give insight into the methods used to conduct this thesis. Various aspects that were needed to carry out this study will be discussed in the below sections. The subsequent sections will give information on accessing the interviews, the interview structure and setting, and the sample. My role and reflections as a researcher, and ethical concerns will also be discussed as they were deemed essential to the formation of this study. The last section then describes the analysis and coding process.

Accessing the ex-inmates

In November 2021, I contacted a small NGO in Malta that works with prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. The intention was to gather a small sample of ex-inmates to be interviewed for my study. As explained by members of the organisation, the *Mid-Dlam Għad-dawl* provides temporary housing to ex-prisoners who are on parole, who have fully terminated their prison sentence, and, on some occasions, who are on bail. The ex-inmates also need to be at risk of homelessness, have applied for alternative housing with the Housing Department, and willing to follow the terms of the NGO. Assistance on gaining housing after their period is complete, finding employment and other social benefits were also provided. Hence, this NGO was ideal as it hosted ex-inmates with a complex array of circumstances.

Furthermore, one of the main staff members acted as my gatekeeper, and we communicated via email and WhatsApp to schedule the interviews. This mode of communication allowed for a smooth process in which the interviews were more accessible to schedule and re-schedule if need be. Although access to the organisation was pretty easy, I was limited by the number of interviewees they could provide me with. Being a small NGO, only a small number of ex-inmates are hosted, and contact with previous tenants was also limited. For instance, one interviewee was de-selected as he could not speak Maltese or English and access to an impartial translator was limited. Therefore, other than not being involved in crimes relating to sexual violence and having been convicted at least once, no other restrictions were put in place to access the sample (discussed further in the below section). Nonetheless, access to the interviewees – five individuals, two interviewed twice – was smooth, especially considering that I had no prior access to any ex-inmates. Furthermore, this NGO also provided the setting

for my interviews, with the first interview being on 25th February 2022 and the final interview taking place on 13th May 2022.

The interviewees

All of my interviewees were Maltese ex-inmates who were presently living or once were occupants at one of the apartments provided by the NGO. Additionally, it was the NGO that referred said individuals to me. The sample consisted of four males and one female, ranging from 28 (twenty-eight) to 58 (fifty-eight). In total, five interviewees were gathered, and a total of seven interviews took place. For the purpose of this study, their crime orientation at the time of the study was of utmost importance. Crime orientation refers to the "individual's stance in relation to crime" as described by Byrne and Trew (2008). In table 1, a brief summary of my interviewee sample is provided along with pseudonyms (from an online name generator) for anonymity and for a more coherent results section. A participant is an individual who has no desire to desist, while an inactive participant is someone who is not active in crime but would participate in crime if given the opportunity. The term hopeful non-participant relates to individuals who have the desire to desist from crime but are limited by a complex situation (such as being on bail) that restricts them from reaching full desistance. Finally, the term desister indicates a person who no longer participates in crime and has no desire to re-enter criminal participation. Their gender, age, deviant behaviour, criminal offence and reasoning for imprisonment are only applicable for contextual reasons. Hence, they will be identified in the results section if relevant to the pathways in or out of crime. For instance, some participants might have reported drug use – this information is only relevant if drug use was interconnected with their story. The reasoning behind this is to secure their anonymity further, as well as abide by the fact that only relevant information will be used within this study.

Name	Crime orientation	Age
Sam	Participant	28
Julie	Desister	38
Scott	Inactive participant	39
Tobey	Hopeful desister	39
Will	Hopeful desister	58

(Table 1)

The Interviews and the Setting

Prior to formulating the scope of my study, I knew that the individuals I wanted to do my study to focus on were Maltese ex-inmates. In the past few years, the prison in Malta has been under scrutiny for failing to protect inmates from suicide attempts and suicide deaths. Following these unfortunate events, the prison was inspected, and internal changes had to be made. This issue resulted in extensive media coverage of the Maltese prison system. Therefore, the initial purpose of my study was to focus on the ex-inmates' experience with the prison justice system, specifically the ones who had been imprisoned at the Corradino Correctional Facility. The reason ex-inmates and not inmates were seen as more ideal in my case was because I wanted to interview inmates who had time to reflect on their experience once out of prison.

Nonetheless, having limited knowledge of ex-inmates' stories, I decided to go with an unstructured interview approach so that the "questions are formulated as the interview proceeds" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 31). This step was also vital as I wanted the stories of the ex-inmates to be told from their point of view, to give them a voice and to understand their situation better. As Goodley (2004) wrote, "in all forms of research, the researcher always gains from the collection of data, while the researched generally stands to gain far less from the research interaction" (p.60). Thus I wanted to avoid that situation, and the idea was to make this study meaningful for the interviewees; to tell their side of the story. For this reason, a narrative approach was the most suitable for my research. However, I was also aware that the interviews might not necessarily result in narrative data (Mishler, 1986 as cited in Presser, 2008). To ensure narrative data as much as possible, my role as a researcher was to be "open

to all that the speaker had to say" (Presser, 2008, chapter 5, section 2, para. 3). With this in mind, I made sure to be "a good listener and [that] the interviewee [was] a story-teller rather than a respondent" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.31).

Therefore, I approached this interview open and started it with the general question – "can you give me an introduction about yourself?" Given that I was put in contact with the interviewees through the NGO, it was already established that the interviews would concern their relation to crime. The introductions were mainly related to crime involvement, allowing the questions to emerge from the interview itself. But, I kept some notes in mind on things I wanted to ask in the interview, especially regarding the prison system. Their experience under the criminal justice system turned out to be a mere part of the story they had to tell. To ensure that moving away from this theme was the right call to make, I set up a second pilot interview which resulted in the same conclusion. Thus, the decision to focus on pathways in and out of crime emerged.

Henceforth, I set up an interview guide with four main themes – entry into crime, them and others (including close social networks, community and social institution), imprisonment and their current situation to help answer the research question. Meaning that a semi-structured interview approach was set up consisting of a "flexible and free-flowing interaction" (Morris, 2005, chapter 1, section 2, para. 1). Minimal interference was used for the sole purpose of directing the interview by making use of "follow-up questions" to expand on important points and when topics of interest were briefly mentioned by interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.150-151), and "probing… to elaborate or explain an answer" (Morris, 2005, chapter 1, section 2, para. 1).

All first-round interviews (including pilot interviews) were between 30 to 45 minutes long. In contrast, my second round of interviews ranged from 1 hour and 30 minutes to 2 hours long. The follow-up interviews were conducted to minimise further the gaps in the interviewees' stories (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.151). That is, my last three interviewees were approached directly with semi-structured interviews relating to research questions. At the same time, my first two pilot interviews were unstructured to provide the researcher (me) with a better approach to interviewing ex-inmates and assessing my study's feasibility. Moreover, by having a second interview with my two initial interviewees, a "rapport" was built, and they opened up more about their criminal path (Morris, 2005, chapter 1, section 5, para. 6). Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in Maltese as both myself and the interviewees

preferred to speak in said language. That being said, speaking in our native language further allowed for a smoothly progressive interview Morris (2015) spoke about.

As previously mentioned, the NGO provided the setting for the interviews. Being in the office of the NGO both aided and restricted my research. It helped because, to my interviewees, it was an accessible and familiar venue. Hence, it aided in a feeling of comfort and security for my interviewees and given that it was a small building in a quaint town, not many disturbances were present (Morris, 2015). However, having an office as one's research setting is anything but natural (Presser, 2008). This is especially true since a person was always close by to assist if needed and for security reasons with only a glass door separating them from the interview setting. The individual was usually someone my interviewees knew well and were comfortable with. Even so, I have to say that although this method made me feel more secure, I do have to reflect on how it might have influenced my research. For instance, at certain times when the person in the other office was present, my interviewee would look at them and ask them to corroborate their story, or they would speak in hushed tones so they would not be heard. Thus, the other individual's presence was noted by my interviewees and a shift in tones or directions occurred. This meant that, although this social setting (Presser, 2008) was seen as the most ideal, the interviews being held in such circumstances might have impacted their responses. Even so, the occurrences in which there were interferences with the said individual were not common and only happened two times throughout my (seven) interviews.

Positionality and reflections

Regarding the above statement, I also acknowledge that my influence might have impacted the interview data, and my recounting of their story poses a toll on the authenticity of my research. As Stanley and Wise (1993) noted, "our consciousness is always the medium through which research occurs" (p.157). My consciousness within this regard was more of a student researcher and how I could morally and ethically tell their story without giving the ex-inmates anything in return. At least that's how I approached it, and so the idea for my two initial interviews to serve as an introduction to ex-inmates' perspectives emerged. And as I mentioned above, it was the right decision to make. By taking a step back as a researcher and allowing them to guide my study, I could formulate a better understanding of the plots and meanings most valuable to them in their story in relation to criminal pathways. However, by

this point, I had also accepted that my research only serves to give a voice as well as to illustrate the possible situations of ex-inmates in Malta. Thus, when my final interviewee asked me, "how will this study help me?" I was able to answer him with, "I can only give you a voice within this study. Unfortunately, I am not in the position to help you in any other way." Luckily for me, this response was enough for Scott, and we carried on with the interview. Furthermore, the fact that all my interviewees thanked me for listening to them at the end of our interviews, in a way, gave me the reassurance I needed; that I allowed them to tell me parts of their stories.

The second concern in relation to my presence is that of me being a young female reading for a Master's course. I must admit that I did not reflect much on this before commencing the interviewing process. What I mainly reflected on is what you see above. However, after my first couple of interviews, I noticed that my interviewees made comparisons between me and them. Thus, as Michielsens (2000) was quoted in Presser's (2008) book: "mutual construction is inevitable" (chapter 9, section 5, para. 4). They pictured me as the "good person" (bil-għaqal) and them as the "less good person" – some even said, "I'm not like you." This image of me as presented by them was, in a way, unexpected because I had not considered their judgements of me as an educated individual. Instead, the image I focused on was a physical one where I took note to wear causal clothing (mainly jeans, trousers and sweaters) to present an easy-going picture of myself.

Nonetheless, after my first instance of comparison, I took note and reflected on how I could use such a situation to my advantage. So, the next time one of my interviewees said anything on the line of *bil-għaqal* – meaning a person of good behaviour (non-deviant) – when referring to me, I asked them to tell me what they meant by that and how we differ. This led me to understand better their self-image, and sometimes (and sadly) this exposed their shame, guilt and inferiority towards individuals they deem to be of good conduct. However, this notion will be better reflected in my analysis chapter.

Finally, with regards to my follow-up interviews, I too noticed a shift in my approach as there was a sense of familiarity with the individuals. Them having shared so much about their life, I felt like I knew them, and I got the impression that they did too. However, something I had to reflect on was the possibility of them telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. This thought was presented when one of the ex-inmates said that they had reflected beforehand on

what they could talk to me about (after our initial interview). And although they reassured me that what they said was what they truly believed and experienced, I still had to reflect on what this could mean. Additionally, following Presser's (2008) study, I kept in mind that there might be certain falsehood in their story but chose not to verify any of the information that they provided me – as she rightfully pointed out: "self-presentation was being studied; historical events were not" (Presser, 2008, chapter 5, section 2, para. 4). By taking this into consideration my reflection was to avoid having such scepticism by trusting their narrative as being authentic and that their stories are merely influenced by my approach and presence. Thus, within this context, I take into consideration that my telling them I'm a student within the Cultural Criminology field might have influenced their storytelling process by providing a more detailed account.

Ethical consideration

Before contacting the NGO, I set out not to limit myself to individuals with a specific criminal record, but I excluded myself from those relating to sexual violence. Where I stand today, I find it difficult to let the veil of prejudice down when it comes to such a criminal conviction. Thus, I would not have been able to target such a field morally. So, I asked my gatekeeper to exclude such individuals. Additionally, I was adamant that such a perspective should have a separate study on its own. Thus, both ethically and logically, such a sample would have been unsuitable for my study, especially considering the sample size.

Furthermore, the subsequent considerations were applied following Creswell and Poth’s (2018) outline of ethical issues and possible solutions. Throughout my study, the protection of my interviewees was of utmost importance, especially since they were to recount unfavourable events from their life. Thus, to minimise the emotional and mental toll these interviews could result in, I told them to refrain from telling me anything they did not feel comfortable with, to not mention any real names, that only the relevant information will be used, that any identifiable information will be amended or omitted accordingly, and their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected (hence, the pseudonyms in table 1). They were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any given moment. Permission from my part was also requested in order to record the interview and keep said recording until the completion of my studies. Finally, prior to commencing the interview, they were asked for

oral consent to use the interview data as applicable. All interviewees consented. Moreover, as previously mentioned, at certain times, other individuals were present nearby. For this reason, I asked said individuals to ensure confidentiality if they heard any parts of the interview.

Analysis and coding

This section was greatly influenced by Presser (2008) and Morris (2015). The first step to analysing my data was of transcribing my interviews. This was done a day or two after the interview took place in order to remember key details of the interview. Of vital importance in this step was for me to ensure that the story, the tone and depth of the language used were being represented (Morris, 2015). Additionally, I needed to ensure that the transcriptions were actually a narrative. Inspired by Presser's (2008), this study too determines "that a person's narrative consisted in what he said that reflected a sequence of events over time and offered an evaluation of self" (chapter 4, section 4, para. 6). Similarly, this study recognises that the narratives are "the running accounts bounded by my time with each research participant" (chapter 4, section 4, para. 5).

Having established this, as proposed by Morris (2015) the first and second pilot interviews were analysed to generate central themes within these narratives with the aim to help in structuring the interview guide for the next interviews. The following 5 interview transcripts were then analysed upon having gathered all the data and once the research questions were put into place. Thus, the coding process of the first two interviews had to be done again in order to fill in any gaps with the research aim. The analysis was done by putting all my transcripts in NVivo and manually coding the data. The programme itself was used to better compare and store the coded data. Three large themes were established – pathways in crime, pathways out of crime, and pains of criminal pathways. Following this divide, various smaller themes were generated from each theme based on the previous literature used. These themes will be explored in more details in the results and findings section.

Chapter 5 – **Analysis**

The aim of this chapter is to answer the research questions of this study. As a refresher these are:

- How do ex-inmates in Malta portray their pathways in and out of crime?
- How do they narrate their identity in different processes of their criminal path?
- Who are the main actors in the stories about their criminal careers?

This chapter contains three sub-chapters. The use of these chapters is to present the data and themes as clearly and as accurately as possible. Hence, following the previous patterns, the first two sub-chapters will be divided in pathways in crime and pathways out of crime, while the third and final will then focus on the pains of a criminal path. Together these three parts will be used to answer the research questions above and to **tell the story of my five interviewees – Julie, Sam, Will, Scott and Tobey.**

It must also be noted that although other themes were identified in my interviews the themes that follow were seen to be most suited in understanding the pathways in and out of crime and in providing a sociological and cultural criminology perspectives. That being said, some themes were also omitted as to present a more cohesive results section that is in line with the research questions.

Pathway(s) in crime

This section will take into account two identity formations - that of an individual who is in control of their choices and that of an individual who was pushed towards crime beyond their control. Although conflicting, these narratives formed part of my interviewees' stories. This division made the most sense for my study because although it recognises that the stories being told are those of ex-inmates, they portrayed an element of contradiction in their statements and therefore their identity. Hence, they are central to making sense of the interview data and in understanding better why a life of crime is sometimes the preferred alternative. The first section will shed light on Katz's (1988) perception of **seductions of crime** and Byrne & Trew's (2008) **positive crime orientation**. The second part will focus on the **condemnation scripts** as developed by Maruna (2001) as well as considering the **role of**

different actors in the pathways in crime (Harris, 2011; Clark, 2011). And the third section will focus on **the relationship between drugs and crime.** Therefore, a form of **balancing contradictory identities** (Åkerström et al. 2011) takes place in the ex-inmates' stories – that of individual autonomy and that of a force beyond their control; in this case, the powerful thrill-seeking individual and the victim of society (and of drugs).

The attractions of a criminal path

Contrary to Katz's (1988) sneaky thrill seekers who found escaping being caught as a thrill, some of my interviewees felt that being caught and not getting in trouble was even more of a power-move in their criminal lifestyle. That is, three of my interviewees expressed how **power** was a main element in their participation in crime. Tobey and Will explained that having a reputation and knowing people who were powerful made them feel fearless and want to continue with their criminal path:

> *Interviewer: How did you feel when you were caught?*
>
> *Tobey: a lot of thoughts, but at the time I didn't worry much. Not to brag, but I had some power at that time. I knew I wouldn't end up in prison and all that, you understand?*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *Interviewer: When you say power, what kind of power did you have?*
>
> *Tobey: Meaning I had people who would speak up for me. In fact, all I did was one month minus two day arrest. They had found a gun on me, loaded. But it's how they say "lil min taf, mhux kemm taf" [it doesn't matter how many people you know if you don't know the right ones].*

For Will, this position was nice to be in because he had everything he wanted. So, although having shown some form of regret when participating in crime, he still felt that there was positive reinforcement (Abrams & Hyun, 2009) because he had more freedom. In fact, he said: "it was a nice time because I used to reach my limit, I was never homeless and all that. I used to feel good." This statement suggests that he felt more powerful and free when he was younger and participating in crime because he knew people that people would help him get out of unpleasant situations (just like the ones he is in now). This narrative can be linked to an expression of a higher and more respectable criminal status as a younger criminal (Clark, 2011l; Katz, 1988; & Maruna, 2001; Byrne & Trew, 2005/8), something that he had now lost. Sam also stated how a continuation in crime would make him gain power and have a

respectable name to “possibly get somewhere on my own.” Power in Sam’s case would translate to be feared by others and can take the shape of a “9mm on person.” Sam spoke about feeling powerful knowing that others feared him:

> *Sam: I like it when they look at me because they give me more confidence with myself… I do more in the streets.*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you do?*
>
> *Sam: It’s not like you spit at them or throw something. You show them that ‘you’re not going to do anything or get to me.’*

Hence, the gun mentioned (he didn’t actually carry a gun) and the demeanour he showcased when people give him looks would represent that “to survive unwanted imitators, you must show that unlike the kids, you're not kidding” (Katz, 1988, p.99). Furthermore, Sam’s attraction to crime began at young age and stemmed from feeling constrained by a lack of freedom in his upbringing (Scott, & Lyman, 1968). Thus, this can explain his current stance on crime participation. As conveyed in his caged bird analogy, he felt free when pursuing this path:

> *Sam: I’ll give you an example of a bird. If a bird is locked in a cage all its life once you give it that bit of liberty it will try to take as much of it as it can. And that’s what happened with me. They gave me my liberty and I started hanging out with people with whom you should not hang out with and all that.*

So, even though Sam started off as being attracted to this path, he eventually came to view it as a possible career. In line with Ward & Marshall (2007), Sam’s “personal strivings” toward a career in crime are to be free and powerful. However, it must be noted that actions upon pursing such a career had not yet been taken. Sam’s position resembles what Matza (1999) refers to as drift. And although drift is mostly common in adolescents who are less likely to transit into criminal careers, the flirtatious nature with and lack of commitment to crime in Sam’s stories highlight that he is still in “limbo between convention and crime” (p. 28). Additionally, his caged bird analogy further exemplifies that he is still taking advantage of the freedom he lacked as a child and is leaning towards gaining control of his own “destiny” (p.29) by having the goal of becoming a proficient criminal.

Meanwhile, Scott's case shows a positive crime orientation (Byrne & Trew, 2008) where financial independence was his main push towards a career in crime. However, even though his decision came from the meanings he gave to financial freedom – that of caring for his children – there is still an element of power (Abrams & Hyum, 2009). Julie on the other hand was the only individual who did not express any benefits to criminal involvement. Instead, she said that it was the people that she met along the way who led her to a criminal pathway – which brings us to our next theme.

Major protagonists in the ex-inmate's stories

In this part of my thesis, actors who were given major importance in the ex-inmates' stories about their criminal pathway will be discussed. Three individual actors – the family, the peers and the role models – and two main institutional actors were identified – the prison and the community. Within this section, contradictory to the other, a pawn or victim persona was presented to be the main protagonist of the ex-inmates stories with major influences imposed by the abovementioned actors.

The family

Influences from the family ranged from childhood to adulthood, the interviewees gave me different familial influences including a push towards deviant behaviour in childhood to being the main source of income in adulthood. When introducing themselves to me, most of my interviewees gave a general overview about themselves including their name and age. Most of them then went straight to talking to me about why and how they started participating in crime. They started telling me stories of the past such as "I didn't have a good upbringing", "I was abandoned at a young age", "my dad went to prison when I was young", or "I always looked for that type of company". This pattern is indicative of an established causality between past and criminal behaviour whereby the interviewees put blame on a complicated past for their criminal actions.

In her study, Harris (2011) noted that there is an element of culture in which a criminal path is the norm especially when surrounded by a criminogenic environment (Maruna, 2001) that can lead in repetitive behaviour. Most often, the family and peers were the main actors to contribute to such an environment and a culture in which a conventional role in society feels too farfetched in their reality. The stories in Harris's and Maruna's sample where also present in mine, and thus were supported by the data extracted from my interviews. Taking into

consideration the above statement, we have the story of Will who was exposed to deviant behaviour by his mother's partner at a young age:

> *Will: …My mum had a friend [partner] who, as I told you, owned shops and would make me [medical] certificates so that I would be able to go help him instead of going to school. So, I didn't do well in school… At that time when I used to work in the shop with my mum's friend I used to see all types of people, you understand? So… criminals and such, you understand? ... I saw a lot of things.*

Will's case exemplifies how families can limit ones future opportunities by forcing certain responsibilities within their childhood (Maruna, 2001, p.61). It is also suggestive that the encouragement of unlawful behaviour as thought behaviour indicated a lack of agency from their part (Maruna). Hence, by having his parents prioritises employment in a place not fit for a child (or in other world child labour) rather than education not only exposed him to criminal influences but also limited his possibility of breaking generational crime (Smith and Farrington, 2004). In fact, whenever Will spoke about criminal participation, his actions were constantly justified by his upbringing – indicating that he was destined for that life.

From the above excerpt, individuals involved in crime tell stories about a *pawn* self (deCharms 1968 & 1972; Maruna, 2001) that was pushed by outside forces, in this case, towards criminality. A theme that was constant towards most of my interviews. Furthermore, a lack of family intervention can also lead for the individual to view themselves as a pawn of society and become more attracted to certain situations that support their victim narrative (Maruna, 2001). As Will explained, no support meant that he continued towards a criminal path:

> *Will: Still, I still did not learn. Because I did not have any support from my family or anyone.*
>
> *Interviewer: so, were you scared that your family would find out?*
>
> *Will: No, not really because my family knew what I was doing and that I was not on the right path, understand?*

In Sam's case, being abandoned by his parents, losing his grandparents at a young age, being shunned by his other relatives and then institutionalised made him feel like a victim of

society. He explained how these circumstances limited his possibilities, freedom and opportunities and so he was pushed towards this life in order to gain some form of liberty. Sam said that a life of chaos is all he knew and accepted that these pains were drivers towards a commitment to crime and a wish to further his criminal path. Thus, within the pawn narrative he presented, he was also self-victimising himself (Maruna, 2001). However, unlike Maruna's sample, Sam did not only feel mistreated by the criminal justice system (Shover, 1996 as cited in Maruna, 2001, p.77) but by life in general. Therefore, growing up with a lack of stability in childhood was a constant theme in the ex-inmates' stories; mainly relating to an element of pain experienced in childhood. Another example is that of Scott who did not want to be financially tied when it came to caring or his family and especially his children. So, when faced with financial constraints and being the only source of income for his family, he was pushed to start selling drugs. Hence, Scott felt that he had no other alternative (Harris, 2011) but to do so to support his family:

> *Scott: I was raising thirteen individuals in total. Two of whom were my own children, two were my girlfriend's and four were my sister's that had just come from [country name] and did not have anywhere to live… I ended up not being able to keep up with my income and I ended up selling drugs.*

Thus, Scott's reason for selling drug stemmed both from his upbringing and from his situation at the time – both revolving around familial influences. In fact, his love for his children and the fact that he does not want for them to miss out like he did as a kid, brought Scott to the decision that if they needed the money and he could not provide it to them, he would be willing to risk it all again – "I wouldn't think twice about it. Because I think that I've lived my life enough…" Hence, his fear of not being able to support his children (Harris, 2011, p.73) outweighed any other fears of being incarcerated. Additionally, his involvement in crime mainly stemmed from financial problems that where heightened by the responsibilities of parenthood (Byrne and Trew, 2008).

Moreover, indirect familial influences were present in the decisions of Julie who spoke about how using drugs was a leeway to crime but did not realise until later on that the reason she was using was because "in reality, this thing starts building up from when you're young." Furthermore, Tobey noted:

Tobey: like I told you it's the company… the company. In reality I was brought up good… I always chose the company.

Interviewer: What kind of company?

Tobey: Drugs, theft and all that.

Thus, ones upbringing can be seen as a leeway to crime involvement, but it is then encouraged by other factors that the individuals comes face to face with through their path; such as peer influences.

The peers

Most of my interviewees rarely acted alone when committing a crime. They stated that they looked for these "type of people" to experiment with, or encountered them when they were at their lowest. As Byrne and Trew (2008) stated, "friendships with people who stand in opposition to law-abiding values can make crime an enjoyable, positively valued and sociable activity" (p. 252). Will, Sam, and Tobey had similar experiences when talking about their peers where they would only use drugs or participate in crimes such as stealing when accompanied by people. A striking similarity between Sam and Will was that they were both indicted for the same type of crime (separate crimes, and decades) when they were 17 years old and accompanied by their friends. However, Sam admitted to having a follower role. Therefore, while admitting that there was an element of freedom and control when he hung out with certain people, he expressed not having full autonomy. For example, he said how he was bullied at a young age and as he grew older he started bullying others but at the same time justified it by saying that he became who he hung out with and having a follower persona:

Sam: I was bullied at school, I don't know for what reason. And then I started growing up and the things that they would do to me I would do to them. I started bullying people at school and hit people my age or younger than me. And then without wanting to - how the Maltese idiom says – tagħmilha maz-zopp, zopp issir [meaning: you become who you hang out with].

…

Sam: …I have a problem in my mind, not a mental one, but the problem with me is that I'm a follower. For example I wouldn't help you kill someone but I follow a lot of steps with regards to criminality.

In the case of Sam, "schools reinforced the negative and violent culture of their communities" (Harris, 2011, p.72) as this was the place where he met other individuals who would participate and encourage his deviant behaviour. Moreover, while Sam stated that his follower persona led him to a criminal path, Will admitted to being more accepted by his peers when he acted in a deviant way gave him a bigger push:

> *Will: …And the company also. I remember smoking the first joint with my friend. He told me "oh wow how you've changed…you're very different after smoking the joint, you have a more positive attitude" you understand? And that gave me a kick and I stayed on drugs…And I always searched for company.*
>
> …
>
> *I used to look for those kind of people because I was their type, I felt comfortable with them.*

Similar to Primo and his network in Bourgois (2003) book was that, at the time that they were hanging out with their peers, there was a sense of belonging and the self-victim narrative was put aside or had not yet been developed. Hence, "their niche… shielded them from having to face the fact that they were socially and economically superfluous to mainstream society" (Bourgois, p. 120). At the time, this sense of belonging was thus satisfied by finding an accepting company. In Will's case, the peers he hung out with prompted his criminal path further and made him feel less different. On the other hand, Julie stated that:

> *…there are some people… like if there were to be someone coming up to me asking me "Julie give me some [drugs]" I would tell them "no, you've never used why should you fall for that?" It's an ugly road. But at the time I did that, there were two people who told me "yes come here and take some [drugs] with us". I wanted to take because I was sad. Instead of finding someone to help me I found someone that drowned me.*

Julie explained how her case was a mix of wrong place, wrong time, and wrong company. Thus, family and peer influence played a major role in entry into crime for my interviewees with most of them being exposed to criminal behaviour at a young age and then later on in their early and late teens. These examples also showcase a lack of good influence from others in my interviewees lives to which Harris (2011) refers to as role models – or lack thereof. That is, they give explanations within their narratives to highlight how by not having good

role models they were inclined to participate in criminal behaviour because that's what they were surrounded by. This next chapter brings us back to the self-victim and pawn narrative.

The role models

Harris (2011) explained that a lack of role models can influence individuals to participate in crime. However, individuals that model behaviour were a prominent part in shaping some of my interviewees' deviant behaviour. For instance when asked whether he had any role models growing up, Tobey said:

> *Tobey: No… on the contrary… my brother [7years older]. He would take drugs too.*
>
> *Interviewer: How did that impact you?*
>
> *Tobey: …I followed in his footsteps.*

Thus, although not recognising his brother as a role model, by saying that he followed in his footsteps, Tobey recognised that he imitated his behaviour. Will, also said that he did not have a role model "but rather the opposite" as he referred to his mum's partner and admitted to having looked up to him when he was younger.

Whereas Sam said that his role model is (as of the time of the interview) famous rapper Tupac Shakur (2Pac) and aspired to be like him in fact he stated "when I got out of prison I wanted to get a new leaf on my life, but then… I started seeing on him [2Pac] and that and I started listening to his music."

It must be noted that although Sam started off as describing himself as a Pawn, there was a conflicting narrative in his second interview whereby he chose to accept his faith and find a reason for his life struggles – in his case it was to dedicate his life to crime and the 'thug life'. Sam explained that the instigator of these changes came from seeing Tupac as a role model. Thus, his goals and self-perception shifted when he started following Tupac because Sam recognised himself in him. Additionally, he said:

> *Sam: Because I follow a lot this person… I'm not telling you that I'm imitating him. But, thanks to him I got to see my own life. Let me show you… for example I like to listen to 2Pac. He died at 25 years. Here he tells you "If you can't find somethin' to*

live for, you best find somethin' to die for." I see that it makes a lot of sense because if you don't have anything in life to live for, at least find something else.

Meaning that, his role model set him to a new sense of direction, and a new sense of purpose to live out a life of crime as something to die for – "leave behind your legacy." Tutenges and Sandberg's (2012) study also found an "intimate interactional relationship between […] behaviour and […] stories" when studying drinking behaviours (p.1). Thus, it can also be said that similar to action and inspiration when it comes to drinking behaviour, Sam being inspired by 2Pac's thug life is suggestive of a person who has committed crimes and wants to "generate stories" of their own. Moreover, although Sam said that he was not trying to imitate him, the fact that he aspired to be like 2Pac could also be an indication that Sam does not entirely feel like he can write his own destiny, so he feels the need to imitate or replicate other people's behaviour in order to "be someone".

Contrary to Sam, Scott's decision to use alternative illicit means to provide from his family stemmed from the mirror he chose to put in front of his life as to not become like his father "I made a promise to myself that I do not want to become… the way my father brought us up." Thus, the story that was generated here looks at who one does not want to become rather than who one wants to be. This decision thus, resulted for Scott to come to the conclusion that he would risk it all again, even if it meant going to prison again. In fact, the next section will look at how being locked up and its aftermath can promote further crime participation.

The prison

My interviewees' prison sentences ranged from 2 years to 10 years. However, all five were imprisoned more than once – hence recidivism was present within my sample. This was an indication that reformation failed to take place in prison (with only one exception, kind of). Tobey, Sam and Will stated that their prison experience was more negative than positive. They were there as a punishment for a crime they did and all they could do was count down the days until they got out. Nonetheless, Sam expressed that his drug problem emerged from prison "I started using it from prison. And I stayed with the same problem on the outside too." Meanwhile, when asked about the difference between the first time and last time he was in prison, Will had this to say:

the first time I was sent to prison for those thirteen months there were only sixty prisoners, unlike today where there are 800 (eight hundred) or I don't know how

much. I was still young, and there were very big criminals, you understand? And they did not influence me positively after hearing what they used to say, understand? Meaning that it was more damaging for me.

This excerpt from my interviewee highlighted how he was influenced by 'big criminals" in prison at a young age that was also reflected in Clark's (2006) study. The first time he was imprisoned was at seventeen years old (circa 1980), and given that there was a lack of structure in prison he was put in a division with said criminals. However, this lack of structure was still prominent till today as Scott stated that during his three year sentence (released in 2022) he was put in a cell with a person that was spending life in prison. This information supports that of Clark's (2011) research where inmates reported "criminal career developments" from such prison interactions. These statements also exhibit a prison structure that can fill a person with negative behaviour – that of hatred and drug use. As well as, promote further proficiency in criminal activities and imbalances in "reformation".

In the case of Julie, prison was her haven and 'nothing was missing in prison' and went in and out of prison from 2004 until 2021 wither longest sentence being from 2008 until the end of 2017. Hence, up until that point no reformation occurred in prison. However, what surprised me the most was Julie explaining that she had anxieties about leaving prison because she had become so accustomed to that life and confessed to crimes she had not yet been found guilty of in order to prolong her sentence. Thus, Julie devised strategies that would prolong her from facing her anxieties, in her case, they were found outside of prison and within the community (Goffman, 1961).

On the other hand, Sam said that the prison system should be harsher and he did not fear it. While, even with the bad prison experiences they had, Scott stated that he would do it all over again for his children, while Will is still awaiting trial. Possibly, an indication that changes cannot occur unless the person not only desires them, but acts on it – a theme that will be further explored below in pathways out of crime.

Desperate means call for desperate measures

Central to my study was the use of drugs and how four out of five of my interviewees committed a crime for the purpose of attaining financial means to buy drugs, while one was selling drugs to obtain financial means. Hence, especially for the former four individuals, one could not exist without the other (Maruna, 2001). Although they expressed participating in deviant and criminal activities at a young age to experiment, this soon changed when they

became drug dependent. In fact, being clean from drugs meant being clean from crime, while using drugs meant participating in crime to satisfy their addiction. Even a user said that he cannot stop using it because:

> *Sam: You try to in a way kill the pain that you have by replacing it with something else that makes you happy in life. The pain you have takes away your happiness, so for you to start feeling like that, you have to take something. Not long ago I tried to stop everything but I realised that after living the life I had I realised that I cannot stop. Because I think that my mind would focus on the negative.*

This excerpt falls in line with what Maruna (2001) referred to as hyperconsumptionism where the temporary thrills are experienced through excessive consumption of substances, in this case drugs. But, nonetheless all of my interviewees, including the one above, claimed that it destroyed them or contributed to their continuation in a criminal career.

Therefore, although this narrative contradicts the one above (attractions of crime), I felt that it could not be ignored as most of my interviewees told me that "it was all because of drugs" (Will). This perception also allows us to see how there are multiple sides to the same story and how pathways are guided with the changes in meanings (Blumer, 1969). Hence, even though individuals such as Will and Tobey admitted to taking drugs to experiment and for the thrill of it, they did also confer about becoming an addict. This information supported both Clark's (2011) and Maruna's (2001) findings on the relationship between drugs and crime, but even so, it does not take away that criminal actions can be committed for their attractions. That is especially since when talking about drug use they used it as a means to explain their behaviour and not to excuse it.

Pathways out of crime

In this section, three themes stood out the most – **instigators for change, taking actions towards change, and support from other actors.** Within this part only the individuals who managed to successfully and knowingly move away from crime will be taken into consideration - Julie, Tobey and Will. Although Will is currently deemed as a hopeful desister due to his current situation, his 16 years of sobriety and a crime free path will be taken into consideration. This is because of the fact that desisting is still a complex process to understand, hence, technically, he was a successful desister for those 16 years. Additionally,

both Will and Tobey expressed a hopeful crime free future. Tobey however, has gone back and forth with his sobriety and crime free path. He was listed as a hopeful desister since at the time of the study he had only been released for two month and expressed that he does not know what's in store for the future but hopes for it to be crime free. Therefore, his story lies also with past successful attempts and his present situation. Although Scott and Sam expressed that they are not currently partaking in criminal activities, they did express that continuing in the criminal path is still an option for them. Therefore, they will not be taken into consideration on the basis of the explanation given in Chapter 2. The below themes also highlight major points relating to **reflexivity on the past, the future and the present identities from the part of the inmates.**

Instigators of change

Julie, Tobey and Will gave meanings to their instigators for change. Julie said that while imprisoned, the death of her mother made her reflect on her life path and choices which resulted in her decision to "want to do something with my life". Thus, for her it was an emotionally charged and reflective decision that made her want to turn her life around. Will also gave an emotionally charged reason for change, that of being a role model for his children. He said that when his kids were young he chose to become sober in order to be someone they can look up to. Additionally, he said that making such a change lead for him to continue in a pathway out of crime by finding legitimate employment and pursue an education. Moreover, they explained that together with the instigator for change, one cannot be completely free unless the change is being made for oneself. Hence indicating that personal agency is the central element towards change (Laub & Sampson, 2003). So, regardless of the reason, in my sample, one could not move away from crime successfully unless they were doing it for themselves:

> *Julie: You have to be the one to do it, even if you have people around you. It depends on you. When I was in prison I did a lot of programmes but I did not care. But then, my mum died and I wanted to do something. I chose to do something. I did not want to carry on like that. I knew that once I got out of prison, I knew I wouldn't have anyone and I was going to suffer. So I fought with myself, plus I had help and I took on this challenge. It was a hard challenge… a lot…but it's all right now.*

In Julie's excerpt above and in Will's story about becoming a role model for his children and avoiding drugs, we see how they accomplished their desistance by working towards a desired

self (Giordano et al., 2002; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) and by moving away from a feared self (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). This meant that taking actions to instigate change was a main element in moving away from crime. For instance, the action taken on Julie's part was to ask for help when in prison, while Will's was seeking out a drug addiction recovery groups, but the biggest difference compared to other failed attempts was that of a desire to change (Hunter & Farrall, 2018). Therefore, hooks for change alone cannot instigate change and need to be accompanied by cognitive changes (Giordano er al., 2002). Additionally, the element of hope was seen to be a vital aspect in my sample (Harris, 2011; Maruna, 2001). For example, a push for Julie to seek out a change in her criminal path meant that she had to also have a hope for a better more positive future, whereas Will's story about his sobriety journey also indicates a look into the future where he hoped he would be the kind of father his children looked up to.

On the other hand, Tobey said that being employed helped keep him in check when it came to his sobriety and made him want to continue on a crime free path. Tobey was keen on continuing with his employment journey as it made him feel a sense of security as well as keeping his mind off drugs. As Laub and Sampson's (1993) age-graded theory of informal social control suggests, employment accompanied by "job stability, commitment to work, and mutual ties binding workers and employers" in order for criminal participation to be affected (p.146). Tobey managed to maintain his sobriety and keeping away from crime for three years and he gave all the credits to his employment. However, by expressing that he liked having a job and did not want to lose it, especially since it provided him with stability and an in income, he showcased a will and desire to continue on that path. In fact, he only succumbed to drug use and criminal behaviour once he was laid off because of Covid-19. Thus, as Laub and Sampson explained, strong ties with social networks such as employment are more likely to result in desistance, whereas weak ties can be seen to contribute criminal participation.

Taking action towards a crime-free self

Three themes stood out when taking action to move away from crime: a drug-free self, making changes in their social network, and finding a legitimate means to earn money.

Towards a clean self

Julie, Will and Tobey all had different reasons as to why they chose to stop participating in crime. But, as seen in the above section, drugs were a main element to their pathway out of crime.

> *Julie: Life is beautiful like this. I don't want to go back. I know how much prison time I did for nothing. I went through a lot. It's not worth it. Even waking up healthy, that's enough for me… Not waking up and having to look from where you're going to steal, or have to go for methadone, or have to see where you're going to sell the object. It has a lot…*

Meaning that, sobriety was synonymous with a crime-free self (Maruna, 2001; Schroeder et al., 2007; Williams & Schaefer, 2021). In fact all three expressed that once they got clean they stopped participating in criminal activities. Julie and Will intentionally sought out professional help to aid in combatting their addiction. Tobey on the other hand relied on the distractions that were present at the time in his life – mainly having a full time job – and personal will. Hence, while Julie and Will were working on themselves through some form of therapy, Tobey took it upon himself to find distractions – in the past it was being employed, and now it is focusing on his health.

Shifting social networks

The second change presented in all of these three stories was that of a shift in social networks. Two main themes emerged – that of knifing off (Williams and Schafer, 2021) and of boundary work (Copes et al., 2008; Maruna, 2001).

Julie, Tobey and Will said that there are no real friends in crime. As Julie noted "I don't have any friends. I used to have friends before but they all betrayed me cause when your one that road… all friends betray you either today or tomorrow." Thus, as Williams and Schaefer pointed out, knifing off can be "the result of disappointment and feelings of betrayal." In fact, once they started taking steps towards desistance, they stopped hanging out with their deviant peers:

> *Will: After I did the programme I changed my entire lifestyle. I cut out places I used to visit and those people that I thought were my friends but weren't. I started hanging out with people who never used drugs, or they were like me, having used in the past but stopped. But, with the people that were still in that situation [involved in crime], I used to honk my horn at them [as a gesture of hello] but I wouldn't stop to have a chat with them.*

> *Tobey: I try to stay away from everything. I have a bunch of friend who I used to talk to that I don't anymore…because it's better "ugh" than "ouch"… avoid, I avoid.*

Additionally, the interviewees explained that hanging out with individuals who support a criminal lifestyle (Williams & Schaefer, 2021) when trying to desist would be playing with fire. In the sense, they would be constantly surrounded by temptations. Hence, knifing off was the only option for them. Nonetheless, in their story there was also a reflection of Copes's et al.'s (2008) boundary work – here instead the clean self is viewed as having superiority over the drug users and criminal others. As Will said, "They were like me… or worse… you can't do good things and still be with criminals, with all due respect." Maruna (2001) explained that this shift can become present when trying to desist because individuals want to create a distance between themselves and "real criminals" (Goffman, as cited in Maruna, p. 138). Hence, this change allows them to move away from the past and start the process of making good (Maruna, 2001).

Finding a stable income

The final similarity is that of employment, Tobey used it as a distraction from taking drugs and participating in crime. But, in reality he expressed that it was more than that – he said that having a good income made him not think about those things as the benefits of being employed outweighed those of being in the criminal path. He expressed how he liked working and doing something for himself that would benefit him; and thus having a purpose (Harris, 2011; Maruna 2001). The same can be said for Julie, who found employment through the prison. The feeling of pride of keeping a job for so long also meant having a structure for herself. She did not have to worry about where to get money from to satisfy her addiction, or about being caught after a burglary: "The road I was on before it was not good at all. Theft, lies, and fights nothing was good. Not like now where I work, my mind is at ease you know." This perspective is line with Sampson and Laub's (1993) theory discussed above, and as Williams and Schaefer (2021) employment aids in "the strategy to act in prosocial roles." Hence, a stable income led to having a peace of mind and having a purpose for both Tobey and Julie.

Furthermore, Will also sought to make something of himself – he wanted stability but also credibility within his employment. Something he did manage to get. He gave back to society by working with other addicts and helping them get off that path. His narrative supports that of Maruna's (2001) redemption scripts where he has "social purpose or meaning for this part of his life: It has produced a "book" that he can pass on to the next generation" (p.104). He felt proud of once having such a responsibility, but also being able to afford big things

legitimately:

I was one of those with the most clients at the [organisation], I had a good credit. I was the only one who had their own car from my team. I… I had very big responsibilities
[…]
I was one of the good ones. Today I feel good because a lot of my previous clients are now married. So, when I see them or think of them I feel good, to be honest. I also have clients who have died, you understand? But, those 16 years… were beautiful to me. A beautiful life… simple…

Within this context a stable job was thus representative of their real self – a self that is away from crime (Maruna, 2001). In their current situation (of a hopeful desister) the thing Will and Tobey craved the most was simplicity. The simple life that allowed for them to have a stable income, good relations with their family, and hope for the future. All of these things stand out in Julie's case, as she had all of them – her partner, her partner's children, a good job, a simple happy life, and a stable income. Even so, both Will and Tobey expressed the desire to fix their relationships with their family and relative in their future. For Will he wishes to regain contact with his four children and some of his siblings; whereas for Sam it is to strengthen his relationship with his children and fix the one with his mother.

The powers of support systems

Social support was also a vital aspect in the shift towards a crime-free path within my interviewees. Individual agency and supportive environments towards a desisting self are ideal for a successful clean future self (Maruna 2001; Giordano et al. 2002). Within this context, it to "re-create social networks and build human capital" is also seen as a necessary step towards desistance (Harris, 2011). For instance, Tobey had found support in a family member who gave him a job and helped him out when he was in trouble. He recounted a time where he was about to be jailed for not paying a fine and his relative helped him out:

…At the time I was still working with [family member]. I called him from the police station and I told him what happened… and he told me "don't worry I'll come now and pay for it." And I didn't even spend one hour in prison. They didn't even put me in a cell or anything. I was there for an hour or an hour and a half, he came to pay for them and we left.

…And then he started taking them from my wage; €50 per week.

However, his assistance went beyond that and Tobey showed how much his relative's support was meaningful in his crime free path:

> *Tobey: My [family member] helped me a lot. Those almost three years I was clean thank God he was there… Giving me a job was enough and he took care of me.*
>
> *How did he take care of you?*
>
> *Tobey: Everything. He would take me to appointments and remind me of everything. It's not that I wouldn't remember but he wanted to help me, a lot.*

Therefore, emotional support was just as important as instrumental support, if not more. Another family member that showed support towards all three of the interviewees was their mother. From the stories of my interviewees the mother was a vital protagonist in their criminal paths by seeing a better side of them and supporting them emotionally. For Julie it is clear that the love her mother had for her made her want to change for the better "my relationship with my mum was really good. She would come visit me two times a week." This was also the case for both Tobey and Will. Although his current relationship with his mother was rocky, he did say that he found support from her when in prison as she would call him up. Meanwhile Will said that his mother always saw the good in him and he always showed her respect "My mother looked at me and told everyone in the room look I know he's disobedient but he never, not once spoke back to me. And it's true. I used to always do what she told me." Hence, supporting them at their lowest and still seeing the good in them was meaningful for the ex-inmates and their journey towards a crime free path and generated a moral obligation of making good (Maruna, 2001; Cid & Marti, 2017). Julie also had support from her partner. In fact, she was the only individual that was in a stable relationship. Julie's relationship with her partner was a key instrument in her wanting to stay in a crime free path: "I don't want to lose what I have now. I love my partner so I don't want to lose it. She supports me and helps me a lot."

Although being imprisoned did not prompt the ex-inmates to make life changes, the substantive and interpersonal support (Harris, 2011) that was introduced to them in prison did. For starters, Julie found help in prison when she decided to make changes. Assistance was given in the form of drug addiction programmes, working with mental health professionals,

being employed while transitioning from prison to society, and securing housing with the NGO. Meanwhile, the NGO that was temporarily hosting them at the time of this study contacted them while they were still in prison. Support from NGOs was prevalent within my sample, for instance at one point in his life, Tobey was provided housing by an NGO in order to help him change his life around and beat his drug addiction. Thus, similar to Byrne and Trew (2008) "social support and the development of strong pro-social bonds were important in many of the participants' accounts of their shift towards desistance" (p.245). About *Mid-Dlam Għad-Dawl* Tobey said: "I found a lot of help from them here. It's always better than on the outside."

The pains of a criminal path

Inspired by Nugent and Schinkel (2016), this section aims to shed light on the pains endured in a criminal path – starting from the pains while pursuing a career in crime mainly relating to a negative crime orientation; then moving onto the pains of desistance focusing on isolation, goal failure and hopelessness; the pains of having a criminal label; and the pains of damaged relationships. The aim of this section is to highlight the complexities of a criminal path as well as to showcase how such path is non-linear and one does not simply go from criminal participation to desistance.

The pains of participating in crime

As discussed above, Sam described how he wanted to pursue a life of crime because of influences by his role model, and because he was always attracted to that life. However, he contradicts this positive crime orientation by suggesting that the way he was brought up made him a *pawn; a victim of society.* In one of his interviews, he explained that he wished to have a family:

> *…where you can go home and say "hey mum or dad" or something. It's already enough that what's causing all the pain and all the problems throughout your whole life. So if I went through all this? I …? And I have all these pains in my heart and all that? It's true that you see me smile but inside myself at the back there are all these problems, all these pains… but at the end of the day I still laugh. Life brought me like this, and I continued to go in a downward spiral… because I liked this life. So, I decided to reach a different grade, I don't know. But, we'll see I don't know.*

This excerpt shows a desire of an alternative self that did not lead him to a life of crime. Thus, although recognising the benefits of a life of crime, the pains are still there. This is representative of what *negative social relations* and can result in alienation and persistence (Byrne and Trew, 2008). Moreover, although peer influences were seen as a contributor to entry into crime, they can leave a lingering impact even after *knifing off* occurs; that of trust. All interviewees explained how there are no real friends in the life of crime – they were *superficial* (Williams and Schaefer, 2012). Julie and Sam seemed to be the most influenced by this. While Sam is still friends with people, he still expressed that "in his life, there are no friends in this life. Because today a friend taps on your back and one hour later he betrays you. Because nowadays there are no friends." Meanwhile, Julie explained how she used to have friends but doesn't anymore because they all betrayed her. Other than that, participation in crime can result for the individual to be continuously cautious about their environment and about being a victim of a crime. This can stem from a link between "isolation and fear" (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). Having been incarcerated for so long, Julie was only accustomed to the life of crime on the outside. Thus, being isolated in prison and away from conventional society, contributed to her fears of becoming the victim of a crime.

The pains of desistance

"The need to stay away from temptations, provocations and risk, combined with the effects of institutionalization, meant that they often just stayed in their accommodation, in effect reproducing some elements of their imprisonment" (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016, p.). This was evident in my sample. For instance, Julie explained how the thing that kept her to herself the most was how people would see her. So, she spent three months confined in her room avoiding as much as she could as to avoid human contact. The main reason for this reaction was the shame she felt after being imprisoned for quite a publicised crime. Hence, the pains of *isolation* were evident in my sample. Furthermore, not being able to get a job for Will presented the pains of *goal failure* (p. 574). His wish to find employment in order to be able to achieve full desistance was limited by his current criminal situation and his pending case. Finally, *hopelessness* is found in Scott in the form of "slowly giving up hope for anything other than a life of merely existing" (p. 574). Although Scott is not recognised to fall under any category of desister, Nugent's and Schinkel's perception on the pains of hopelessness give's insight as to why he is willing to participate in crime if need be. In this case, and by the conversation I had with Scott, it would seem that he feels this way because he was "losing sight of a happy ending" (p. 574).

The burdens of a criminal label

As Williams and Schaefer (2021) pointed out, “labelling, through possession of a criminal record or media exposure, reduced prosocial opportunities such as employment or relationships.” This was evident in my sample. Julie and Will spoke about how media exposure increased their anxieties within the community.

> *Julie: this went around all over the media… so I think people would recognise you…*

> *Will: the media breaks you. It doesn’t benefit you it just damages you. Speaking for myself.*
> *[…]*
> *Society abandoned me. Even when I go to apply for a job, they take down your phone number….They press the button and see all those things [referring to media] and don’t contact you. I need a job… because I need to work.*

This perception of them reduced their integration within the community (Ferrell et al., 2008). In Julie’s case confinement in her room for three months; and in Will’s lack of job opportunity limiting his move towards independence and integration. However, the label also adds a burden to the relatives of the ex-inmate. Will said: “…they used to say Mary’s [fictitious name] father is in prison and all that. So my children used to pay for my consequences while they were innocent. Which is not okay.” Goffman (1963) referred to this as *courtesy stigma* that is imposed by the community on family member of the stigmatised. These findings were also prevalent in Clark’s (2012) study. She explained that stigmatisation cannot be limited when a person’s identity cannot be hidden as Malta’s small size produces “limited privacy and rife gossip” (p.12). However, media and community reactions are not limited to individuals, but rather inmates and ex-inmates in general. Scott explained that online comment on media posts about inmates made him feel anger towards society.

> *Scott: You become angry and become cruel with society. I am not saying that I feel… but I’m saying what a person becomes in there. I have cruelty towards society.*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you mean?*
>
> *Scott: For starters, people think that we are in a hotel and that we have everything and there’s everything when they don’t know the reality of things of entering prison*

and what's in there. And even they [the media] were boasting about a director who cut out drugs, there were still drugs coming in. Not a lot. But, it was coming in still.

The criminal justice system also presents inmates as one and the same. Will did not agree with the Maltese justice system – he sees it as a system that dehumanises individuals, treats everyone the same and does more harm than good so people "they become viler instead" (Will). Thus, the tainted image and stigma present within the community can lead to the feeling of a loss of control excreted by outside forces (Katz, 1988).

The pains of damaged relationships

Tobey, Will and Scott valued their relationship with their children the most. This was evident especially since they spoke about them quite a lot in our interviews. However, with a disappointed look on their face and eye contact avoidance, all three expressed that they did not have the best relationship with their children. In their confession to me, I could sense some shame that was later confirmed to me, by statements such as:

Scott: If I could turn back time, I would but I cant.

Interviewer: What have you lost after you started using drugs again and going to prison?

Tobey: my children's company.

Will: I don't blame them. I made mistakes and they forgave me, I made a mistake and they forgave me, but then enough is enough. Right now I'm not on good terms with them and it's my fault because before they always used to help me.

The shame that the three ex-inmates conveyed also indicated that distance from their children heightened their feelings of loneliness especially since they expressed that they missed them; "I feel pain, because they would always be with me" (Scott). Will said "loneliness breaks me" and in his second interview explained how being misunderstood also contributed to his loneliness

The situation of being in prison had a toll on their relationship with their children and thus amplified the feelings of shame and loneliness. After being locked up other meaningful

relationships with parents, significant others, siblings and parents were also damaged– or as Scott put it "gone with the wind." Thus, as Katz (1988) pointed out "in shame does the person acknowledge failings or moral inadequacy." Within this context, they portray a narrative of a failed father, son, partner or sibling – all roles that according to Maruna (2001) contribute to the *real me* narrative where individuals realize that they were also "normal". Additionally, it must also be noted that such situations can stem from the weakening of social ties once imprisoned (Glaser, 1969).

Will and Tobey, also portray the narrative of a failed desister within this context; or what Glaser (1969) referred to as *eventual recidivists* (p.54). For both of these individuals, it was a domino effect. For instance, Will was employed, married and in good contact with his children, after an incident at work he ended up relapsing, his relapse led to being laid off, separated and losing his children's respect. The loss of his desisting self resulted in the loss of his support system. Thus, being frustrated, angry, humiliated and ashamed Will resorted to re-entering into criminal participation – in his words:

> *when I broke my sobriety I started looking for people who I used to hang out the first time. Because even then, people notice that you're not the same. That there's something bad within you. Or they start to reject you.*

This situation also falls under the umbrella of Sampson and Laub's (2004) age graded theory where "poor job stability and weak marital attachment to one's spouse increased the likelihood of criminal activity and deviant behaviour" (p.8). Based on my sample, having to start all over again can be a mentally exhausting process and is mainly related to having worked hard and then losing it all - specifically the meaningful relationships created when on the desisting path. Nonetheless, both Will and Tobey are hopeful desisters.

Chapter 6 – **Final discussion and Conclusion**

From the recounts of Julie, Sam, Scott, Tobey and Will, pathways in and out of crime are anything but simple. They consist of a continuous evaluation of past, present and future circumstances and identities. All five interviewees have unique stories, and their current crime orientation and prospects differ in various ways. However, the similarities in their criminal influences and desistance processes are striking.

The ex-inmates *portrayed pathways in crime* as having both positive and negative connotations. The benefits mainly relate to acceptance, fun, freedom and money (Abrams & Hyum, 2009; Byrne and Trew, 2005/8; Clark, 2011; Katz, 1988; Maruna, 2001). And although holding a different meaning for each individual, the element of power was deemed of great importance. That is, getting away with crime and being feared by others were the main reasons persistence in crime was present. On the other hand, the negatives concerned mostly damaged relationships with others, lack of trust, having no real friends, loneliness, shame and rage, and drug dependency (Glaser, 1969; Katz, 1988; Maruna, 2001; Nugent and Schinkel, 2021; Williams and Schaefer, 2012). Also, four interviewees depicted a relationship between drugs and crime as one and the same (Maruna, 2012; Clark, 2011). Hence, pathways in crime were portrayed by ex-inmates as consisting of both benefits and costs; for some, the costs outweighed the benefits (Julie, Tobey and Will), and for others, the benefits outweighed the costs. On the other hand, *pathways out of crime* were presented to be triggered by outside forces such as bereavement, family responsibilities and employment (Harris, 2011; Sampson and Laub, 2003), but desistance was only possible once cognitive changes occurred (Giordano et al., 2002; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). In this context, my sample showed that the pathways towards desistance are a change within oneself, supported by other factors and circumstances and their meanings. Accordingly, the processes towards desistance are complex and consist of various reflections and significant changes in one's environment as well as a shift in identity.

Furthermore, in pathways in crime, two central contradictory identities (Åkerström et al., 2011) were performed – the pawn or victim of society and the competent or powerful criminal. That is, the individual narrated stories from their childhood that limited their free will and pushed them towards a life of crime (Clark, 2011; Harris, 2011; Maruna, 2001; Scott and Lyman, 1968). Hence, the pawn identity was identified. However, when reminiscing

about their criminal past and whenever justifications for their behaviour were unnecessary, they presented themselves as being in power when participating in crime. Thus, the narratives of the past hold a balance between the identities of victimhood and of power, with the only exception being Julie, who solely presented a pawn narrative. Meanwhile, in successful pathways out of crime, an identity shift was necessary, with the main influences being the hopeless current self wanting to become the hopeful, optimistic future self and avoid becoming the feared past self (Giordano et al., 2022; Harris, 2011; Maruna, 2001; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Presser, 2008; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Visualising their future identity away from crime and fearing the consequences of staying in a life of crime was thus essential to obtaining a desister identity or hopeful identity. Consequently, taking action by getting clean, cutting ties with the criminal past, and finding legitimate means of income (Maruna, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Schroeder et al., 2007; Williams and Schafer, 2021) were also vital for a desister identity to flourish. The desisters and hopeful desisters also showed pride in their crime-free identity compared to those they used to hang out with when participating in crime and other individuals "worse than them" (Will) (Copes et al., 2008; Maruna, 2001). Lastly, the lingering (negative) effects of a criminal identity presented themselves on both paths and mainly included: community and media reactions that increased anxieties; lack of employment possibilities that limited their social mobility; and judgements on others based on affiliation that increased their feelings of shame and anger (Ferrell et al. 2008; Goffman, 1963; Katz, 1988; Williams and Schaefer, 2021).

The ex-inmates also identified four main groups of actors to be of utmost importance when it came to influencing their pathway in crime - the family, the peers, the role models, and the prison. The family represented diverse meanings in the ex-inmates' narratives: an enforcer of crime environments, lack of opportunities, and major responsibility (Byrne and Trew, 2008; Harris, 2011; Maruna, 2001). The peers were mainly seen as fellow criminals who accepted or pushed them toward crime participation (Byrne and Trew, 2008; Burgois, 2003; Harris, 2011). The role models triggered curiosity and generated criminal behaviour and stories (Harris, 2011; Tutenges & Sandberg, 2012). Finally, they presented the prison as an institutional actor where they met professional criminals that taught them more about crime, introduced them to drugs, and made them feel more different from "conventional" society (Clark 2006/2011; Goffman, 1961). In pathways in crime, the main actors, after the ex-inmate themselves, were the supportive family, including the children, mothers, close relatives and significant others; and supportive others such as NGOs who provided them with housing and

professionals who helped them deal with their pains (Byrne and Trew, 2008; Harris, 2011; Maruna, 2001; Cid & Marti, 2017).

Overall, this study bridges various theories and concepts on entry into crime, persistence and desistance. Additionally, it aims to contribute to the interactionist standpoint whereby identity is continuously transformed with social interactions. This study also presented a cultural criminological take mainly by recognising the thrills of committing a crime, the impacts of a tainted social label that can result in rage and loss of control leading to a commitment to crime, and the meanings given to social actors in their move towards or away from crime. Furthermore, I concur with Presser (2008) that "story *telling* impacts stories" (chapter 9, para.1) on two grounds: (1) in the interviews, their perception of me and my demeanour shaped their storytelling process and "without the discursive opportunities offered by the interview" (chapter 9, section 5, para. 3), different narratives would have been generated; (2) in the retold stories of others, such as 2Pac, that also created narratives and their given meaning led to identity shifts. Even so, I acknowledge that I do not have the whole story; but I would argue that I have rich stories that helped me reach my goal of understanding their side a little bit better.

Although this study gives a multifaceted perspective on pathways in and out of crime, I wish also to point out some *limitations* this study recognises. The first is generalizability; the small sample size and in-depth interviews do not allow for generalising the central topic (Morris, 2015). However, the purpose of this study is to understand and give a voice, not generalizability. In terms of validity, as previously stated, these are not historical facts but rather stories of individuals (Presser, 2008). Although I was attentive to any mistruths, their stories were seen as their truth and thus valid. Further, this study recognises the imbalances present in ex-inmates' stories, but that's what makes them even more compelling. Additionally, although the data gathering process of in-depth interviews is time-consuming (Morris, 2015), they are worth your while (if you like hearing people talk about themselves). I also recognise that this study is on the broader side, but, given the limited sample and the diverse stories, this was the best approach for a fruitful thesis. Even so, studies on criminal pathways would also benefit from a narrower stance and a longitudinal approach. For instance, given that the Maltese prison was portrayed as a promoter of criminal behaviour, anxieties and stigma, future studies would benefit from a thorough analysis of the psychological, sociological and cultural impacts the Maltese prison structure has on the inmates and ex-inmates. Future research on desistance would also gain from expanding on

failed desistence. More specifically, to better understand the most meaningful and influential aspects of the successes and failures of desistance.

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