

The Influence of ‘Islandness’ on the Securitization and Economic Integration Policy Responses to Vulnerable Migration in Small Island States

A Comparative Analysis of Malta and Trinidad & Tobago

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Abstract

Islands have long been strategic sites for mainland territories' offshore migration governance. However, small, sovereign island states' implementation of migration policies based on their unique geopolitical position among larger states has revealed that the concept of "islandness" impacts migration management. This has become a salient issue in contemporary migration governance with the movement of socio-economically vulnerable migrants by boat to strategically located island states in the Caribbean and Mediterranean. However, there have not been any comparative studies of islands from both regions. To analyse the impact of "islandness" on the securitization and integration of vulnerable migrants on small island states, the policy responses of Malta and Trinidad & Tobago to African and Venezuelan migrant inflows respectively will be studied. Contextual, historical and document analyses were used to comparatively examine how the migration-security and migration-development nexuses are impacted by the unique geopolitical and economic vulnerabilities of island states. Small size, dependency, and limited resources were found to impact their perception of migration with the prioritization of securitization for self-preservation despite the ability of vulnerable migrants to supply labour in ageing island economies. The findings of this research suggest that island states should be considered their own "migration states" to more clearly understand the nuanced policy responses to irregular and vulnerable boat migration.

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Introduction

Islands are often admired for their natural, tropical reserves that provide an escape from the outside world (King, 2009). In the Caribbean and Mediterranean, island life is perceived to be relaxed and free because of the surrounding ocean that protects these spaces from the hassle of mainland life. Their assumed temporal stability and social homogeneity is presumed to illustrate isolation from global interaction and movement (Steinberg, 2005). However, even in these understandings of islands, the temporary tourist movement to and from the island is not considered to be mobility that defines the unique geopolitical and socio-economic functioning of island spaces. The isolation of islands reinforces many vulnerabilities that they have experienced through shared colonial histories, limited natural resources and power struggles with larger, more dominant states (Mainwaring, 2008).

In fact, the same isolated, pristine and delimited island attributes that are idolized for their idyllic qualities can become elements that enforce restriction, enclosure and dependency (Lemaire, 2014). Islands that have unique geographical features and are strategically located have been spaces utilized in migration management by mainland territories (Mountz, 2011). However, small island states which have distinct geopolitical characteristics and international relationships produce new understandings of contemporary migration governance. Recently, the prominence of irregular boat migration of vulnerable persons has increased interest in the role of island states in migrant displacement and relocation discourse (Mountz, 2011).

In this research, the island states of Malta and Trinidad & Tobago (TT) will be analysed to probe the influence of “islandness” on policy responses to migration. Both islands have been experiencing an influx of extra-regional migrants who are of different racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Of interest to these cases is the socio-economic vulnerability of these migrants who are fleeing social, economic and/or political insecurity in their origin countries. Their vulnerability is amplified because of their irregular entry through the porous, maritime borders of both island states. In TT, over 44,000 Venezuelan migrants of varying ages, skill levels and socio-economic needs are estimated to have entered the island by November, 2023 (ACAPS, 2024). In Malta, African migrants have also been irregularly entering by boat in the thousands since 2004 (UNHCR Malta, n.d.).

A reoccurring theme in the national discourses of Malta and TT is the juxtaposition of the large numbers of migrants to the small, isolated and limited structures of the islands. This concept of “islandness” which refers to the geopolitical identities and functions of small island states will be explored further using Malta and TT to uncover small island states’ role as key elements in the securitization of migration. Despite their similar colonial experiences, island identities, strategic geopolitical positioning in relation to mainland territories, claims of migrant “burden” and

negative perception of extra-regional migration which have shaped their dominant policy approaches to vulnerable migrants, Malta and TT have previously not been compared.

While the use of islands by dominant “migration states” has been studied, there has been less research on the role of island states as their own “migration states”. Research on how securitization and economic policy are linked and more nuanced on small island states is also limited. This research will therefore compare the migration policy approaches of Malta and TT to study the dependency of island states on securitization policies and resulting effects on the economic integration of migrants. It will consider the “islandness” of both states to understand how the migration-security and migration-development nexuses are expressed through their policy actions and inactions in coping with socio-economically vulnerable migrants.

Literature Review

1.1 Island States, “Islandness” and the Migration State

This section argues that island states have distinct features and unique self-perceptions that influence their migration management. This “islandness” will be evaluated to reveal how their existence as sovereign nation-states with clearly demarcated physical borders and unique internal functioning affects their migration governance and the balance between openness to promote economic growth and closed borders to ensure self-preservation.

Islands are spaces that have historically and even more recently been utilized for unique purposes. They were strategic locations to fuel economic growth during European colonization of the West, and more recently have become offshore locations to keep migrants and asylum seekers away from mainland territories. With such central positions in the migration policy of Western “migration state” countries, islands have been overlooked as their own potential “migration states” with unique migration policy, vulnerabilities and perceptions of migrants. The “migration state” (Hollifield, 2004) can be described as a nation-state whose core function revolves around the management of migration while coping with contesting ideas of economic interests which require some level of mobility, and political interests which often involve closure to a heterogeneous outside. These competing interests centralize on the argument of sovereign “nation-states” and are often discussed under the concept of “methodological nationalism” (Anderson, 2019).

“Methodological nationalism” is the common assumption that the nation-state is the unit of analysis underlying the current political and social world (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). There have been many critiques of this assumption in contemporary political and social science (Sager, 2014; Anderson, 2019; Beck, 2007) and there have been calls for the “methodological de-nationalism” of these areas of study (Anderson, 2019; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). However, the framing of migration policy in sovereign island states and the functioning of islands as “migration states” in their own process of nation-state-building depend heavily on the political interpretation of the nation-state. Also important to the migration policy of island states is their understanding of their identity which, under the Westphalian ideal of the nation-state, includes a culturally homogenous ‘nation’ (Steinberg, 2005; Hall, 1990).

With clearly demarcated physical borders, and often functioning as individual states within these borders, islands have been described by scholars in the fields of nissology (the study of islands) and migration as the insular ideal of a nation-state (Steinberg, 2005; Mountz, 2011; Gillis, 2004). This atypical but political ideal of sovereignty, separation, enclosure and homogeneity are a historic representation of the island as the perfect Westphalian state (Steinberg, 2005). Gillis (2004) asserts that islands are “paradigmatic examples of territorial states” due to their

geographically and naturally bounded sovereign territory. This promotes the image of being clearly defined and separated from the rest of the world. This author uses the example of Britain to show how its claims of being “pure” and “cohesive” were founded on its ability to objectify its existence as an island and show its superiority in a world constructed on the idea of “methodological nationalism” and sovereign territory.

Apart from the unusual, but historical self-definition of purity based on its existence as an island, Britain can be categorized differently to how other smaller islands have been objectified through time. Mountz (2011) identifies that islands and island states have been key elements in the securitization of migration because nation-states can exploit their isolation from the rest of the world to control migration and mobility. Steinberg (2005) adds to this perspective by defining islands as “bounded spaces that exhibit[ed] temporal stability, territorial indivisibility and socio-political homogeneity amidst a world of interaction and movement” (p 259). He alluded to their inherent ability to fully and individually control migration-related process and policies without the interference of bordering political or social interests. For this reason, Gillis (2004) and Lemaire (2014) argue that islands can exploit their unique geographical characteristics to implement a “total-institution” migration governance model that prioritizes self-preservation.

Goffman (1961) defines the total-institution as an area where individuals work and reside which allows them to be isolated from the outside over an extended period of time leading to an “enclosed, formally administered” way of life. Gillis (2004) adds that the total-institution setting in an island is solidified by the ability of its government and people to exercise power more tightly in a “delimited and well-bounded territory”. This also describes the internal processes of the “nation-state” defined by Wimmer and Schiller (2002) and Anderson (2019). Lemaire (2014) discusses the influences of Foucauldian logics of biopower, biopolitics and the “dispositif” which encapsulate the nation-state ideas of sovereign power over people and territory. The total-institution model, Foucauldian logics and the geographical characteristics of islands illustrate how isolated sovereignty allows island states to control migration and migrants in patterns that are similar to each other, despite their geographic, political, historical, cultural and economic distinctions (Mountz, 2011).

Despite – or even ideally because of – their socio-political, geographical and other aforementioned advantages of isolation and sovereignty, islands have been typically used by mainland territories as offshore sites for managing migration flows (Mountz, 2011; Mountz & Briskman, 2012; Lutterbeck, 2009). Steinberg (2005) identifies that the social construction of islands is far more advantageous than its physical borders because mainland territories idealize the island as a space that is innately controllable due to its separation from wider society. Gillis (2004) argues that this social construction of the island is based on the aspirations of the mainlanders to separate themselves from islanders. This need to separate is based on the ideas of the nation-state, but also on the interpretation of islands as homogenous, isolated, pristine and

temporally static spaces (Lemaire, 2014; Gillis, 2004; King, 2009). Scholars such as Malpas (1999), Cresswell (2004) and Falzon (2012) emphasize that geographical characteristics and social constructions of islands and their “islandness” help in understanding islands’ sociopolitical actions. The separation of those on the island from those on the mainland is then linked to either the view that islands are paradises that must be enjoyed for their natural, physical characteristics, or islands as places that are backward, in need of study and paternalistic help (Gillis, 2004; Mountz, 2011). “Islandness”, then, can be defined as the qualities of smallness, remoteness, insularity, peripherality, and dependency of islands that inform their social and geopolitical structures (Foley et al, 2023; King, 2009).

Capitalizing on these social and physical constructions, mainland territories have often used islands as areas for detention, prisons, and in general, carceral environments (Lemaire, 2014; Mountz and Briskman, 2012). Thus, mainland territories, often Western countries in the Global North, use islands to implement policies that are required to establish their power as “migration states”. Detention on islands has been “reiterated, readapted and reshaped” (Lemaire, 2014, p 158) to increase the separation of people, especially when they are considered threats to society. They are required to be kept away from the world in isolated spaces and so, are sent to islands. This is the negative implication of insularity (King, 2009). Islands are fashioned into spaces that are defined by feelings of restriction, control, enclosure, surveillance and discrimination, especially to those who have been identified by mainland Western territories as the “other” (Lemaire, 2014). Islands which are territorially-bound, homogenous nation-states that are ideal Westphalian states then become isolated, small, delimited and inescapable to those whose rights are curtailed by the more powerful migration state.

King (2009) summarizes the contradictions in the definition of islands depending on the perspective of the observer as “the historical dialectic between isolation and focalism, colonialism and settlement, emigration and depopulation” (p 54) to show how island ecosystems have been understood as small-scale microcosms of the world’s functioning. He criticizes this essentialism of islands and narrative of exceptionalism in relevant scholarship. The author argues that insularity, even in a world defined by methodological nationalism, implicates islands in political separation in a globalized world. King (2009) finds that modern migrants look for “new routes of least resistance” which are often islands. Steinberg (2005) further finds that the contradiction between a state (as a porous unit) and an island (as a pure and isolated unit) transforms islands into contested migration spaces. Mountz (2011) argues that this displays the precariousness of migration and political status in small territories. She identifies that there has been scarce research on the link between the geopolitics of islands and their migration governance but King (2009) adds that islands have been used as “semi-laboratory settings” for social processes including migration. To understand the role of islands in migration management, and as potential “migration states”, these islands’ geopolitics should be analyzed in tandem with relevant migration policy actions or inactions.

Apart from their use by mainland territories, islands should be understood as sovereign states with distinct social, political and economic goals which tie into common patterns of migration observed in and out of their borders. King (2009) theorizes that there are two types of islands in the modern world – nodal islands and marginal islands. Nodal islands attract and exchange populations through migration and are defined by their cosmopolitan yet stratified societies and diaspora. Marginal islands have high rates of emigration and depopulation with labour becoming their biggest export. Warrington and Milne (2007) have defined islands differently, characterized by their history, modern economies and geopolitics. “Plantation islands”, “fortress islands” and “entrepôt islands” are of most interest in this research. Plantation islands have a history of immigration, mono-cropping, dependency on Western countries, are often racially unequal societies and have relatively recent mass emigration rates influenced by their main export being labour (Warrington and Milne, 2007). On the other hand, fortress islands depended on their military power and strategic locations which led to emigration and economic vulnerability post-WWII. The entrepôt island is one that sees large migration inflows and outflows while being a detached entry point for nearby mainland territories. King (2009) also finds that islands are strategic locations in the geopolitics of irregular migration, specifically describing the movement of migrants from Africa to Europe through “transit islands”.

The similarities between nodal and marginal islands (King, 2009) and plantation, fortress and entrepôt islands (Warrington and Milne, 2007) all pertain to their history of immigration and emigration, labour as their biggest export, and strategic placement within modern migration governance. King (2009) argues that in a globalized world, the characteristics of nodal and marginal islands are combined to produce island states that display some level of contradictory economic and political goals. Warrington and Milne (2007) also conclude that islands display some combination of the characteristics of plantation, fortress, entrepôt and other categories described. These categorizations of islands in a globalized world, their territorially-bound nature and nation-state status, their geographical characteristics, history of use and suitability as places of detention, and their role in modern migration governance can all be seen to implicate island states in the “liberal paradox” (Hollifield, 1992, 2004).

This liberal paradox captures the need for states to be open and promote mobility in a globalized world to propel their economic growth but also to prioritize their self-preservation through the closing and securitizing of borders for sociopolitical reasons. King (2009) identifies that the fundamental issue underlying migration and small islands is that their economic dependence on emigration makes them more efficient at handling outflows, but less capable of coping with inflows, especially with sudden increased migrant influxes. Understanding island states’ securitization policies and their effects on labour market participation should then be viewed through the lens of the liberal paradox and the migration-development-security nexus.

1.2 Migration-Security and Migration-Development Nexuses on Islands

The migration-development and migration-security nexuses have been proposed in the international development agenda to characterize and legitimize policy actions of receiving countries in the Global North. They are centered around the effects of South-North migration on the North, with scarce, if any focus on the individual aspirations of migrants, the socio-political or economic statuses of the sending countries or the prevalence of South-South migration. Many scholars have argued that these nexuses as instruments for policy formation and implementation in the North have depended on crisis-making rhetoric based on their definition of the migrant. The migration-development nexus identifies migrants as agents of development for their communities in the Global South, while the migration-security nexus identifies them as threats to receiving countries in the Global North. This section will discuss how these nexuses are manifested on small island states.

Sorenson (2012) identifies that the dichotomy of the framing and categorization of migrants in both nexuses result in two distinct policy approaches to migration. In the migration-development nexus, policies emphasize the problems in and possible solutions for the Global South, as understood by the Global North. In the migration-security nexus, however, policy approaches involve national and regional agendas of the Global North in protecting natives from migrant threats from the Global South. Within the Global North, the need for economic growth through imported labor but the persistence of political closure of borders leads to the liberal paradox (Hollifield, 2004). Despite this, it can be observed that there is a very clear distinction between the types of migrants who are considered threats and those that are welcomed as possible positive additions to the economy (Mountz and Mohan, 2022). The securitization of migration observed through the migration-security nexus could then be defined as the rearrangement of social and political discourse to frame the phenomenon of migration in terms of fear and insecurity. This gives rise to policies that prioritize the protection of the native group from threats through “territorial and administrative exclusion” (Huymans, 2006).

The framing of migrants is especially important to the migration-security nexus, and the overall securitization policy agenda of “migration states”. Entman (1993) defines the concept of framing as the intention to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p 52). These framings are inherently manipulated to obscure certain information and emphasize selected others for the specific purpose of public absorption (Entman, 1993). From this understanding, the migration-security nexus and securitization agendas frame migrants as threats (especially through the conflation of their presence with terrorism and drugs) to evoke a sense of fear in the public. It exaggerates actual threats to justify securitization policies, and creates a sense of urgency through the construction of a “migration crisis”. This facilitates the hasty implementation of reactive policies to achieve a certain political end (Keen and Anderson, 2018).

Especially in the EU and its periphery islands, there has been growing media and public attention brought to the “migrant crisis” involving deaths at sea and increased use of maritime routes after 2014 (Moore et al, 2018). In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) during the same time frame, the framing of the recent Venezuelan migrant outflow has been characterized by a crisis narrative that has influenced the use of the term “*crimmigration*” (associating migration with crime). Peters and Berkeley (2020) and Anatol and Kangalee (2020) among other scholars on the LAC region have emphasized the role of the media and government in the creation of crisis narratives. This has increased xenophobic and discriminatory behaviors against Venezuelan migrants who are perceived to inherently be criminals, hence their involvement in “*crimmigration*”. Mainwaring (2008) finds that similar government and media portrayal of migrants in the EU has directly influenced and justified stringent detention policy in periphery states. This has also been identified by authors such as Said and Jara (2020), Camilleri and Hampson (2018) and Freier (2018) regarding migrant framing and migration policy in the LAC region. In both Europe and the LAC region, the construction of crisis has depended upon the use of terms like “*crimmigration*” (Anatol and Kangalee, 2020), “spontaneous arrivals” (Mountz, 2015), “migrant crisis” (Moore et al, 2018), and “waves and invasions” of migrants (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014). These have been fundamental in promoting the criminalization of all migrants and thereby, justifying restrictive policies of deportation and detention (Mainwaring, 2008).

Scholarship on migration and islands has identified the seemingly causal relationship between the geopolitical status, perceived “islandness” identity and securitization framing of migrants on migration policies. Particularly prominent in this discourse is the prevalence of the framing of strategically located islands as places of transit. This transforms any migrant arriving in these spaces into a “transit migrant” as identified by Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll (2014), Falzon (2012), Collyer et al (2012) and King (2009). This framing indicates temporariness which influences the short-term nature of migration policies. These scholars have also discussed the effect of the construction of new island identity on perceptions of migrants as disruptions to the norm and nation-building processes, and the need to portray migrants as transitory to protect that identity.

Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll (2014) attribute “islandness” and the transitory view of migrants to the construction of the “politics of fear” surrounding less socio-economically privileged migrants. King (2009) asserts that the entry of such migrants is viewed as an invasion that threatens “islandness”. Collyer et al (2012) further argue that the creation of the concept of “transit migration” constructs a crisis-like phenomenon which describes migrants as constantly in a state of transience and therefore, unable to integrate. These framings of migrants as invaders of clearly defined nation-state spaces allows for the justification of restrictive policies. Falzon (2012) finds that “The construction of the type [as unwanted threats] is compounded by a sense of limited resources, peripherality and vulnerability, as well as a condition of ‘islandness’.” Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll (2014) add that the framing of migrants as “undesirables, unwanted and

unaccepted” in islands which are “new host territories” with structured homogenous identities leads to a securitization and criminalization approach.

The permanence of the transient assumption of migrants in island states, perpetuated by the view of mainland territories that migrants are always on the move from the periphery to the core using islands as stepping stones (Collyer et al, 2012), introduces the idea that migrants will not and should not integrate on the island (Falzon, 2012). This furthers the narrative that island states must protect their citizens who partake in their ideal “islandness” identity from the outsiders (Lemaire, 2014). Anderson (2003) finds that periphery islands create spaces that define and enforce the dichotomies of the excluded and included, the discriminated and accepted, and the known and unknown. By including the “permanent” and the “transient”, islands can then begin to illegalize the presence of migrants, whether they are seeking protection, integration or permanency on the island (Collyer et al, 2012; King, 2009; Mainwaring, 2008).

Anderson (2003) and Hay (2006) also identify that “islandness” and the community identity of an island aligns deeply with its ability to be harshly geographically disconnected from the outside. Their strategic positioning, porous borders and other ‘small island state’ characteristics make islands perceive themselves as more vulnerable to those outside of the “islandness” identity (Lemaire, 2014). King and Thomson (2008) further assert that islands, which are young independent states and are forming new identities, are more prone to creating ad hoc, reactive policies that do not consider long-term integration of migrants, instead focusing on border control and deportations. The complex nation-building processes of often post-colonial islands (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014) lead to the use of “islandness” identity in setting political agendas in relation to larger political entities such as regional trading blocs (EU, CARICOM, etc.). Thus, the laissez-faire policy approaches to migration on mainland territories increase pressure on nearby strategically located islands to counter with securitization policies to protect their “islandness” (Schuster, 2011).

Griffith (2004) notes that island states, particularly in the Caribbean, view their “objective realities” of having smaller economies, populations, and territories as “inherent vulnerabilities” which influence the way in which they respond to and perceive themselves in relation to more dominant states. Griffith (2004) specifically discusses this element of “islandness” in relation to the security dilemma and geopolitical vulnerability of small island states which have relatively restricted state power and capacity in an international, interdependent system. Barker (2017), Griffith (2004), Mainwaring (2008) and Vaughan-Williams and Pisani (2020) emphasise the perceived role of small island states in the international system, and how this positioning influences the perception of vulnerability leading to securitised approaches to migration and development.

Building on King’s (2009) identification of the understanding of islands as microcosms of the whole world, Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll (2014) find that islands are “particularly interesting sites

for examining the politics of detention.” The treatment of migrants and the implementation of regional bordering policies vary according to the size of the island and their perceived power in their regional geopolitical positioning (Mountz, 2011; King and Thomson, 2008; Lemaire, 2014; Mainwaring, 2008; Lutterbeck, 2006). However, island states which have strategic positioning for the EU such as Malta and Lampedusa vary in their response to migration (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014). Malta, which is described to have less land space and less relative status, displays less solidarity with migrants, especially more vulnerable ones, while Lampedusa which has more land space and more relative status, shows more solidarity with less privileged migrants (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014). Lemaire (2014) argues that the ability to have a mainland territory to which an island can potentially transfer migrants (like Lampedusa) in contrast to island states that do not (like Malta) “reifies the imagined characteristics of the island as a closed, restricted, isolated space”. This can in turn make detention policies on sovereign islands appear more restrictive.

The culmination of the politics of insecurity and protection, the perception of “islandness” and the socio-economic vulnerability of migration flows to strategically located islands is the securitization of migration on island states as discussed through the research of the aforementioned authors. The term “transit migration” applied to migrants on islands ignores that some islands states are destinations in their own right (Collyer et al, 2012). This can severely restrict the types of migration-related policies formulated and implemented. The crisis-framing of migration creates reactive instead of proactive and potentially more integrative policies, especially if the securitization of migration is viewed from the perspective of mainland territories pushing the responsibility for migration management to peripheral islands (Keen and Anderson, 2018). Mountz (2015) finds that framings and policy actions which are not intersectional or multidisciplinary create structural barriers which prevent integration. McCall (1994) identifies that “migration is a major preoccupation of island states, either as emigration or immigration”. Therefore, island states should be considered as “migration states” in global migration discourse with special consideration given to their disproportionately significant roles in migration despite their discussion as marginal territories in international discourse (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014).

1.3 Economic Development, Labour Flows and Integration on Islands

The concept of “islandness” in small island states is also influential in the understanding of their labour markets and economic performance. Scholars have linked the economic development of small island states to their island identities due to the distinctive challenges that only island states seem to experience (Armstrong and Read, 2002; Lamusse, 1980; Armstrong et al, 2014; Griffith, 2004). The colonial histories of small island states in the Caribbean, Pacific, and Southern Europe expose some similarities in the trade dependencies and labour-related migration out of the region (Chai, 1998; Bertram, 2006; Briguglio, 1995; Blyde et al, 2020). Understanding the patterns

of labour immigration and emigration, major employment and production sectors, and economic vulnerabilities of small island states can help to explicate their current levels of economic development. This can influence economic policies that can affect the labour participation of migrants.

Research on the economic development and performance of islands often focuses on the tourism and agricultural sectors of archipelagic islands of mainland territories such as the Balearic, Greek and Hawaiian Islands (Bardolet and Sheldon, 2008; Andriionitis, 2003; McElroy and Hamma, 2010; Tsartas, 2003, Butler and Nelson, 1994). The specific geopolitical identities, nature of trade, development and economic vulnerabilities are, however, different on island states and this greatly influences their economic integration policy. Island states have historic, colonial reasoning for the current policy frameworks that stimulate economic development. Research on small island states has focused on their inability to diversify their economies leading to their reliance on niche export-driven markets that lead to high import rates of basic goods (Armstrong et al, 2014; Lamusse, 1980; Briguglio, 1995).

“Islandness” additionally influences the economic ideologies and vulnerabilities of small island states. Small size is cited as the reason for the limited amount of natural resources available, the land available to diversify the economy when agriculture is a dominant sector, dependency on exports for revenue, high import rates for basic products, increased rates of production, reduced market competition, increased monopolies because of the inability of multiple firms to specialize in the same product, and the high costs for transport of goods between trade partners (Briguglio, 1995; Armstrong and Read, 2002; Armstrong et al, 2014; Baldacchino and Fairbairn, 2006). Lamusse (1980) finds that small tropical island states that are former colonies depend on mono-cropping and that their plantation histories influence labour policy. Furthermore, their remote and insular nature increase their reliance on foreign sources of finance like remittances and aid (Briguglio, 1995). This may be linked to the influence of “islandness” vulnerabilities on emigration of natives out of small island states (Armstrong and Read, 2014).

Armstrong and Read (2014) find that temporary worker inflows are found in small island states to cope with their undiversified economies. However, there is little research about these groups on small islands. Literature on temporary labour often revolves around the departure of persons from small island states to nearby mainland countries as labour migrants, especially from Pacific islands to Australia and New Zealand (Curtain et al, 2018; Barker, 2010; Connell, 2015; Petrou and Connell, 2018). Corresponding to the previous discussion on the importance of remittances in small island states, the discussions on the mobility of temporary workers from small island states focus on the size of their remittances, their contribution to the development of the larger state, and the various visas, work permits and policies catering to their required low-wage, temporary labour on the mainland (Ratha and Shaw, 2007; Connell and Conway, 2008; Browne and Mineshima, 2007). The focus on low-wage, temporary labour and remittances of migrants in the

Global North aligns with the definition of the migration-development nexus. However, with large agricultural and service industries in small island states (especially tropical), temporary, low-wage, seasonal workers can find employment which can become more difficult to track with porous maritime borders that are harder to monitor (Carling, 2007).

The movement of socio-economically vulnerable migrants who work in low-skilled jobs on strategically located island states should also be considered in the migration-development nexus. On the island of Hispaniola containing both the Dominican Republic (DR) and Haiti, there has been a persistent flow of poorer, low-skilled Haitian migrant women into the neighboring country through the relatively porous borders (Blyde et al, 2020). This low-skilled labour provided by migrant women facilitated the increased labour market participation of high-skilled, native DR women by increasing the affordability and availability of childcare and domestic labour (Blyde et al, 2020). Similar flows of less-skilled labour throughout the Caribbean have been observed through the routes provided by free labour movement for CARICOM nationals in CARICOM countries (Skeete and Juman, 2020). The movement of Venezuelan migrants in the LAC region has also involved the provision of short-term work permits acknowledging their socio-economic vulnerability and economically-motivated movement out of Venezuela (Freier, 2018; Camilleri and Hampson, 2018; Peters and Berkeley, 2020; Blyde et al, 2020). However, the short-term nature of these special residence-work permits in Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Trinidad & Tobago may indicate expectations of participation in temporary labour and of return. This does not incentivize integration into the formal labour market because short-term permits do not provide economic or social security for those migrants depending on more long-term sources of income. This may encourage (continued) participation in the informal economy.

Peters (2017) asserts that regulatory and financial burdens of participating in the formal market do not encourage migrants to stop working informally. Schneider et al (2010) further argue that the size of the informal sector is positively affected by stricter state regulations. Rigid criteria which make it difficult to obtain special permits and visas (especially in the case of reactive policies for large unexpected inflows of vulnerable migrants) because of the requirement of documents like passports, birth certificates and educational diplomas further disincentivise the formal integration of vulnerable migrants (Selee and Bolter, 2020; Camilleri and Hampson, 2018; Freier, 2018; Blyde et al, 2020). Some examples of these reactive, temporary and economic policies are found in the responses to Venezuelan migrants in the LAC region, Syrian refugees in Turkey, and migrants of varied origin in Southern Europe (Visser, 2016; Altındağ et al, 2020; Maroukis et al, 2011; Freier, 2018; Camilleri and Hampson, 2018; Peters and Berkeley, 2020; Blyde et al, 2020).

Increased demand for cheap labour coupled with the lack of legal pathways for low-skilled economic migration and the state's insufficient capacity to monitor borders has led to an increase of (often undocumented) migrants within the informal economy (Visser, 2016). Maroukis et al (2011) identify that immigrants are a principal source of labour in the informal sector, especially

more vulnerable migrants and undocumented migrants who have access to fewer rights and are more prone to exploitation, social exclusion and prolonged irregularity in the country. Mapp and Moore (2015) find that motivation to participate in the informal economy is increased by social discrimination and marginality. The vulnerability of refugees and the undocumented, unregulated and uncertain duration of their stay restricts formal labour market integration with many (especially those in large inflows) finding employment in the informal sector (Altındağ et al, 2020). Furthermore, the social exclusion and spatial isolation described by “islandness” create a “prison-like situation” for migrant workers in small island states (Lemaire, 2014).

Apart from their definition as spaces of isolation, islands are also defined as “paradises” used for entertainment value as discussed in section 2.1. This is evident in the prominence of the service sector and tourism industry which are used to diversify the economy by capitalizing on the rich natural resources on small island states. Bianchi (2000) finds that the intersection of the islands’ tourism industries with migration to these islands has resulted in a “tourist-worker nexus” involving the labour of migrants in this service sector. This further exacerbates the contrast between poor and rich migrants who are viewed as either workers or as tourists respectively (Bianchi, 2000). Migrant tourist-workers cater to the tourism labour deficits on islands that are caused by richer persons who view the island as spaces of entertainment rather than as areas offering employment opportunities (King, 2009). It can then be seen how temporary, seasonal labour and transit migration concepts are applied mostly to less privileged migrants.

The socio-economic vulnerability of migrants involved in the formal and informal labour markets can be described as the intersection of their economic, political, legal, and social relationships in their origin and receiving countries (Macioce, 2017). Their treatment in the receiving country as they attempt to achieve socio-economic mobility through labour is predicated on the perceptions of their vulnerability and their temporary labour. The size of the informal economies in developed and developing countries, the extent of participation of migrants, and the temporariness, conditions and treatment in their jobs is difficult to estimate (Atta et al, 2022; Visser, 2016). But, migrants with fewer rights and socio-economic vulnerabilities experience low-wages and physically and psychologically heavy employment that affect their integration into countries (Maroukis et al, 2011). However, much less research has been done on the informality of labour migrants on island states, the influence of more porous borders on the temporary, casual, low-wage work of migrants, the treatment and further socio-economic disenfranchisement of these vulnerable migrants and their integration into employment and productivity sectors that have developed in island economies.

The intersection of “islandness”, securitization agendas and history of policies regarding labour migration of small island states can reveal the difficulties in formulating more integrative policies beneficial to the large numbers of socio-economically vulnerable migrants who have been newly arriving on strategically located islands. The discussion of security on small islands has been

conflated with economic concerns instead of just in terms of militarized and political agendas (Griffith, 2004). In essence, the migration-security and the economic migration-development concerns of island states have become a compounded issue resulting in mixed policy actions. The framing of migrants as threats to “islandness” plays a significant role in the creation and implementation of securitization or short-term regularization policies which can hinder the integration of these migrants into the social and economic structures of island states.

Methodology

This research will be conducted using (i) comparative, (ii) document and (iii) contextual, historical analysis methods to examine how the theme, “islandness”, influences policies that affect the formal labour market participation of vulnerable migrants in Malta and Trinidad & Tobago. The prevalence of and dependence on securitization policies in small island states, and the characteristics of “islandness” which introduce unique economic vulnerabilities that preclude islands from providing labour integration pathways for large numbers of vulnerable migrants will also be explored.

The strength of a comparative analysis for this research is its focus on grouping of concepts and dispelling the notions of “false universalism” (Rose, 1991). The concepts of “islandness”, migration-security, economic vulnerability and their effects on policy-making can be compared across different cultural, historical and political settings to test their generalizability. The use of a contextual, historical analysis to uncover salient trends will reinforce the causal relationships between the geographical and historical structures of “islandness” and modern approaches to migration-security and migration-development. This is fundamental in understanding the underlying assumptions of causality (Pickvance, 2001) of “islandness” on policy-formation in small island states.

To conduct a comparative analysis on migration policy approaches, a document analysis of three policies in Malta and TT each will be done. These three policies were chosen because they are most relevant to the securitization and economic integration of vulnerable migrants in both island states. This document analysis will take a social constructionist approach to consider the “historically and culturally specific” characteristics (Wood et al, 2020) that shape the formulation of legislation and policy on both islands. The historical, economic, social and geopolitical formations of both island states will be further explored in the contextual analysis of this research to present the parallel themes shaping their responses to migration. The policy document analysis will help to conduct comparisons between the themes of “islandness” and migration-development-security to interpret the influence of trends and unique emphases on modern-day approaches (Altheide, 2000).

Furthermore, three qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three academics who specialize in interdisciplinary analyses of the recent Venezuelan migration to TT. The semi-structured interview ensured that there was flexibility to ask in-depth and contextualized follow-up questions that allowed for the discussion of themes and data that were not explicitly asked in the main prompts. This allowed for the construct validity of the research (Loren and Jacobsen, 2003). The interviews complemented the comparative analysis because they allowed for the discovery of trends and data that were previously not categorized in this under-researched field (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Contextual Analysis

To understand the effect of the “islandness” narrative on the securitization policy and economic integration of migrants, a comparison of two island states experiencing contemporary migration challenges will be conducted. In this research, Trinidad & Tobago (TT) in the Caribbean and Malta in the Mediterranean will be examined to identify any similarities and differences in the response and justification of migration policy of small island states. This section will give an overview of the historical migration patterns in both island states, economic and geopolitical factors that influenced these trends, and their approaches to migration policy.

2.1 Trinidad & Tobago



Diagram 1: showing proximal location of Trinidad and Tobago to Venezuela. Extracted from “Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela” (R4V, 2020)

Trinidad & Tobago (TT) is an anglophone country in the southern Caribbean made up of two islands located 7 miles from the coast of Venezuela in the South American continent. With approximately 5,130 km² of land space and an ethnically and racially diverse population of 1.5 million people, it is a small, sovereign island state with a history of colonization, emigration and regional political ties. The diverse population is the consequence of colonization and the import of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians. As a former British plantation island, the agricultural sector and oil industry were established and are still principal in TT's present-day economy (Brereton, 2007). The dependency of TT on oil and gas exports and its otherwise undiversified economy makes it volatile to and dependent on international markets, but has also allowed for its relatively high development in the LAC region (Anatol et al, 2023). TT is also a member of the UN's Small Island Developing States (SIDS) category which describes it as a country facing

“unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities” that are exacerbated by its “remote geography” (United Nations, n.d.).

TT experienced large emigration flows in the 1950s and 1960s prompted by the demand for low-skilled labour in Europe and North America following World War II (Nurse, 2004). In the 1970s and 1990s, TT experienced a second wave of mass emigration of high-skilled professionals influenced by the decline in its economy (Nurse, 2004). Intra-regional migration between Caribbean countries after the creation of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) regional bloc was characterized by the movement of those from poorer CARICOM states to TT during its oil boom and increased tourism in the 1990s (Caribbean Expert Group Meeting on Migration, 2005; Jones, 2020). These emigration and immigration flows have shaped the common migration routes associated with TT (Nurse, 2004) but Reis (2007) finds that nuanced migration discourse within the government pertaining to relevant policies and amendments of legislation have still been “largely absent”.

Migration into and out of TT have been mainly motivated by labour opportunities, which may have set the early overarching framing of mobile persons as economic migrants. Self-reliance, increasing domestic employment opportunities for return migrants and preventing further out-migration and brain drain were the main policy goals post-independence (Ramsaran, 1999; Nurse 2004; Reis, 2007; Mishra, 2007; Bristol, 2007). These issues also hold prominence in the multilateral agreements between CARICOM members which have had to “overcome challenges of... small size with associated lack of economies of scale and vulnerability to external shocks” (CARICOM, n.d.) through labour-focused freedom of movement within the region. TT has been considered both a destination and source country, as well as a transit country regarding its facilitation in these migration routes (Reis, 2007).

Despite experience with immigration of CARICOM nationals, the inflow of socio-economically vulnerable Venezuelans within the last decade has exposed the underdevelopment of migration policy and frameworks in TT catering to distinct categories of non-CARICOM migrants. With an estimated 45,000 Venezuelans entering the nearby island between 2015 and 2023 (ACAPS, 2024), TT has received more Venezuelan migrants as a percentage of its population than any other country in the region (Teff, 2019). The institutions present to facilitate migration are limited (Reis, 2007) and are restricted to the control of the Immigration Division under the Ministry of National Security. Despite being a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, policies regarding asylum-seeking are vague (Clark-Mendes, 2020) while policies on deportation are clearly defined and enforced by the police and coast guard who work under the Ministry of National Security. Even with its expansive labour immigration experience and the demand for middle to high-skilled migrants (categories into which most Venezuelan migrants fall) in its stagnant and ageing population, TT has few structural domestic policies for ensuring migrant integration into society (Anatol et al, 2023).

Instead, TT's policies regarding Venezuelan migration have been characterized by securitization and restrictive narratives emphasizing the inability of the small island state to cope with the disproportionate burden of migrants. The deportation and arrests of Venezuelan migrants, some asylum-seeking, have been prevalent. The assignment of the Ministry of National Security to enforce deportations and detentions as well as amnesty policies based on surveillance and data collection (Mohan, 2019) is "a clear signal of [the state's] intent to put the criminal justice system to work in managing mass mobility" (Chami and Seemungal, 2021). As an island state experiencing increased irregular boat immigration, the Coast Guard, under the directive of the Ministry of National Security, has played a dominant role in the surveillance and border control of the small ocean space between Venezuela and TT. It operates "to assist civil authorities in times of crisis" and "to provide Search and Rescue services in keeping with national requirements and international agreements" (Ministry of National Security, n.d.). However, the increased securitization and criminalization of Venezuelan migrants arriving by boat through intensified border control has been linked to human trafficking and forced prostitution (Peters and Berkeley, 2020).

The securitization policies and other ad hoc, reactive policies to Venezuelan migration have been accompanied by some negative perception of these migrants in the public, news media and government officials' speeches. The Prime Minister of TT has commented on the need to protect citizens and their quality of life from Venezuelan migrants, emphasizing their "guest" status within the country and the inability of "this little island nation" to accommodate these "economic migrants" (Nanton, 2019). The use of the term "anti-crime" to describe any police exercise involving Venezuelan migrants in news media, the government framing of "economic migrants" in contrast to CSO, NGO and IO framing of "asylum seekers and refugees", and linguistic, racial distinctions of Venezuelans in TT (Herbert, 2021; Chami and Seemungal, 2021) have juxtaposed the identity of TT nationals against that of Venezuelan migrants.

2.2 Malta



Diagram 2: showing proximal location of Malta to continental Europe and Africa. Extracted from Encyclopædia Britannica Inc. (2024)

Malta is an archipelagic country consisting of two islands in the Mediterranean Sea south of Sicily, Italy. It is the southernmost border of the European Union (EU). This small island state has a landmass of 316 km² and a population of 530,000 persons. It has a history of colonization and emigration, and after its accession to the EU in 2004, it has increased its geopolitical ties with other European countries and has experienced larger inflows of migrants of different socio-economic statuses and nationalities (King and Thomson, 2008). As a former British colonial island, its demographic and economy is a consequence of colonialism through the import of various groups of people (Baldacchino, 2002; Mainwaring, 2014) and it was used as a British military base because of its strategic location (Katsourides and Heraclidou, 2014). According to its 2021 census, the population is 90% Caucasian and more than 80% Roman Catholic¹. Due to its limited natural resources and its historical function as a “fortress island”, post-independence Malta experienced high rates of labour emigration of its unsustainably large population through the 1950s and 1960s to the UK and North America (King, 2009).

Until joining the EU, Malta was considered a SIDS owing to its small size, undiversified economy and limited natural reserves (Mainwaring, 2008). However, its status as a developed state was cemented by its accession to the EU and its decrease in economic volatility through the

¹ Data obtained from Malta's 2021 national census (found at https://nso.gov.mt/mt/themes_publications/census-of-population-and-housing-2021-final-report-population-migration-and-other-social-characteristics/) with calculations done by researcher.

development of its tertiary sector, manufactured exports, tourism and financial services sector (Grech, 2015). This economic growth influenced the return migration of natives and the immigration of EU high-skilled workers (King and Thomson, 2008; Mainwaring, 2008). Almost 60% of immigrants in Malta are Caucasian². Within the regional bloc, labour migration of EU nationals to Malta is encouraged by free movement, application-free working rights, and easier access to residency and integration (EU, 2024). Involvement in the EU is thus conditional on Malta's implementation of regional policies stipulated by the supranational organization, including its migration-related policies.

After becoming a strategic point between Europe and countries in Africa and the Middle East, Malta began receiving many migrants through its maritime borders. This further increased after the Syrian refugee outflow which prompted changes in immigration policy. This inflow of non-EU nationals was accompanied by the narrative that Malta was a transit country for those who were on their way to continental Europe (Mainwaring, 2008, 2014). This mixed influx of refugees and economic migrants arriving by boat resulted in the tightening of immigration policies which now aimed at securitizing the migration inflow through detention, deportation and other restrictive measures (Mainwaring, 2008; Nimfuhr et al, 2020). Despite Malta's insistence that the number of migrants pose a burden on their small island, EU policies including the Dublin Regulation maintain that Malta must register and keep the migrants who arrive on their shores within their borders (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014). Furthermore, the narrative that many migrants do not intend to stay in Malta but are in transit to continental Europe is implausible because strict detention policies prevent their internal mobility on Malta, much less to other EU countries (Lutterbeck, 2009).

The mixed migration flow consists of African migrants, Syrian refugees, Ukrainian refugees, and other vulnerable migrants from Asia and the Middle East (European Commission, 2024). Between 2005 and 2015, most boat arrivals were of Somali and Eritrean origin while non-boat arrivals were mostly from Libya and Syria (UNHCR, 2024). There was an increase in boat arrivals especially after EU accession because the island's Search and Rescue (SaR) region had to extend further into the Mediterranean under EU requirements (Mainwaring, 2014). The number of annual unauthorized boat arrivals was 57 in 2001 but increased to more than 2500 in 2008 (Mainwaring, 2014). Almost 22.2% of Malta's population identified as "non-Maltese" in 2022 (European Commission, 2024).

This increase in the immigrant population in Malta, including asylum seekers, refugees, protected persons and economic migrants, has prompted negative discourse in the public, media and government (Mainwaring, 2008). Migrant discrimination along with securitization measures and their criminalization further prevent integration in the absence of policy (Mainwaring, 2014; Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014). The illegalization of asylum-seeking and increased

² Data for calculations obtained from Malta's 2021 national census.

securitization have also been attributed to the increased trafficking of migrants from source countries (Mainwaring, 2008; Vaughan-Williams and Pisani, 2020). The large migrant population is argued to be unmanageable because of Malta's small size. In 2007, the opposition party called the arrival of migrants an "invasion" with the Minister of Justice saying "One migrant who arrives in Malta is like 150 arriving in Sicily," (Kroeger, 2007). The Minister of Foreign Affairs said that Malta, "given [its] size and [its] density of population, if you compare, [is] taking a bigger strain proportionally than all the other countries in the European Union," (Times of Malta, 2014).

The Maltese government's responses to irregular maritime immigration displays the highly politicized narrative of migrants coming to Malta and the view that migration is a security challenge not only to the island state, but to the EU (Lutterbeck, 2009). The public referring to migrants as "klandestini" ('clandestine' in the Maltese language) and the government's rhetoric of migrants as a burden on the small island have been further characterized by the Ministry of National Security and Law Enforcement being in charge of managing migrant inflows, and the focus on identification and surveillance measures through detention-on-entry policies (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014; Mainwaring, 2008). Although Malta has a relatively developed migration policy framework, the use of restrictive policies even for asylum seekers has been justified because "In relative terms, there are no countries who have our [Malta's] problem with respect to the size of our population and population density," as declared by their Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs (Mainwaring, 2014).

2.3 Comparing Malta and Trinidad & Tobago

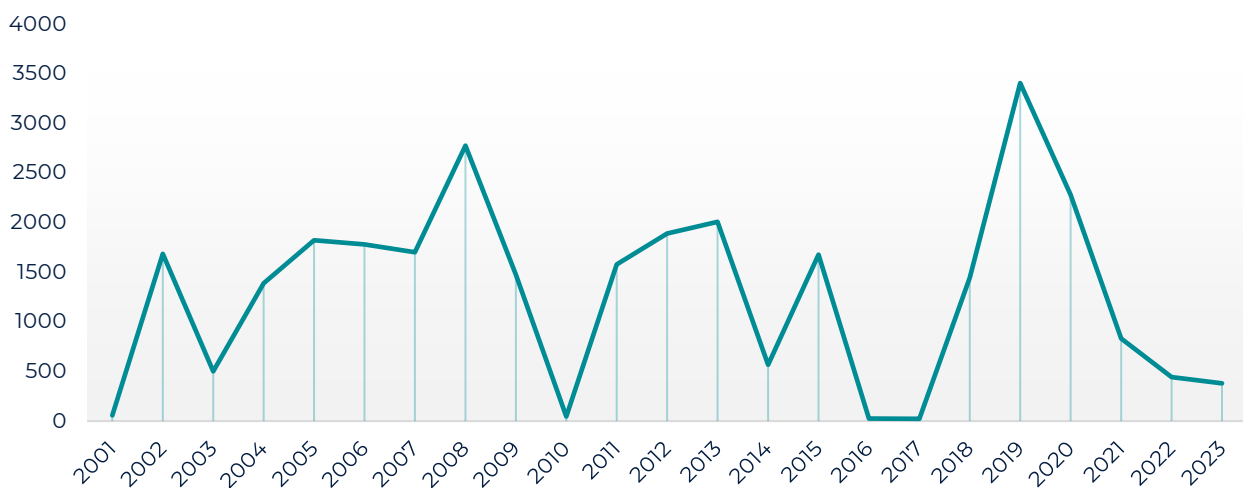
Malta and TT experience many similarities in their histories of migration, colonization, regional influence, securitization approach to migration, and the negative rhetoric associated with migrants. The island states' position in recently evolving migration patterns can be argued to place them within the same category as mainland and Global North "migration states". Their policy responses to migration of more vulnerable groups have exposed the difference in management of intra-regional labour mobility and extra-regional, securitized inflows. The similarities and differences in the specifics of these movements, policies and socio-political and economic backgrounds will be compared further.

With both countries being former British island colonies gaining independence in the 1960s (1962 in TT and 1964 in Malta), their demographics, economic development and identities have been influenced by their long history of dependency. Their dependence on certain sectors for economic growth (natural resources and service industries) have influenced large emigration flows to the "Global North" during economic hardship. Economic growth also depends on the export of locally manufactured raw materials or goods while consumption within the country is influenced by the remittances of their large diaspora and the import of goods. Consistent with these trends is that both islands have many policies targeting return migration, emigration, and regional migration. Their involvement in regional trading blocs (EU and CARICOM) also influence

their migration policy, especially since EU-nationals and CARICOM-nationals benefit from free movement and labour policies that promote regional migration. Both countries also have had language education in schools for Arabic and Spanish. This is because of the presence of Arabic-speaking African migrant groups in Malta post-WWII (King and Thomson, 2008) and historical connections to Venezuela and Spain in TT.

More recently, both island states have experienced a large inflow of socio-economically vulnerable migrants who arrive mostly by boat through their porous, maritime borders. In Malta, increases were observed after 2004 attributed to its accession to the EU. TT has seen a drastic increase in the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Venezuela after 2014 following the economic and political collapse of this neighboring country.

Graph 1: representing the number of boat arrivals in Malta between 2001-2023



There is no data on the number of boat arrivals in TT, but 86% of the 30,000 refugees and asylum-seekers on the island are Venezuelan, assumed to have arrived through maritime borders (UNHCR, 2023). Both islands experienced a large inflow from nearby countries that were outside of EU and CARICOM territories. Despite the difference in regional requirements, both islands have based their policy responses on securitization narratives that focus on detention and deportation. This has also led to the criminalization of asylum seekers found in these mixed inflows.

The involvement of the Ministries of National Security in both islands, and the coast guard, armed forces and police force in the implementation of the aforementioned policies is another similarity which solidifies the island states' stance on the increase in irregular immigration. Both countries have referred to these new flows of immigrants as 'burdens' that have been straining the limited resources, capacities and size of the small island states, and as transitory owing to the islands' strategic locations. These reasons have been used to justify restrictive policies. The socio-cultural and economic clashes that threaten the safety and well-being of natives have also been identified as reasoning behind the implementation of securitization policies.

While Malta is more stringently compelled to enforce EU migration regulations, both island states have been described by scholars as having more securitized than integrative approaches to policymaking. The negative perception of migrants in the public, media and official spheres have created disparities in the treatment of these socio-economically vulnerable migrants, especially in their social and economic integration into the country. In both islands, the securitization and criminalization of migrants has been linked to increase trafficking that risks their safety and increases their vulnerability. The “in-transit” narrative of these migrant flows has been used by both island states to argue that integration policies are unnecessary. However, the informal labour participation of these migrants in the midst of inadequate integration policies has exposed trends of deskilling and exploitation that impact their quality and standard of living, and decrease their potential benefits on the receiving islands’ economic growth.

Both island states have an ageing population which is expected to reduce the labour force (Economic Policy Department, 2023). However, migration has been at the forefront of demographic discussions in Malta. With the average age of residents decreasing because of the increase in the number of younger foreign nationals (National Statistics Office, 2021), the demographic dividend can offset the economic effects of the ageing population with proper integration. In TT, little to no generalizable research has been published on the skills and ages of the Venezuelan migrant population with the last census conducted in 2011. But, an interview³ with an economist collecting data on labour market participation of this population revealed that most migrants fall into the 15-45 age group which can help to achieve a demographic dividend. Malta and TT have a 3.1% (National Statistics Office, 2024) and 4.1% (Central Bank Data Centre, 2024) unemployment rate by January, 2024 respectively. With some economic integration of the younger migrants in both islands, it can be expected that labour market participation will increase and offset the economic consequences of an ageing population.

Malta and TT have many similarities in their management of migration that can be attributed to their perceptions of their “islandness” and their role as “migration states”. In the following sections, the influence of these “islandness” narratives on their migration policy responses will be analyzed to identify trends in the participation of migrants in the formal labour market of these islands. The islands’ roles as “migration states” and the influence of the liberal paradox on the lack of economic integration of socio-economically vulnerable migrants will be explored through an analysis of major policy actions.

³ Interview A in Appendix.

Existing Policies and Institutions

This analysis will focus on three main policies and legislation that govern the migration and integration of vulnerable migrants in TT and Malta. Both islands have a main policy framework governing in and out migration called the Immigration Act formed in 1970 (Malta) and 1969 (TT). While this act provides the basis for legal and policy actions for managing migration in both islands, supporting legislation, enforcing institutions and amendments to the act vary. Additionally, the policies specifically entailing refugee treatment and the more recent, reactive policies to the new migrant inflows in both islands will be analyzed. The similarities and differences can uncover understandings of migration within the islands and the analysis of policies made under these acts can reveal the implications of “islandness”, security and integration for Malta and TT.

3.1 Malta

The Maltese Immigration Act of 1970 is headlined by the phrase:

“To restrict, control and regulate immigration into Malta and to make provisions for matters ancillary thereto.”

(Chapter 217 Immigration Act, n.d.)

Out of the five chapters containing 36 articles, chapter four titled “Prohibited Immigrants” consists of 21 articles and outlines detention, expulsion and deportation regulations by the Principal Immigration Officer. “Prohibited Immigrants” are classified as those who cannot support themselves, have dependents who may need public welfare, have not met the standards under the Prevention of Disease Ordinance, are prostitutes, are offenders of directives under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance or involved in violent crimes. This Act was also amended in 2000 and 2002, presumably in preparation for EU accession. Outlined in the act are regulations to maintain security, and to deport persons who are not in possession of travel documents without specifications on considerations for asylum seekers.

The bulk of Malta’s current migration-related policy seems to have been constructed in line with its accession to the EU in the early 2000s. The Refugees Act of 2001 was one of the first major steps in consolidating Malta’s policy with that of the EU. It allowed for the creation of the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and the management of irregular immigrants who were seeking asylum or protection. Asylum-seeking in Malta can result in one of four outcomes:

- i. Refugee Status
- ii. Subsidiary Protection (SP)
- iii. Temporary Humanitarian Protection (THP)

iv. Rejection of Asylum

(Asylum Information Database, 2023)

SP and THP holders receive a 1-year residency permit, identification documents, access to welfare services, but not automatically to work permits. These can be obtained if the holder's employer applies before the other documents are distributed and are then valid for up to 6 months (UNHCR Malta, n.d.). The International Protection Agency handles these approvals and is funded by the EU, but it operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Security and Employment. This ministry is in charge of all migration in Malta and manages the Detention Services Agency, police force, armed forces, asylum applications and employment.

Before they can apply for international protection, migrants including asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors and vulnerable applicants are detained for up to 18 months without any visit permissions despite the EU's 12-month maximum stipulation (AIDA, 2022). There are three currently functioning detention centers housing irregular migrants (often arriving through maritime borders) in Malta. The Safi Detention Centre, Hal Far Immigration Reception Centre and Marsa Initial Reception Centre are administrative institutions used for collecting data and detaining migrants on arrival (Global Detention Project, n.d.). These centers are located out of public sight (Baldacchino, 2014; Mainwaring, 2008). Heavy monitoring, fingerprinting, identification and other surveillance strategies are employed (Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2014; Mainwaring, 2014).

Despite their classification as administrative centers, they are maintained by the Armed Forces of Malta. The Detention Services Agency detains every irregular boat entry in reception centers on public health grounds. This detention is justified by the "Prevention of Disease Ordinance" and the "Public Health Act" that have informed some articles in the Immigration and Refugees Acts. After receiving a medical clear, migrants are transferred to either a detention center or an open accommodation center based on their country of origin, nationality and their personal circumstances (UNHCR Malta, n.d.) These reception centers are meant to validate identity and documentation and conduct first registrations including fingerprinting for the EURODAC system until further decisions on permission to remain are made (European Council for Refugees and Exiles, 2021).

In an amendment to the Refugees Act in 2005⁴, possibly provoked by the unexpected increase in the number of irregular immigrants and potential asylum seekers arriving on Malta's shores, several previously vague articles were rewritten. The Refugee Commissioner was given more power in "preliminarily deciding by a reasoned decision whether the application is manifestly

⁴ Document found at <https://legislation.mt/eli/act/2005/17/eng>

unfounded” rather than the previous duty to “recommend” action. The article providing unconditional state medical care was changed to only allow medical services if an application was not “ill founded”. If “ill founded”, the Refugee Commissioner is instructed to deport the migrant immediately. Furthermore, one amendment made the carrier and migrant responsible for bearing the cost of their onward journey if “a third country national in transit through Malta” is identified. This solidifies Malta’s stance on transit migration within national legislation.

Under the Refugees Act, the EU Qualification Directive allowing for the expansion of the definition of migrant vulnerability included “subsidiary protection” status. Those granted this status can apply for renewable residence permits, travel documents and access to employment and other state services (UNHCR Malta, n.d.). The “Temporary Protection” status was specifically granted to Ukrainian persons who left after February 24th, 2022 in response to the war in the region and entitled them to “residence permits; access to the labour market and accommodation; social and welfare assistance on the same level as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection; medical care (including, as a minimum essential emergency care and essential treatment of illness); and access to education for children and teenagers,” (AIDA, 2022). This “Temporary Protection” status only for Ukrainian refugees and the determination of detention accommodations based on nationality emphasize Malta’s racialized approach to migration policy.

There are few implemented integration policies in Malta. Under the Refugees Act, all statuses allow access to the formal labour market and basic services. The Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers under the Ministry of Home Affairs provides language training and skill assessment for status-holders. However, locating healthcare, education and employment is left up to the migrants themselves which prolongs the integration process (People for Change Foundation, 2014).

The 2012 National Employment Policy⁵ is one of the few policies that mentions the integration of migrants outside of asylum seeking and protection. It was renewed for the period of 2021 to 2030. It aimed to have a “human-centric approach” to labour market participation and socio-economic mobility by providing better quality employment and standard of living (Ministry of Finance and Employment, 2021, pp 41). It briefly mentions the overwhelming participation of migrants in the informal economy and the need to provide training to integrate them into the formal labour market, but there is no detailed explanation on how these practices will be funded or implemented. Furthermore, the policy document states that there is shrinking demand for labour and that migrant unemployment reflects the “unwillingness of the registered unemployed to take up existing job vacancies” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). This is contradicted by the 2012 policy’s emphasis on the need to import foreign labour to promote economic growth, to reduce seasonal employment, to decrease the exploitation of

⁵ Found at <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Employment-Policy.pdf>

foreign workers and to develop a “national economic migration policy” (Maltese-Italian Chamber of Commerce, 2013).

3.2 Trinidad & Tobago

The 1969 Immigration Act in TT is enforced by the Ministry of National Security under which the Immigration Division operates. The role of the Immigration Division is:

“... to preserve national security by effectively monitoring and controlling the movement of persons into, within, and out of Trinidad and Tobago and to provide an efficient passport service to citizens.”

(Ministry of National Security, n.d.)

The Immigration Act is divided into sections based on immigration regulations, immigration through work permit exemption and CARICOM migration. These subsidiary legislations focus solely on the movement of economic migrants, and the ability to distinguish, yet incorporate, the requirements of CARICOM is particularly interesting.

Out of five chapters, one chapter consisting of 12 sections discusses “Deportation and Transportation” orders outlined for the Immigration Division and its head, the Chief Immigration Officer. In the previous chapter, four more sections discuss the administrative features of deportation, detention and medical checks upon arrival. These sections detail the actions to be taken if someone needs to be deported, and how transportation out of the country is to be financed. There are vague statements regarding the implementation of articles in the act, and significant power in decision-making on deportation is given to the Chief Immigration Officer and Minister. Clarke-Mendes (2020) finds their roles “vague and confusing” and many of the articles “contrary to international human rights practices” (p 121). Many articles on deportation allow these officials to act on their own without considering appeals of the migrants, rulings of the judicial courts or needing to state reasons or procedure for repatriation. These officials are allowed to order indiscriminate deportation of even asylum seekers according to national legislation, but this directly infringes on international conventions to which TT is a signatory.

There is evident scarcity in the guidelines for refugee or asylum in the Immigration Act despite frequent amendments, and one more recently in 2016 following the influx of vulnerable Venezuelan migrants. In fact, the words ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum-seeker’ do not appear once throughout the entire document. There are also few mentions of the rights of immigrants. This gap in refugee and migration legislation may have been attempted to be filled using the 2014 National Refugee Policy. The first line in this “Phased Approach Towards the Establishment of a National Policy to Address Refugee and Asylum Matters in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago” mentions the strategic location and proximity of TT to mainland South America from where it is

“geographically predisposed to receiving migratory arrivals of undocumented persons” (ACNUR, n.d., p 3). This policy was meant to involve the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Attorney General, implementing partners and NGOs in governing asylum migration.

This policy would also allow for the involvement of the judicial courts in the asylum process to provide due process and prevent violations of non-refoulement laws after the acknowledgment of asylum application under the “Principle of Fair, Efficient and Expeditious Adjudication of Claims” outlined in the policy draft. It would also provide access to documentation and services such as work permits, healthcare, education, freedom of movement and identification papers to asylum applicants and refugees. However, one decade later, this policy draft remains as a draft with no formal implementation and only mentioned on the UNHCR TT website. The website also mentions that the policy is meant to increase national capacity to shift refugee status determinations from the UNHCR to the government (UNHCR, n.d.).

This policy was supposed to facilitate the creation of a Refugee Unit working in tandem with the Immigration Division to foster government and agency coordination. However, the only evidence that this unit exists is found in UNHCR TT website. With no national legislation in TT, UNHCR remains the body in charge of handling refugee claims (UNHCR, n.d.) and data collection in the country despite the policy’s intent to transfer this responsibility to the government. This has been the only attempt to include humanitarian migrants into a legal framework in TT, but it has remained unenforced.

Finally, the most recent policy implemented to cope with the large inflow of Venezuelan migrants after 2015 has been the 2019 Migrant Registration Framework. It was aimed at mass regularization of undocumented Venezuelan migrants through the provision of a temporary, 1-year registration card and work permit. For two weeks in June 2019 (OPM, 2019), migrants could apply for these registration cards through this “amnesty period” by providing their fingerprints, proof of address, photos and medical examination results (Mohan, 2019). An estimated 16,500 persons applied and were approved after this exercise (Chami and Seemungal, 2021). This temporary policy providing access to the formal labour market has been renewed once yearly since 2019 to continue to allow formal economic participation and documented residence (Ministry of National Security, 2023). However, only those who registered during the original 2-week registration period in June, 2019 can renew their permits, leaving approximately 23,000 Venezuelans in TT with no access to even temporary regularization.

Analysis of Policy Approaches in the Island Context

The scope of this research limits the analysis to the policies discussed previously that specifically target more socio-economically vulnerable flows of migrants, often entering through maritime borders. This section will explore the link between the “islandness” characteristics of Malta and TT that are used to justify their policy actions and inactions. More explicitly, the ways in which the concepts of smallness, dependency, insularity, constrained economies, peripherality, inexperience and strategic geopolitical positioning are manifested in the exercise of control over and securitization of migration in small island states will be discussed. The use of “islandness” and related concepts reifying the territorially-bound, homogenous and inherently vulnerable features of small island states also expose policy gaps in the management of migration on islands.

It can be observed through their Immigration Acts that there is no expected type of migrant in terms of their type of employment or otherwise in TT, with a clear emphasis on return migration and residency status unlike in Malta. This can be attributed to the more diverse population in T&T, and its long-term involvement with CARICOM movement, unlike Malta which is more homogenous and has had to sacrifice some of its sovereignty to align with EU principles. Contrastingly, this has opened more space for refugee policy inclusion in Malta, which is absent in TT who has instead provided more frameworks for economic migration. Although each island defines the influx of migrants differently, both islands’ migration policy is extensively securitized with focuses on detention and deportation. This can maybe be explained by “islandness” and the priority of the country to protect its porous borders, limited resources and vulnerable internal systems from the ‘other’.

4.1 Small Size

The small size of both islands and the resulting limited availability of resources can be identified as one of the major justifications of Maltese and Trinidadian government officials in the formation of crisis narratives regarding large influxes of socio-economically vulnerable migrants. The “housing” of migrants is often referenced when publicly discussing the burden of migrants on both small island states. In TT, the Prime Minister argued that international organizations had agendas to convert the island into a refugee camp for Venezuelans and that there are “limited facilities for holding persons” (Nanton, 2019). The Maltese Foreign Minister stated that the small island could not support migrants because the maintenance of overcrowded detention camps stretched their limited resources (Soares and Joy, 2014). Like the narrative created by their Immigration Acts, both Malta and T&T seem inclined to focus on the detention or deportation of migrants. The securitized approach is manifested in the presence of policies that prioritize initial and long-term detention in Malta, and indiscriminate deportation in TT outlined in their Immigration Acts. The justification of these restrictive policies is observed to be the supposed lack of space on islands.

4.2 Unequal Geopolitical Power

Both islands have strategically launched their smallness to imply that their international geopolitical power is “small”. Maltese officials claim that they are unfairly burdened by EU policies (such as the Dublin Regulation) which force them to keep potential asylum-seeking, vulnerable migrants within the island. TT argues that entities like the UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations compel them to view Venezuelan migrants as refugees instead of “economic migrants” (Nanton, 2019) and to provide for them. Malta has a 15% first instance decision asylum granting rate as compared to the approximately 50% rate of Italy and Greece, but has more grants per capita (Sturge, 2024). On the contrary, TT which has received an estimated 45,000 vulnerable Venezuelan migrants within the past decade has only registered 16,500 persons (Chami and Seemungal, 2021). The existence of a relatively rigorous refugee policy in Malta compared to absence of one in TT can explain the distinct approaches to migrant integration on both islands. However, what is certain is that the argument of relatively little choice in the management of migration within their state is based on the islands’ understandings of their geopolitical positioning with larger, mainland territories and international powers.

In these ways, both island states use their securitization policies to portray an image of overcrowding and exhaustion of their resources to an international community. Malta, using its high volume of vulnerable migrants, uses the effects of its own securitization policies of prolonged detention to argue that its small size and limited power burden its resources. On the other hand, TT argues that its deportation policies are criticized by an international community that views Venezuelan migrants differently and imposes international conventions of non-refoulement on the illegal entry of economic migrants who are burdening the small island. Both islands argue that the housing of migrants is a burden, but do not consider that integration of migrants into the economy through more developed migration policy may lessen the strain on their resources. This is evident through the lack of integration policies designed for vulnerable migrants.

4.3 Dependency

The concept of small island states’ limited geopolitical power is also linked to the perceived dependency of Malta and TT on mainland territories. The crisis creation and trivialization of migration by Malta and TT respectively influence how they view their sovereignty and dependency on external powers. Malta has been consistently arguing that it is burdened as a border country of the EU to host migrants attempting to enter EU territory because of unfair policy requirements. This argument is often used to garner financial funding from EU member states whom Malta claims to be protecting (Mainwaring, 2014). Funding is often requested to increase capacity for detention and securitization, and not to provide integration. Malta received 44.1 million euros between 2007 and 2011 in EU funding for migration management (Mainwaring,

2014), but discussions on relocation and resettlement of migrants were dismissed by the EU because these policies were considered “pull factors”.

On the contrary, TT has been trivializing the number and situation of Venezuelan migrants, arguing that the UNHCR estimates are exaggerations. Furthermore, the Prime Minister rejected the notion by multilateral organizations (like the Organization of American States OAS) that TT must be involved in the condemnation of the Maduro regime which led to the economic collapse of Venezuela (Bahaw, 2020). These are some examples of TT’s rejection of external powers and narratives of internal policy responses to migration. Unlike Malta, TT strongly emphasizes its sovereignty and political power relating to migration. Despite the Eurocentric model of migration that is imposed on these island states (Interview⁶ in May, 2024), the influence of colonial pasts on both islands can be seen to impact their perception of sovereignty and migration management.

While Malta has attempted to appeal to former colonizing powers for aid through the strategic launching of its “islandness”, TT has been more prominently exerting its power by emphasizing its post-colonial sovereignty despite its vulnerabilities as an island state. These two approaches have required the manipulation of the “migration crisis” – through its exaggeration using detention, overcrowding and limited resources in Malta and its trivialization using deportation and rejection of international narratives in TT. Although both islands use securitization policies, Malta employs restrictive policies to *keep migrants in* on-site detention zones, while TT *pushes migrants out* through large-scale repatriations and deportations.

4.4 Insularity and Isolation

Post-colonial understandings of island states can also be related to the formation of a young identity based on the “nation-state” concept. The islands’ identities are a consequence of the practices employed during their colonial periods. TT was formed into a “plural society” (Edwards et al, 2023) and Malta, into a more ethnically and racially homogenous population. Despite this variation, scholarship and media coverage in both islands have reported xenophobic attitudes towards socio-economically vulnerable migrants. While this can be argued to be a response to migrants on larger, mainland territories as well, the geographical isolation of small island states employing restrictive migration policies can transform the experience of discriminated migrants into one that is “prison-like” (Lemaire, 2014). The juxtaposition of the young identity of ‘former colony - small island states’ with the sudden and prolonged inflow of a racialized population exposes the fragility experienced by both groups in an environment characterized by little space and limited resources.

⁶ Interview C in Appendix.

In Malta, 73% of natives associate “very negative feelings” with migration from outside of the EU (Fernandez, 2016) with the word “immigrant” becoming “synonymous with the term ‘African illegal migrant’ regardless of the legal status or asylum outcome of the individual” (People for Change Foundation, 2014). In TT, the coverage of Venezuelan migrants resulted in the creation of the new term “anti-crime exercise” which was used to report any news involving Venezuelans despite their legal status or non-involvement in crime. Venezuelan migration is also linked to prostitution, crime, disease and promiscuity/infidelity in TT (Edwards et al, 2023) with the term “crimmigration” defining all migrants as criminals (Anatol and Kangalee, 2020). This is reflected and maybe even influenced by the Immigration Acts of both islands which have effectively equated migration with insecurity demanding securitization policies.

This is only used in the justification of restrictive policies for vulnerable migrants, but not for EU or CARICOM nationals who are privy to free mobility which further demonstrates the racialization of vulnerable migrants on both islands. This is especially true in Malta where 58% of the Non-Maltese population is Caucasian and only 6.3% are African (NSO, 2023) despite association of the word “immigrant” with “African illegal migrant”. The criminalization of these vulnerable migrants, often asylum seekers, is against international refugee conventions but is pervasive in both islands’ migration legislation. The implication that these policies protect the quality of life of natives creates further migrant discrimination which hinders social integration, influencing participation in the informal labour market.

4.5 Constrained Economy

Interestingly, literature on xenophobia in both islands often appears with discussions on the labour market. The Maltese and Trinidadian public have expressed concern about increased labour competition (Edwards et al, 2023; Falzon, 2012) that is exacerbated by the limited opportunities available on islands. Attempts to facilitate integration of vulnerable migrants, correlates with the amount of agency afforded to them on each island. In TT, the Prime Minister’s insistence on calling them “economic migrants” gives vulnerable Venezuelan migrants full accountability in their situation, thereby criminalizing their often undocumented status. In Malta, references to human-trafficking and migrants from “war-torn” areas brands them as victims who must remain detained as they are dependents. The argument against integration in Malta and TT seems to insinuate that increased numbers of persons will result in less resources for natives. However, these arguments are not based on any evidence since research on the potential economic contributions of vulnerable migrants is scarcely available or conducted (Holicza and Stone, 2016; Interview⁷ in May, 2024).

⁷ Interview C in Appendix.

Furthermore, the lack of economic integration initiatives in legislation concerning vulnerable migrants can be attributed to the prevalence of and dependence on securitization policy in both islands. The “plantation island”, “fortress island”, nodal, and marginal categorizations of TT and Malta explain their economic dependencies and vulnerabilities which have shaped their understanding of migration in economic terms. For both islands, high rates of emigration, brain drain, ageing populations and export dependency have shaped policies which prioritize return-migration and native emigration. Even with sudden influxes of young and highly skilled migrants, the islands seem unable to consider economic integration that would benefit both their ageing populations through increased labour flows and the vulnerable migrants who can work formally to increase their socio-economic status. The presence of large primary and service sectors in both islands as a result of their “islandness” and colonial pasts have provided a path for exploitative, informal migrant labour in the absence of policy that integrates them.

4.6 Peripherality

The lack of economic integration policy is often justified by the argument that vulnerable migrants are ‘in transit’ and therefore, will soon leave and do not require integration. Despite lack of evidence that Venezuelan migrants are only temporarily entering TT, it can be argued that the overwhelming response has been laissez-faire, with strategic non-regulation of the migrant population despite many unlawful deportations and the legislative focus on securitization. Interviews⁸ with academics in the field revealed that the lack of integration frameworks forces many migrants to work informally and send remittances, but this is not indicative of their intent to stay temporarily. In Malta, the argument that migrants were ‘en route’ to Italy or other EU-border countries and not to the island state has resulted in SaR mission pushbacks and refusals to respond to distress calls from migrant boats (Levinson, 2023). Reliance on the ideas of “transit migration” and non-interference can be linked to the islands’ perception of “islandness”. Malta and TT may view themselves as peripheral countries where persons would not want to remain permanently. The criminalization of vulnerable migrants on both islands may also help to justify their non-response. Despite Malta’s commitment to EU SaR and refugee policies, its non-intervention resembling TT’s can be explained by its perception of its peripherality, and its ability to obscure its strategic non-regulation from more dominant entities through its geopolitical remoteness.

4.7 Inexperience

The islands’ projection of their inexperience with migration may explain their strategic non-regulation and non-integration stance. Malta and TT’s emphasis on the burden that these new migrant flows pose to their “islandness” justifies their underdeveloped immigration policy. They

⁸ Interviews A-C in Appendix.

rationalize their inability to integrate vulnerable migrants by claiming that “transit migration” and recent strategic positioning have otherwise prevented them from experiencing these migrant flows unlike large “migration states”. However, the expansive policy frameworks to guide return migration, intra-regional economic migration and post-WWII emigration flows show their capability to incorporate more robust migration legislation. Both islands’ refugee policies also display such attempts to expand migration policy.

Malta’s 2001 Refugee Act was created to align itself with EU requirements pre-accession. TT’s reasoning for the 2014 National Refugee Policy was less clear, but a UNHCR periodic review from September 2015 documents a 195% increase in asylum claims between 2013 and 2014. This resulted in only 184 refugees and asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2016) and may have been triggered by the same Venezuelan economic crisis. But, this asylum-seeking ratio increase may have led to NGO and IO pressure to propose policies to better manage future unexpected increases. The initiatives to create such policies further dispel the claim that both island states are inexperienced with vulnerable migrant flows, and are only recently reconciling with their strategic location. While it can be argued that the recent influxes of vulnerable migrants deviate from the flows they have experienced, TT and Malta have been receiving vulnerable Venezuelan and African migrants from 2014 and 2004 respectively. This has given them ample time to adapt to these flows and create more holistic integration policy.

4.8 Additional Impacts of “Islandness” on Migration and Growth

The “total-institution setting” of island states is observed through the restrictiveness of the securitization policies in TT and Malta. These, along with isolation, strong national identities and migrant criminalization create an inescapable environment for migrants who cannot integrate formally. Even the strategic non-regulation of migration in TT which leads to higher informal sector employment leads to the marginalization of Venezuelans who can never fully integrate, characteristic of total-institution settings. However, the influence that regional and international policies have on the migration policies of both islands, especially in Malta, contradict the strictly demarcated, sovereign, geopolitical borders that some scholarship associates with “islandness” and total-institution settings.

Furthermore, the migration-security nexus seems to overshadow the migration-development nexus in both island states. Proactive policy in both Malta and TT are heavily securitized while reactive policies are more integrative but temporary. While the presence and size of the informal economy may hinder integration, the lack of research conducted by both island states on the economic participation of vulnerable migrants fails to provide any scope for evidence-based labour market integration policy formation. The agency of migrants to work and send remittances (as outlined by the migration-development nexus) is undercut by detention and deportation policies which prevent meaningful, skilled and non-exploitative work. Policies in both TT and Malta complicating work permit access further discourage formal economic integration.

The prioritization of securitized policies based on concepts outlined by “islandness” further demonstrates the liberal paradox. This is because the islands’ neglect the vulnerability and human rights of recent migrant inflows and the demand for labour in their ageing and undiversified economies.

Both island states maintain that remoteness is an inherent vulnerability, but they do not utilize the labour resources that reach these remote, small areas and which can lead to a demographic dividend. Securitization can lead to feelings of marginality which can further encourage informal employment. The “prison-like” setting of islands based on the remote, insular and territorially-bound features of “islandness” and lack of connection to a mainland to facilitate relocation may further contribute to migrants’ subversion of state regulations which already criminalize them. This may result in further illegality through migrant’s preference to participate in the informal economy, work in illegal occupations and opt out of receiving documentation, thereby living in the shadows of both island states.

Conclusion and Implications

This research focused on the impacts of “islandness” on the policies targeting vulnerable migrants in the two island states of Malta and TT, previously never compared. Contextual analyses revealed that both islands had unique geopolitical, economic and social strengths and vulnerabilities that dictated their migration management. Despite being small island states, the influx of socio-economically vulnerable migrants revealed how these small islands are functioning as “migration states”. This is highlighted through the securitization of borders to protect their natives, limited resources and sovereignty *and* the simultaneous openness to accommodate free mobility in the EU and CARICOM and to promote economic growth through their tourism sectors and export-based economies. This also reveals the liberal paradox that has been created through their policy actions and inactions that have prioritized the migration-security nexus in handling vulnerable migrants rather than the migration-development nexus.

This research finds that “islandness”, in terms of the small size, dependency, regional and international power struggles, insularity, isolation and inexperience of Malta and TT, impacts their migration governance which seems to be more focused on self-preservation from the ‘other’. Interestingly, the economic integration of vulnerable migrants being impossible *because of* Malta and TT’s “islandness” is not an argument identified in this study. This may be attributed to both island states’ disregard for the formulation or implementation of labour integration policies. Instead, the use of arguments such as “transit migration”, “strategic location” and “migration burden” to justify their restrictive policies places the onus of integration on vulnerable migrants whose irregular statuses are prolonged in the presence of criminalization and securitization strategies and absence of proactive, long-term regularization policies.

The influence of colonial histories and the imposition of Eurocentric policy reveal the trends of unequal power struggles influencing the policy actions of both island states. This suggests that the “islandness” of small island states is distinct to the island territories of mainland states because their understandings of sovereignty and international geopolitical positioning depend on their perceived level of economic dependency on regional powers. This is particularly evident in the crisis-creation and trivialization narratives associated with vulnerable migrants in Malta and TT. These are two different responses that stem from the same “islandness” concept of both islands. This is one example in the way that “islandness” manifested differently in the policy approaches of Malta and TT.

The potential economic benefits for both the island states and the vulnerable migrants through their integration into the formal economy is supported by the fact that the young population of migrants can offset the ageing populations of Malta and TT to achieve a demographic dividend. This suggests that some form of long-term economic integration policy can benefit small island states that are peripheral, remote and have undiversified economies. However, the dependency

on reactive, short-term securitization policies coupled with the discrimination and criminalization of vulnerable migrants seems to have taken precedence over proactive, long-term integration policies that may offset the economic vulnerabilities described by the small island states' "islandness".

The implications of this study suggest that "islandness" does impact the labour market integration of vulnerable migrants because the small size, limited resources, geopolitical positioning, dependency, historical experiences and "ideal nation-state" structuring of islands influence the creation and implementation of securitization policies. This comparative analysis has also revealed that migration and integration policy are affected by the unique history and economies of island states, not just by their existence as Global North or Global South, developed or developing states as modern migration discourse dichotomizes. While the scope of this research is not to recommend policies, the contextual, historical, and comparative analyses have shown that exploring islands as their own "migration states" is important for modern approaches to migration studies and can aid in the incorporation of South-South flows into global migration governance discourse.

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Appendix

Interviews:

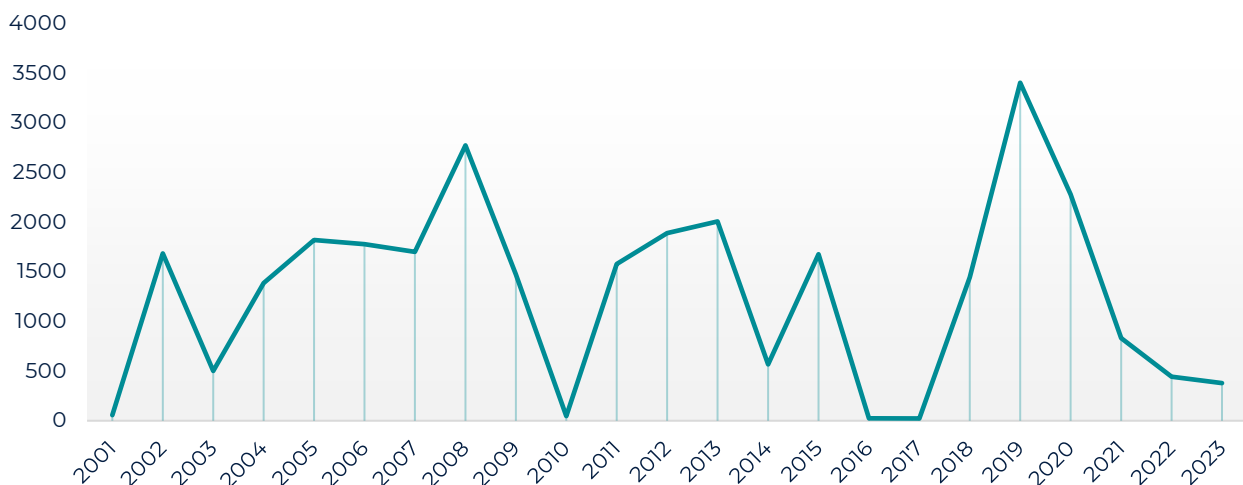
Three interviews were conducted in May, 2024. All interviewees opted to remain anonymous.

Table 1: showing details of interviews conducted in May, 2024

Interview	Date	Affiliation	Area of Study
A	04/05/2024	University of the West Indies	Economics
B	22/05/2024	Toronto Metropolitan University	Human Geography; Mobility Studies
C	31/05/2024	University of the West Indies	International Relations

Graphs:

Graph 1: representing the number of boat arrivals in Malta between 2001-2023



Graph 1 represents the number of persons who arrived through irregular boat entry into Malta between 2001 and 2023. Table 2 shows the figures used to plot Graph 1.

Table 2: showing the number of individuals arriving by boat to Malta from 2001 to 2023

Year	Number of individuals arriving by boat
2001	57
2002	1,686
2003	502
2004	1,388
2005	1,822
2006	1,780
2007	1,702

2008	2,775
2009	1,475
2010	47
2011	1,579
2012	1,890
2013	2,008
2014	568
2015	1,677
2016	25
2017	23
2018	1,445
2019	3,406
2020	2,281
2021	832
2022	444
2023	380

The data for the graph was accumulated from various sources as listed below because of the lack of a national database where the numbers for all target years were stored. Table 3 shows the references from which the number of arrivals were taken.

Table 3: showing the sources from which data for Graph 1 were taken

Years	Reference
2012 to 2023	UNHCR. (n.d.). Figures at a glance: Arrivals and asylum trends. Retrieved May, 2024 from https://www.unhcr.org/mt/figures-at-a-glance
2016 to 2017	UNHCR. (2020). Malta factsheet. Retrieved May 2024 from https://www.unhcr.org/mt/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/12/Malta-Sea-Arrivals-and-Asylum-Statistics_UNHCR_November2020.pdf
2011	Human Rights Watch. (2012, July 18). Boat ride to detention: Adult and child migrants in Malta.
2010	Martin, I. (2014). Lowest number of migrant arrivals since 2010. <i>Times of Malta</i> . Retrieved May, 2024 from https://timesofmalta.com/article/Lowest-number-of-migrant-arrivals-since-2010.533310
2002 to 2009	Frenzen, N. (2009). Migrant arrivals in Malta lowest in 5 years. <i>Migrants at Sea</i> . https://migrantsatsea.org/2009/12/19/migrant-arrivals-in-malta-lowest-in-5-years/
2001	Mainwaring, C. (2014). Small states and nonmaterial power: Creating crises and shaping migration policies in Malta, Cyprus, and the European Union. <i>Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies</i> , 12(2), 103–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2014.909076

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