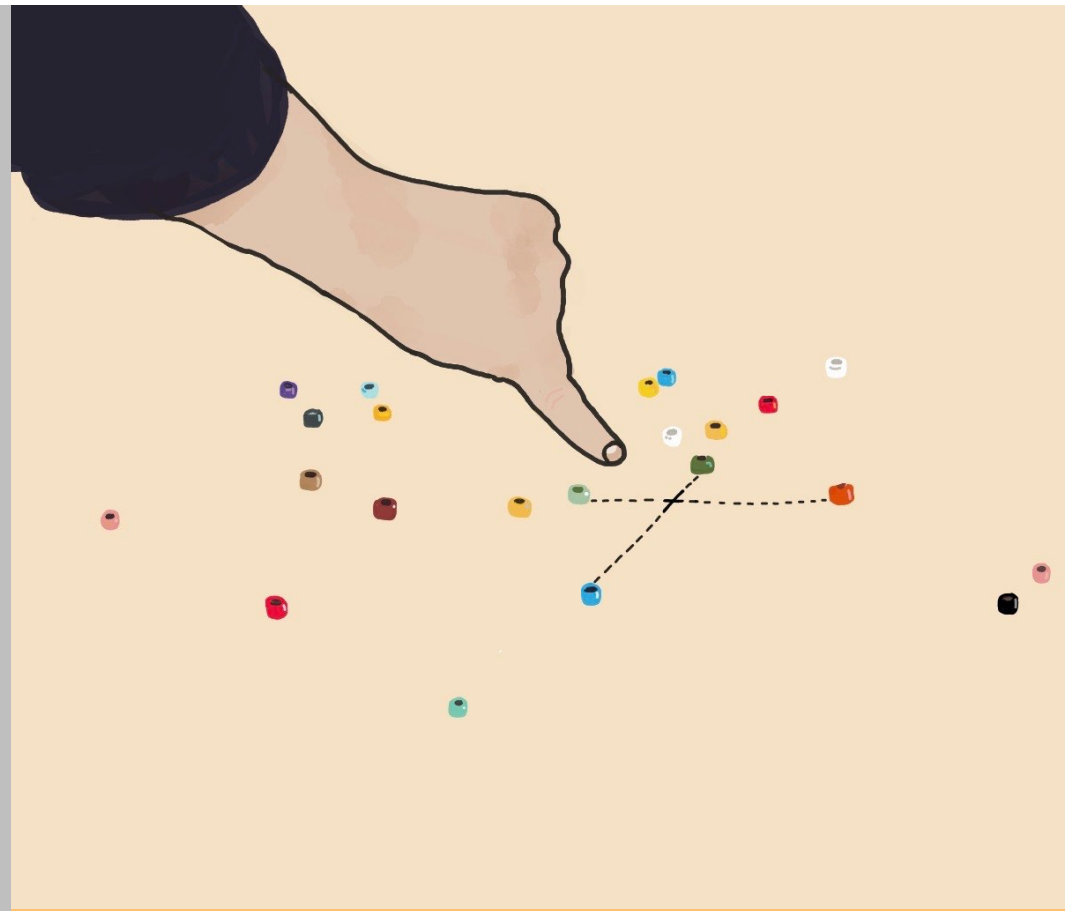


Personal collection of Żibeg and Bubun from Malta and Gozo (held by 5 year old girl)



Digital illustration to visualise the beginning move of the Żibeg game: Salib l-Art (a cross on the ground)



The focus of my research in Gozo centered around street games played by Gozitan children until approximately 1970. Since most street games had a clear gender association I felt it appropriate as female to direct my study towards girl's games or games played collectively. The topic was narrowed down once more to research games which require an artefact to play. As a complete novice to Anthropology, I found a fun starting point in play. I would set out each day with my ever expanding bag of objects, which I would casually place on a café table, look at on a bus or hand over to the locals during chance encounters. These objects became oral history triggers, prompting memories and anecdotes of "the best years of Gozo"

The Maltese word for play is loghob, inclusive of participation in games as well as the universal pastime of children to be lost in the intangible spaces of imagination. Loghob also denotes the fun, pleasure and social connections formed within groups of young people passing time together. One of the most commonly played female specific games from this period became my favourite: Żibeg (Beads). Glass or ceramic Żibeg was played in groups of two or more on the residential streets of Malta and Gozo. Every woman I met was familiar with the game and close to all born up until 1965 played the game in her lifetime. All street games were played during a quieter, more frugal time in Gozo, with fewer cars, and minimal possessions.

Site of auto-ethnographic study / public performance to practice il-Hofra (beads in a hole)



Żibeg found on a sugar bowl cover as weights in a Xaghra home in Gozo



Quite unexpectedly I found that the play research was not all fun and games but hard work! Sweltering heat, sticky chewing gum incidents, finger blisters, and sore knees from playing at ground level all tested my commitment to the topic. I found new motivation in a closed off lane site I discovered within the center of Victoria (Rabat). Here I could play Żibeg with no traffic other than local pedestrians. I perfected my technique, participating in a site specific auto-ethnographic study. This was a curious public performance: April the outsider engaging in a traditional game that had been extinct for nearly half a century. It was here I met a Gozitan that would become a key informant, who told me in retrospect "you are the girl that made me [go] back in time".

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Niftakru l-loghob Remembering play

Malta Summer School 2017
Gozo, Xlendi

