

## **Decolonizing Development: A Historical Reading of a Colonial Present?**

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*The modern prince, [...] can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party.<sup>1</sup>*

**I**n this essay, I shall be indirectly reflecting on the labours of the present Labour Party in government by looking at another historical moment with which to compare and contrast. Mine will be a look out for the ‘benefits of hindsight’, or an ‘archaeological rewind’ to the 1970s in which the ‘same’ political party came to power.

In particular, I shall be focusing on the development discourse which underpinned the 1970s administrations’ efforts to shift the national economy towards a sustained programme of industrialisation, and an increase of the tourism industry and services; an economic discourse which was often portrayed as enveloped ‘in a socialist nation’s journey towards freedom from colonial shackles.’ This decolonization effort, which often assumed mythical proportions, together with its contemporary critical portrayal of the development paradigm as a product of a new imperialism of a Eurocentric capitalist centre emerging from the peripheries, prompts me to seek insights within a post-colonial interpretative framework. My intentions come together well in Gregory Derek’s analysis of a contemporary optical shift from the modern focus on ‘present futures’ to a post-structural notion of ‘present pasts’:

*[Postcolonialism’s] commitment to a future free of colonial power and disposition is sustained in part by a critique of the continuities between the colonial past and the colonial present. While they may be displaced, distorted, and (most often) denied, the capacities that inhere within the colonial past are routinely reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present.<sup>2</sup>*

Thus, first I shall be exploring the historical context, both as a ‘post-colonial moment’ of a newly independent country in a world ideologically divided in two as well as the main narratives which re-present such a moment. In a second part, I shall retrace the paradigmatic continuity of development discourse which characterised the historical period under study, evaluating its significance at the time. Through the work of Mario Vella, Mario Brincat and others, I shall consider development as a capitalist project increasingly wrapped in socialist rhetoric. Rather than regarding such an uncomfortable partnership as an ideological dichotomy, with the expected paradoxes and contradictions, I shall be exploring the limits of these

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<sup>1</sup> D. Forgacs, ed., *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916 – 1935* (New York, 2000), 240.

<sup>2</sup> D. Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (New York, 2004), 7.

discourses, to be on the lookout for horizons of possibilities, spaces for action and the unexpected. In the third part of the essay, having outlined the discursive spaces, I shall be considering the role of education in such a transitional moment which the 1970s represented. Owing to the limits of this essay, I shall be focusing on the comprehensivisation reform, locating it within dominant economic paradigms and the pressures to bring about social transformations.

### **I : (post-) Context - ways of re-presentations**

*There are two histories at work in the Wretched of the Earth: the Manichaeian history of colonialism and decolonization embedded in text and context [...] and a history of coercive 'univocal choices' imposed by the cold warriors [...] on the rest of the world, which constitute the ideological conditions of its writing.*<sup>3</sup>

Homi Bhabha's analysis of the different histories which underpin Fanon's seminal work, the narratives of a decolonization process and the ideological dichotomy of the Cold War, also applies to the period I am focussing on. In the 1971 elections, Dom Mintoff's Malta Labour Party [MLP] was voted to power after a period of thirteen years, which were characterized by the bitter conflict between the Maltese Catholic Church and the Malta Labour Party. Throughout this period, the Labour Party in opposition, though agreeing on independence as the political way forward, had been heavily criticising the terms and conditions which Borg Olivier's Nationalist government had been negotiating with the British, describing them as 'fraudulent'<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in the 1970s the efforts to take Malta out of the colonial era were to be intensified by a Labour Government. Concurrently, though this particular decade was characterised by a period of *détente*, the Cold War between the Capitalist first world to the west of the 'iron curtain' and the Communist second world to its east, further dictated Malta's peripheral geopolitics. To an extent, this characterised the Malta Labour Party's 'distinctly Third Worldist stand with an active role in the Non-Aligned Movement, close relations with China, a trade reciprocity agreement with the Soviet Union and a special relationship with Libya.'<sup>5</sup>

In his seminal essay, 'When was the post-colonial?' Stuart Hall identifies the 'post-' with a kind of rupture from a colonial past. Frantz Fanon's considerations of the violent colonial experience, describing the dual worlds of the colonizer and the colonized, provide important insights:

*The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. [...] It is neither the act of owning factories, nor estates, nor a bank balance which distinguishes the governing classes. The governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, "the others." [...] Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values.*<sup>6</sup>

According to Fanon, the rupture from such an experience is not the setting up 'lines of communication [...] between the two zones', but necessarily entails 'the abolition of one zone,

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<sup>3</sup> H. Bhabha, 'Foreword: Framing Fanon,' in F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 2004), xv.

<sup>4</sup> S. Howe, 'British Decolonization and Malta's Imperial Role,' in V. Mallia-Milanes, ed., *The British Colonial Experience 1800-1964* (Malta, 1988), 359.

<sup>5</sup> M. Vella, 'That Favourite Dream of the Colonies': Industrialization, Dependence and the Limits of Development Discourse in Malta,' in R.G., Sultana ed., *Maltese Society: A Sociological Inquiry* (Malta, 1994), 58.

<sup>6</sup> F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1963), 35-39.

its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the processes of independence and decolonization should be concerned with the creation of new identities, the ‘creation of new men’,<sup>8</sup> who are not only challenging colonial rational viewpoints but passionately claim ‘that their world is fundamentally different.’<sup>9</sup> Thus, for Stuart Hall:

*The ‘post-colonial’ signals the proliferation of histories and temporalities, the intrusion of difference and specificity into the generalising and Eurocentric post-Enlightenment grand narratives, the multiplicity of lateral and decentred cultural connections, movements and migrations which make up the world today, often bypassing the old metropolitan centres.*<sup>10</sup>

He eloquently revisits both his personal and collective experiences of colonization, and talks of the need to re-imagine and re-present the new identities:

*What they felt was I have no voice, I have no history, I have come from a place to which I cannot go back [...] Against this sense of profound rupture, the metaphors of a new kind of imposed religion can be reworked, can become a language in which a certain kind of history is retold.*<sup>11</sup>

From this standpoint, the period understudy cannot be a linear, teleological journey from Independence to Republic Day and Freedom Day as many history books suggest. Despite its long history of being dominated by larger powers, Malta’s colonial legacies are often ignored. This warrants a confrontation between the representativeness of the period’s history and the facing of the colonial ghosts. What did the rupture from one’s colonial past signify to the people who inhabited such a past? Which continuities still marked the post-colonial?

Locally, any re-narration of new personal and collective identities seems conspicuous by its absence. Despite, admittedly, in the decades following independence, ‘labouring people’ kept alive their industrial experiences ‘by recollecting and transmitting memories of their work [...] to their children, grandchildren and friends in the neighbourhood’<sup>12</sup>, the official and hegemonic historiography has been formed as a ‘flat one dimensional nationalistic perspective’ and is ‘still being written in such a totalising vista and is still generating the myth of a historically homogeneous Malteseness.’<sup>13</sup> Such an essentialist and monolithic narrative can be interpreted in terms of what Paulo Freire describes as an anti-dialogic ‘cultural invasion’:

*All domination involves invasion [...] a form of economic and cultural domination. Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders. [...] In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes.*<sup>14</sup>

At this stage, there are a number of reflections to be made. Isn’t the role of such a meta-narrative in contradiction with the process of decolonization and the achievement of political freedom? What would the nationalist ‘Malta first and foremost’ signify in the light of such a process? Judith Butler deconstructs the nation-state by dissociating “the term state from the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Bhabha, xx.

<sup>10</sup> S.Hall, ‘When was the post-colonial: Thinking at the Limit,’ in I. Chambers and L. Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London, 1996), 248.

<sup>11</sup> C.Hall, ‘Histories, empires and the post-colonial moment,’ in I. Chambers and L. Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> J.Chircop, ‘Introduction: Labour History, Historiography and Beyond,’ in J. Chircop ed., *Revisiting Labour History* (Malta, 2012), 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London, 1993), 134.

term nation”.<sup>15</sup> She sees the nation as “singular and homogeneous [...] in order to comply with the requirements of the state”.<sup>16</sup> In the context of Mintoff’s pragmatic socialism, as Alfred Sant describes it<sup>17</sup>, more reminiscent of the socialism of third-world leaders such as Nasser, Nehru, Ho Chi Minh in countries with similar colonial histories, and considering the almost non-existence of an industrial working class which had catalyzed socialist action in western countries, Sant argues that nationalism encapsulated a movement of antagonism against the colonial powers.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the ‘frontal chains of equivalence’ also serve to conflate all those belonging to ‘the nation’ into a logic of difference.<sup>19</sup> However, as Fanon warns:

*If nationalism is not made explicit, if it is not enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words into humanism, it leads up a blind alley. [...] The collective building up of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale.*<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, the staticity of the nationalist narrative, arguably typical of microstates which are rather reluctant in the letting go of the colonial experiences,<sup>21</sup> has rarely sought the necessary deconstruction of often violent colonial identities, as explained by Stuart Hall above, and the necessary reconstruction of new identities. Thus, the pragmatic reading of the immediate necessities of the period of ‘rupture’ the Maltese people were inhabiting had to live-up with such inherent contradictions:

*Labour’s rejoicing at the end of the colonial era seems to have precluded any reflections on the economics of neo-colonialism. This is surprising because in the 1960s the leaders of the non-aligned ex-colonies were greatly concerned with [...] ‘an indirect and subtle form of domination’.*<sup>22</sup>

## 2: On the limits of discourses

I am using ‘discourse’ in rather Foucaultian terms, as the process through which a space is created where ‘only certain things can be said and [...] imagined’.<sup>23</sup> In my reading inside the complexity of the period under study, I shall strive to follow Mario Vella’s methodological refutation of essentialist left/right dichotomies<sup>24</sup>, and his quotation from Laclau, namely

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<sup>15</sup> J. Butler and G.C. Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? language, politics, belonging.* (Calcutta, 2007), 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 32: ‘To produce the nation that serves as a basis for the nation-state, that nation must be purified of its heterogeneity except in those cases where a certain pluralism allows for the reproduction of homogeneity on another basis.’

<sup>17</sup> A. Sant, *Is-Sočjalizmu fi Żminijietna* (Malta, 2004), 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>19</sup> E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, as quoted in Briguglio, M. *EU Accession and Civil Society Empowerment* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Malta, 2013), explain that ‘hegemonic formations can be formed through chains of equivalence, where the particularities [...] are partially surrendered and where stress is made on what [there is] in common. Different antagonisms and conflicts may result in different chains of equivalence, and this process might affect the identity of the subjects involved in it’. On the other hand, they hold that through a ‘logic of difference’, ‘antagonisms are weakened and excluded to the margins of society. Instead of having two antagonistic poles – as is the case with the logic of equivalence – here one finds an expanding formation which incorporates disarticulated elements.’

<sup>20</sup> Fanon, 204.

<sup>21</sup> G. Baldacchino, ‘Bursting the Bubble: The Pseudo-Development Strategies of Microstates,’ in *Development and Change*, Vol. 24 (1993), 31.

<sup>22</sup> Vella, 60.

<sup>23</sup> A. Escobar, ‘The Making and Unmaking of the Third World Through Development,’ in M. Rahnama, V. Bawtree, V., eds., *The Development Reader* (New York, 1997), 85.

<sup>24</sup> M.Vella, ‘The economics of hypocrisy – deconstructing half a century of development discourse in Malta: notes on work in progress,’ in J. Cutajar and G. Cassar eds., *Social Transitions in Maltese Society* (Malta, 2009), 374.

“ideological processes are ‘unintelligible so long as ideological elements are pre-assigned to essential paradigms’”.<sup>25</sup> Thus I shall focus on the limits of the different discourses, spaces which Derrida defined as ‘the episteme, functioning within a system of fundamental constraints, conceptual oppositions outside of which philosophy becomes impracticable’<sup>26</sup>, and thus subject to deconstruction.

In this section I shall be focusing on the discourses which characterised the political, social and economic local and international public spheres in the 1970s; namely the intensification of a capitalist developmental policy, mainly through a programme of late industrialisation financed by foreign investment and the equally intensified citation of the socialist ideology, within a discursive drive towards ‘decolonization’ and freedom.

Throughout this essay, I need to keep in mind Stuart Hall’s critique of a lack of convergence between the mostly cultural post-colonial analysis and the economic analysis of late capitalism which characterises similar studies:

*These two halves of the current debate about ‘late modernity’ – the post-colonial and the analysis of the new developments in global capitalism – have indeed largely proceeded in relative isolation from one another, and to their mutual cost.*<sup>27</sup>

## 2.1 : Inside/Outside Development

*There is an inevitable process leading from tradition to modernity. Follow it and you too can have all things we Americans have.*<sup>28</sup>

Development is a key characteristic of the modern era. Peet and Hartwick claim that ‘as an ideal concept, development comes from Enlightenment notions of the intervention of the modern, scientific, and democratic mind into the improvement of human existence.’<sup>29</sup> This paradigm envisaged a ‘dual society’, a [...] sector [which] is modern because of its exposure to the outside capitalist world. [The other sector is] ‘underdeveloped’ because it has lacked such exposure; but it can be modernized through the diffusion of ‘capital, institutions, values.’<sup>30</sup>

In addition, in a context of the dichotomic relations between a capitalist west and a communist east, the developmental paradigm was further articulated as a chain of equivalence, an ‘us and them’ standpoint, characterized by values that would essentialize its capitalist or socialist point of departure. Escobar argues that:

*[In the West] the discourse of communism, [...] influenced the promotion of those choices which emphasized the role of the individual in society, and in particular, those approaches which relied on private initiative and private property. So much emphasis on this issue in the context of development, so strong a moralizing attitude, probably would not have existed without the persistent anti-communist preaching that originated in the Cold War.*<sup>31</sup>

Kay describes the underpinning rationale of this developmental theory as “[the abstraction of] the general features of developed societies [...] as an ideal type and then contrasted with the equally ideal typical features of a poor economy and society. In this mode development is viewed as the transformation of one type into the other.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, development discourse “was –

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> As quoted by Hall, 255.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 257- 258.

<sup>28</sup> R. Peet and E. Hartwick, *Theories of Development: Contentions, Arguments, Alternatives*. (New York, 2009), 132.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> A.G. Frank as quoted in I. Kapoor, ‘Capitalism, culture, agency: dependency versus postcolonial theory,’ *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2004), 648.

<sup>31</sup> Escobar, 89.

<sup>32</sup> C. Kay, *Latin American Theories of Development and Underdevelopment* (London, 1988), 7.

and continues to be for the most part – a top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be move up and down in the charts of ‘progress’”<sup>33</sup>

Hence, in line with the Gramscian ‘every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relation’,<sup>34</sup> within the development discourse:

*Everything was subjected to the eye of the [...] experts: the poor dwellings of the rural masses, the vast agricultural fields, cities, households, factories, hospitals, schools, public offices, towns and regions and [...] the world as a whole. [...] Development proceeded by creating ‘abnormalities’ (such as the illiterate, the underdeveloped, the malnourished, small farmers or landless peasants) which it would later treat and reform.*<sup>35</sup>

In the early 1950s, the hegemony of such a paradigm was being consistently questioned by western, non-Marxist intellectuals such as Prebisch and the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America started [problematizing] ‘the relationship between central and peripheral economies and attempted to explain what it saw as the functional nexus between the development of one and the underdevelopment of the other.’<sup>36</sup> From a Marxist perspective, Frank went a step further in claiming that ‘underdevelopment is not due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage ... [but] is generated by the very same historical process which also [generates] economic development: the development of capitalism itself’. Far from being separate, the modern and traditional sectors and areas are ‘fully [...] integrated parts of the imperialist system’.<sup>37</sup>

Following this brief outline of the development paradigm and its main critiques, I shall be exploring how it permeated the Maltese public sphere. Under British rule, the local economy was restructured so as to depend heavily on the military needs of the ‘mother country’. Thus, in many ways, Malta’s dependence proved to be not only political but even more so socio-economical. This monolithic ‘fortress economy’ was characterised by periods of relative prosperity, especially in periods of war and instability in the Mediterranean, followed by periods of decline in the standard of living during periods of relative peace. The only major industry which continued to develop locally in the shadows of British military needs was ship repair.

Thus, a post-colonial leader<sup>38</sup> of a peripheral country needed to seek independence which wasn’t solely political but also economic. The question here would be, what kind of relationship with the centre(s) of the economic world, (which in most cases happened to be the same colonizers which had granted these countries their independence) would such country ‘choose’ to have?

In an important essay,<sup>39</sup> Mario Vella traces historically the build-up of a dominant paradigm of export-led industrial development in post-war Malta. Different from other reports on development which had been previously been commissioned by Colonial and Maltese governments, the Balogh-Seers Report of 1955 proved to be an important turning point in this regard. The authors mainly argued for ‘the necessity of industrial activity [the creation of wealth rather than its handling], the need to free the Maltese economy from its dependence on British military spending, necessity of foreign industrial investment, the need for wages to be lower in Malta than in countries from which investment is expected.’<sup>40</sup> Balogh and Seers were

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<sup>33</sup> Escobar, 91.

<sup>34</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1996), 350.

<sup>35</sup> Escobar, 87-88.

<sup>36</sup> Vella, ‘Favourite Dream,’ 59.

<sup>37</sup> Kapoor, 648.

<sup>38</sup> P. Mayo, ‘Tribute to a Post-Colonial Leader: How Malta’s Dom Mintoff Played Big Politics From a Small Context,’ *Counterpunch* (2012)

Retrieved from: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/08/31/tribute-to-a-post-colonial-leader/> on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2014

<sup>39</sup> Vella, M. ‘Favourite dream.’

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

interested in overcoming the difficulties in integrating the economy with that of the former mother country' since economic reliance on foreign firms, especially British ones, different from reliance on British military spending was in some way not seen as dependence.<sup>41</sup> These premises proved to be important underpinnings which led to the general acceptance, even by opposing social blocs,<sup>42</sup> of a development paradigm, articulated in the five/seven year plans which characterised economic planning under different governments between the mid 1950s and the 1980s. This development was based mainly on two assumptions: capitalist development is the only sort of development and if this development is to be an industrial one it must be export-led and based mainly on wholly or partially foreign-owned enterprise.<sup>43</sup>

How did the Labour Government of the 1970s relate with such a developmental strategy? Despite what one might assume if one interprets the Labour policy from an ideological left/right dichotomy, the Labour Party never really questioned the orthodoxy of capitalist developmental concepts. Vella describes the Labour Government's vision of development as 'quasi-orthodox vision of development – between the 'classical' and the 'Keynesian' world economic views and quite compatible with Rostowian 'stages' scheme.'<sup>44</sup> He argues that:

*In the absence of a progressive national bourgeoisie able and willing to promote industrial development, and because the Nationalist Party was dominated by the interests of a merchant capital uninterested in if not downright opposed to industrialization, the task of promoting capitalist industrialization had to be taken up by the Labour Movement.*<sup>45</sup>

In support of such an active economic role of the State, Brincat suggests that between 1971 and 1987, the Maltese state saw itself as a Developmental State<sup>46</sup>. He argues that while in the first three economic plans the state saw its role as 'regulatory', the development plans which were published by the Labour Government in this period, 'treat politics and economic as two sides to the same coin, and the state as an economic actor that must behave as such, not only responding to markets but also shaping them'.<sup>47</sup>

## **2.2 : Inside/Outside Maltese Socialism**

In what follows, I shall be briefly exploring the other ubiquitous discourse which increasing characterised the public sphere in the 1970s, socialism. A quick exercise<sup>48</sup> which goes through the Malta Labour Party's electoral manifestos of 1971, 1976 and 1981<sup>49</sup>, which somehow bracket the historical period I am dealing with, shows that there is a shift in the emphasis and use of particular words (and discourses). In the manifesto of 1971, the words which appear more frequently besides 'government' are 'Labour', 'Malta', 'Maltese', 'Country' and 'people'. This seems to be in line with the need of nationalistic discourse, as discussed earlier on, which creates the necessary antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized. In the manifestos of 1976 and 1981, while still retaining the nationalistic element, there is a marked shift towards

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> M.Vella, M., 'The Economics of Hypocrisy,' on page 368 quotes Herbert Ganado: 'No one better than Balogh spelt out a clear roadmap for productive development, with a clear set of dos and don'ts.'

<sup>43</sup> Vella, 'Favourite Dream,' 57.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> M. Brincat, 'Developmental State Theory and the MLP's economic policies between 1971 and 1987,' in J. Chircop ed., *Revisiting Labour History* (Malta, 2012), 255: 'Literature on Developmental State highlights the use of public policy to force an accelerated improvement of a country's position in the international division of labour by assertive industrialization.'

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 266, 267.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.wordle.net/>

<sup>49</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.um.edu.mt/projects/maltaelections/maltesepolitics/politicalparties/manifestos>

the use of a socialist rhetoric. In 1976, the words most used were ‘Maltese’, ‘Malta’, ‘Socialist’, ‘People’, ‘Work’ and ‘Labour’ while in 1981, the words were ‘Maltese’, ‘Socialist’, ‘Workers’, ‘Country’, ‘Malta’, ‘Labour’. Of course, such key words warrant further unpacking.

In what follows, I shall be briefly tracking the metamorphosis of the socialist discourse in the mentioned manifestos. In the 1971 Manifesto, the nodal point seems to be progress, which is articulated both as the reversing back of the bad effects of the previous two Nationalist Governments, strengthening the economy by increasing the productivity and reducing the national debt. The word ‘socialist’ is only mentioned once, when towards the end of the manifesto, the Labour Party’s guiding beliefs are laid out in four basic points:

*A Labour Government, in the implementations of this programme and in the measures necessary for the good of the people of Malta and Gozo will act on these democratic socialist beliefs:*

- 1. that each citizen has equal rights, irrespective of race, creed and beliefs.*
- 2. that each citizen has the right to follow his religious beliefs without hindrance.*
- 3. that the duty of a civilised society is that it should not allow excess suffering for man through a huge disequilibrium between the rich and the poor.*
- 4. that man in a modern society should create conditions under which it will be more possible to live like brothers, in one family instead of like animals in a forest.<sup>50</sup>*

Such an ideological statement seems devoid of any contextualisation. Socialism is carefully distanced from any notion of antagonism or class conflict. Despite its assumed decolonization project encapsulated in the efforts to gain economic independence through development, such a document lacks any analysis of imperialistic, neo-colonial dependence.

After five years of the Malta Labour Party in Government, in the 1976 Manifesto the Socialist ideology is more carefully articulated and contextualised within the different leftist ideologies which respond to different realities: ‘in the history of certain countries where ignorance and cruelty prevailed.’ The ‘Maltese Socialist Movement’ is articulated as some form of an egalitarian project which would grant all citizens the same rights:

*Under Democratic Socialism the workers united together declare that they are prepared to give these same rights which they had achieved after so many hardships and sacrifices, even to those who only very recently were in power and with the utmost cruelty had denied them these very same rights.<sup>51</sup>*

A substantial part of the Manifesto’s introduction is dedicated to a historical, quasi-mythical rendition of the achievements attributed to Maltese Socialism, starting by the introduction of rent regulation (so that the Maltese worker (“so as to ensure a home for the Maltese worker”), the privileging of the Maltese language (“so that everybody can understand what’s going on”), to the introduction of income tax (“so that those with higher incomes can contribute more than those with lower incomes”), the introduction of social benefits, and so on. In this narrative, the efforts of the Maltese Workers’ Movement were crowned when Malta became a republic:

*The Republic removed privileges and in their stead instilled amongst us work, tolerance, education, social justice and charity. The Republic which we set up together gave the right of freedom of expression, of freedom of conscience, of peaceful co-existence, equally, to all the Maltese, even to those who in the past did their utmost so that this would not come about.<sup>52</sup>*

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<sup>50</sup> Electoral Manifesto 1971.

<sup>51</sup> Electoral Manifesto 1976.

<sup>52</sup> Electoral Manifesto 1976.



The 'Maltese' becomes an articulation of a logic of difference in which antagonisms such as ruling classes, religious indoctrination and the capitalist jungle are pushed to the sides, at times being depicted as 'non-Maltese' aspects. The merging of nationalism with socialism is actually articulated as 'everybody is a worker' (which to an extent eclipses the concept of class struggle which forms part of the socialist/Marxist reading of social relations):

*To this movement a worker means any man who in some way or other contributes towards the social, material, intellectual and moral welfare of his fellowmen. In the eyes of Maltese Socialism a Judge in the Law Courts is as much a worker as the blacksmith in the dockyard, the artist as much as the fishmonger, the doctor as much as the mason, etc., etc.*

The 1981 Manifesto, is more or less a continuation of this nationalist-socialist rhetoric but is more often accompanied by the figure of the worker and the Workers' Movement which "derives its strength from the union among workers who uphold the same beliefs and who wish to live free from any bondage and in a democratic environment, founded on principles of social justice." The abstract 'socialist beliefs' are once again articulated in the following points:

- our country will remain an island of peace, free from all political and military affiliations;
- we will increase still further the levels of economic activity in order to continue to improve the living standards of the Maltese people;
- the material wealth which we will create will be distributed according to the principles of social justice;
- fundamental human rights and liberties will be respected; and
- all the Maltese people will be given equal opportunities in life.

### **2.3 : At the crossroads**

There are a number of questions which emerge from the co-existence of a seemingly structural capitalist developmental project and a very visible socialist rhetoric. Why would such a persistent socialist self-projection (and self-perception) emerge so much more clearly at a second stage of Labour's period in government? Were Labour's social and economic reforms such as the separation between Church and State, the nationalisation of banks and other companies which provided for the economic infrastructure of the country and the progressive increase in wages, inspired by a socialist ideology or seen as necessary for the success of capitalist development through a programme of industrialisation? Sammy Meilaq, a dockyard worker, chairperson of the Malta Drydock's council when it was managed by the workers themselves and an important organic intellectual hailing from the working class seems to opt for the former explanation:

*Socialism can only be constructed over a period of time in a series of progressive phases, rather than in one 'magical' moment. [...] In Malta's case, during the 1970s, economic development happened thanks to a mix of government and private enterprise. [...] In a few years, from a colonized people, we had become owners, and we were controlling vital aspects of the economy, including the banks, energy, telecommunications, the airline and others.<sup>53</sup>*

Yet, despite such socialist idealism, the development project in Malta was no socialist 'Great Leap Forward'.<sup>54</sup> Notwithstanding alternative models of development such as Cuba's effort to base its development on south-south solidarity.<sup>55</sup> the Maltese model of development was clearly

<sup>53</sup> S. Meilaq in M. Grech, 'Epilogu Kritiku,' in S. Meilaq, *Biċċiet Minni* (Malta, 2013) 390.

<sup>54</sup> A point made by Michael Grech in his critical appraisal of Sammy Meilaq's autobiography.

<sup>55</sup> See for example A. Hickling-Hudson, G.C. Gonzalez, R. Preston, *The Capacity to Share: A Study of Cuba's International Cooperation in Educational Development* (London, 2012).

a capitalist project. Grech even questions the prevalent description of the economy as run by the Mintoff Administration as a mixed economy in which the ‘vital’ areas belonged to the people and the other ‘less vital’ areas run by private enterprise as he argues that the country could not be run without the latter ‘less vital’ areas.<sup>56</sup> Towards the end of the 1970s, Mario Vella had already sifted through the socialist rhetoric which was prevalent at the time and interpreted the government’s effort as a ‘Maltese mode’ of dependent capitalist development:

*a model similar [...] to the Brazilian model that emerged in 1964. This model requires the separation of the labour market and the foreign market. The local market (dominated by a policy of low wages) is supplied via traditional industries not usually of interest to foreign capital. The foreign market is supplied by almost exclusively foreign capital which is interested in the country concerned because of low wages which in their turn remain low because of the low cost of living.*<sup>57</sup>

In different academic papers which spanned over different decades, Mario Vella kept deconstructing this post-colonial moment from different perspectives, including the colonizer/colonized perspective of development, the Malta Labour Party’s ideological balancing acts, the role and extent of the Malta’s late industrialization process and the clerical/non-clerical intellectual’s ignoring of such process. He mainly contextualizes his arguments in a Gramscian perspective of a struggle between opposing social blocs, which were often led by different sections of the Maltese bourgeoisie.<sup>58</sup> Vella identifies the promotion by the MLP of a “‘progressive’ historic social bloc cemented together by a national-populist ideology, presented as a non-communist but progressive corporatism, presided over by a paternalistic and caring state.”<sup>59</sup> Such a social bloc, which made up the backbone of the Labour Party, was held together by its antagonism to the more ‘conservative’ bloc, which thus served to essentialize its own identity. It was dominated by the interests of manufacturing capital but numerically supported by Dockyard workers and the industrial employees of the public sector.<sup>60</sup>

This brings me to note some aporetic tension between Vella’s different readings of the historical moment under study. In his 1994 paper, Vella argues that between 1971 and 1987, “the Labour Government is clearly caught between the pressing need to provide a decent standard of living to the people as well as to secure the fullest possible employment on the one hand and the need to attract export-oriented industrial investment on the other”.<sup>61</sup> Then, in his 2009 paper, Vella provides a more radical reading:

*Old Labour under Mintoff [was] a populist party for whom socialist rhetoric was necessary to co-opt and mobilize the working class for the development of capitalism, specifically for a development programme driven by export-oriented foreign direct investment, one typical of late industrialising peripheral economies [which] often resulted in stunted dependent development.*<sup>62</sup>

Though the two discourses are not in binary opposition, they provided spaces for comparison. The first reading is a more hopeful analysis of a Labour Party caught in the contradictions of having to deal with colonial legacies while embracing the economic paradigms of the economic centre, yet still struggling to keep a focus on the categories of people who were the victims of an unjust distribution of wealth, of lack of recognition and representation, with the aim of bettering their condition. The second is a bleaker, apparently determined reading in which socialism sounds much like a *simulacrum*, with no spaces for collective action. Here the party is no modern prince.

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<sup>56</sup> Grech, 391.

<sup>57</sup> L. Sciberras and M. Vella, *Wara r-Repubblika: Versi* (Malta, 1979), 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> Vella, ‘Economics of Hypocrisy,’ 370.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 379-80.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>61</sup> Vella, ‘That Favourite Dream,’ 70.

<sup>62</sup> Vella, ‘Economics of Hypocrisy,’ 355-56.

I would like to hang on to this interpretative tension between these two discourses in order to locate the place of education.

### **3 : On discursive Tensions and Open Identities**

*We are now in the process of reforming [...] education so that we can increase the number and the efficiency of our middle management, engineers and so on.*<sup>63</sup>

Sultana argues that, '[education's] form, content, delivery, assessment and duration, the language of instruction that is adopted, the pedagogical modes that are preferred, the relationship between certification and the employment market [...] are all dependent on which group succeeds in establishing its agendas and generally enforcing these on other groups.'<sup>64</sup>

Following the deconstruction of the local tense relationship between ideological rhetoric and deterministic conceptualisation of development in a post-colonial milieu, such a perspective may contribute to the stepping away from the dichotomic position between two extremes typical of a colonial frame of mind and the opening up the diverse public spheres in which such struggles take place. In his 'Discourse Theory', Laclau, in stating that "no identity is closed in itself but is submitted to constant displacements in terms of chains of equivalence and differences combinations and substitutions"<sup>65</sup> implies that such struggles are part and parcel of a continuous identity formation of the different social relations. This may provide better insights in the complexity of such situations.

Thus, in this latter section of the essay, I shall briefly revisit the role of 'education as struggle' as articulated in one of the first major reforms which was spearheaded by the Labour Government, the Comprehensivisation of schools. I chose to focus on this particular reform, instead of other important reforms which characterised this period, such as the intensification of vocational education and the worker-student scheme for a number of reasons.<sup>66</sup>

I shall first look at the discourses on which such a reform was constructed. Which voids in the 'bleak present'<sup>67</sup> was such a reform addressing? Which antagonisms was this reform engaging with? Was it trying to transform a chain of equivalence (us versus them) in a logic of difference (it is us, and an insignificant them)? In the following excerpt from the MLP's manifesto of 1971, one may get an idea:

*The Nationalist Party came to power through undemocratic means. Even though it had huge funds to dispose of, the Nationalist Government failed in its aim to make our country viable through its own earnings and resources, without the need for foreign aid.*

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<sup>63</sup> From a talk by then Maltese Prime Minister Dom Mintoff to members of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), London, 8 December 1977 – the second in nine months. As quoted in J. Muscat, 'Fordism, Multinationals and SMEs in the periphery. The case of microstate Malta 1964-2000', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bristol (2007).

<sup>64</sup> R.G. Sultana, *Education and National Development: Historical Perspectives on Vocational Schooling in Malta* (Malta, 1992), 55.

<sup>65</sup> E. Laclau, *The Philosophical Roots of Discourse Theory*. Retrieved from: [http://www.essex.ac.uk/centres/theostud/documents\\_and\\_files/pdf/Laclau%20-%20philosophical%20roots%20of%20discourse%20theory.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/centres/theostud/documents_and_files/pdf/Laclau%20-%20philosophical%20roots%20of%20discourse%20theory.pdf) on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2014

<sup>66</sup> At the look of it, this reform is the one which is the least directly linked with the development paradigm and widely viewed as a leftist project. Another important reason would be that in collective memories, this reform seems to stick in terms of its failures. This gives me an opportunity to look at whose interests is the surviving dominant narrative portraying. One last reason is the similarity with the present situation, in which a Labour Government which in its first years in government is implementing a reform which has to do with selection, though this time, it is the other way round.

<sup>67</sup> As Bauman would put it, policies, being future-oriented by definition, devalue the present and make it: 'ugly, abhorrent and unendurable,' in S.J. Ball, *The Education Debate* (Bristol, 2011).

*And as it failed to reach this aim, it also failed in its other aim, that of obtaining for Malta that state of independence achieved by other nations of our size.*<sup>68</sup>

I shall delve deeper into this from the perspectives of the two discursive routes which I tackled in the second part of this essay: capitalist programme of late industrial development and socialist transformation.

A dominant discourse which at the time was characterising development economics, the Human Capital Theory,<sup>69</sup> stated that there is a direct relationship between investment in education (usually measured as years of schooling) and the productivity of workers (both on the workers' income and in their countries' economic growth).<sup>70</sup> Sultana locates such a discourse in the efforts of the main capitalist institutions which were orchestrating the developmentalist paradigm at the economic centre of a global world system:

*The view that education was the solution to economic difficulties was being pushed by influential international agencies such as UNESCO, the International Labour Office and the World Bank.*<sup>71</sup>

Thus 'education for all'<sup>72</sup> was the nodal point which underpinned the educational reforms of this era and thus such a notion became an arena where to determine whose interest were prevailing. Conservative agendas could be observed at work on a macro scale within the international institutions which pushed the 'education for all/education as the solution' agendas. In the World Bank strategy under the McNamara administration, the development paradigm started being accompanied by pro-poor discourses and measures such as the creation of the International Development Association, which were meant to seriously challenge the communist ownership of social justice discourses. This explains some of the apparent overlaps of conservative and progressive discourses.<sup>73</sup> On a local level, the 'Secondary Education for All' reform was discussed and implemented by the previous Nationalist administration, which had the interests of the mercantilist capital at its backbone, yet a mainly selective system was retained.<sup>74</sup> Also, judging by the way Labour's comprehensive schools reform was undermined by exponents of the conservative bloc, such as teachers and particular newspapers<sup>75</sup>, evidences the weaknesses of hegemonic hold which the progressive bloc had on society. This can be also be observed in the relatively sheepish attitude with which the Labour Party and the education authorities introduced the reforms and how they started slowly retreating from the very beginning by allowing Private Schools, allowing partial selection, by the removal of the Minister of Education responsible for its ideation and its implementation, and finally its total scrapping just before the 1981 election.

In such a scenario of a conservative domination over meanings in the education field, the implementation of the comprehensive schooling model as an interpretation by the Labour Party of the 'education for all' paradigm, must have stemmed, at least in part, from the different beliefs which set apart the Labour Party from the Nationalist Party. Peter Mayo, apart from the centrality given to the education-production nexus (contributing to the country's development),

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.um.edu.mt/projects/maltaelections/maltesepolitics/politicalparties/manifestos>

<sup>69</sup> Mainly developed by the Chicago School of Economics. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_capital).

<sup>70</sup> K. Mundy and A. Verger, 'The World Bank and the Global Governance of Education in a Changing World Order' [to be published in *IJES.*, 5].

<sup>71</sup> Sultana, 'Education and National Development,' 163.

<sup>72</sup> This discourse should not be directly linked with the 'Education for All' discourse which was later promoted by UNESCO.

<sup>73</sup> The International Development Association (IDA), an international financial institution which offers concessional loans and grants to the world's poorest developing countries, was set-up in 1960. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Development\\_Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Development_Association).

<sup>74</sup> D. Zammit Marmarà, 'The ideological struggle over comprehensive education in Malta,' in R.G. Sultana, ed., *Yesterday's Schools: Readings in Maltese Educational History* (Malta, 2001), 257.

<sup>75</sup> For a full account see *ibid.*

the push towards transformative action, the importance of the communal and collective dimensions of learning, the prominence to social sciences, identifies the widening of access to education at all levels for underprivileged groups and the dismantling of structures that are perceived to contribute to the reproduction of privileges as important characteristics of socialist education.<sup>76</sup> This explains why countries, with important leftist political traditions, such as Sweden, Norway, France and Great Britain, between 1960 and 1980 ‘went Comprehensive.’<sup>77</sup>

Thus, it is significant to go again through minister Agatha Barbara’s discourse which she was making at the time. As she explains the aims of such reforms, she weaves, in an apparently seamless fashion, all the tensions which occur at the crossroads of capitalist development and the implementation of the socialist egalitarian project:

*to provide everybody with the same opportunities in education; to improve the status of manual workers, at the same time increasing the personal competence of the individual and his awareness of his contribution towards the country's development; to foster encouragement so that Malta attains economic independence; to alter the Maltese educational system from one based on the English system to one designed to meet Malta's needs and at the same time compatible with the system obtaining in Western Europe; to nurture among the Maltese and Gozitans freedom of thought and a sense of responsibility of the individual.*<sup>78</sup>

Zammit Marmarà interprets this comprehensivisation reform as the MLP’s particular articulation of what Carnoy and Samoff term as the ‘transition state’, a state which is actively trying to challenge the traditional pillars on which the country depended:

*The educational systems of transition states are thus much more important in shaping ideology than was the educational system of the conditioned capitalist state it replaced... Through education [...] the state attempts to give a new meaning to citizenship, one that is largely political and socio-collective rather than economic and individualistic.*<sup>79</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

From such an exposition, it is difficult to determine whether Gramsci’s account of the Modern Prince, the collective will which asserted itself in action, was correct. It is still not clear what role may the political party assume when it accepts the different tensions resulting from the different paradigms and interests it has to manage.

What may have been a worthwhile exercise in challenging my own assumptions was the self-imposed distancing both from the common-sense left/right methodological essentialisms and monolithic nationalistic historical narratives. Such a standpoint helped the unleashing of the complexities on the unsuspecting author!

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<sup>76</sup> P.Mayo, ‘The Worker Student Scheme 1978-1987’: Consistencies and Contradictions in Labour’s Socialist Policies,’ in J. Chircop, ed., *Revisiting Labour History* (Malta, 2012), 371 – 374.

<sup>77</sup> Zammit Marmarà, 254.

<sup>78</sup> *Times of Malta* 12 Dec. 1972, as quoted in R.G. Sultana, ‘Education and Social Transition: Vocationalism, Ideology and the problems of Development,’ *International Review of Education*, Vol. 41, no. 3-4 (1995), 202.

<sup>79</sup> Carnoy and Samoff as quoted in Zammit Marmarà, 259.