

The construction of the Citizen and the 'Other' in Schools: An Analysis of Social Studies Curricula and Textbooks used in State Schools

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Abstract: One aim of schooling, as the role of the nation-state, is the creation of the citizen (Dewey, 2006). However, no citizen can be created without the creation of the 'other' (Ahmad, 2009; Sultana, 2008; Mason, 2007). In this essay I ask 'who is *the* Maltese citizen, as the selected ambassador of *the* culture that propels *this* society, and who are his/her 'others'?' I seek to answer these questions by looking at the state's syllabi and books used in Social Studies in Maltese primary schools and argue how Maltese are given a monolithic identity marked by them being Christian and European. This process is inevitably violent upon the 'other' who lives with (or amongst) the Maltese in a context where Huntington's (1993) "doomsday image" (Brasted, 1997, p. 8) is becoming increasingly relevant.

Keywords: nationalism, Maltese citizen, othering

Education as the Creation of the 'Citizen'

Dewey (2006), through a historical analysis, identified three main philosophies of education. Plato's idea of an education, although respecting individuals' different needs, fitted people in a limiting social model. This was an education for the reproduction of society whereby change was not desirable.

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The second philosophy, the Enlightenment, aimed at creating the 'man' as a member of "humanity, as distinct from a state" (Dewey, 2006, p. 96). Such ideal left no institution, besides Nature, capable of educating the masses:

The first step in freeing men from external chains was to emancipate them from the internal chains of false beliefs and ideas. What was called social life, existing institutions, were too false and corrupt to be intrusted with this work. How could it be expected to undertake it when the undertaking meant its own destruction? (p.97)

Flicthe and Hegel argued that the private individual "is of necessity an egoistic, irrational being, enslaved to his appetites and to circumstances unless he submits voluntarily to the educative discipline of state institutions and laws" (Dewey, 2006, pp.98-99). Education was promoted as the role of the nation-state, as a means of regenerating itself, and its aim became the creation of the 'citizen'. This "narrowed the conception of the social aim to those who were members of the same political unit, and reintroduced the idea of the subordination of the individual to the institution" (p. 100).

Pursuantly, one role of Maltese educational systems is assumed to be the creation of Maltese citizens. This is not to say that this is the only objective of education: Curricula usually try to equilibrate between conflicting aims (Schultz, 2009; Adamson & Morris, 2007). A focus on individual emancipation would be worth identifying in educational systems, even though the creation of the individual entrepreneur, or Homo Economicus (Read, 2009; Hursh & Martina, 2003), has become a brutal competitor. This is, however, beyond the scope of this writing.

Culture neutral citizenship is a myth as, even if states promise to treat all citizens equally, history suggests that one particular group has shaped institutions to fit its needs, thus forcefully representing their culture in the construction of social identity (Chircop, 2010). Additionally, social identity can only be fabricated by marking the difference between 'us' and 'others' (Ahmad, 2009; Sultana, 2008; Mason, 2007). In this article I will analyse how Maltese citizens are constructed through the subject of Social Studies in Maltese primary schools. I will analyse curricula by the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department (CMeLD) along with the three text books used in state schools in the final year of primary schooling (Year 6).

Context and Limitations

Schools are political institutions (Kalenkin-Fishman, 2011). Textbooks and curricula are powerful tools in controlling the outcomes of education (Fenech, 2002) and were, along with time table and teacher training, how the Soviet

system maintained quality and standards without directly measuring learning outcomes (Alexander, 2001).

Social Studies was one of the five main (and examinable) subjects in Maltese primary schools, along with Mathematics, Religion, Maltese and English. Arguably, the emphasis on Social Studies and Religion has decreased in recent years, with more emphasis being given to other subjects, such as Science. Nevertheless, when analysing the construction of national identity and the 'other', every aspect of schooling retains importance.

Arguably, after the mass media, educational discourse is most influential in society, especially when it comes to the communication of beliefs that are not usually conveyed in everyday conversation or the media. All children, adolescents, and young adults, are daily confronted for many hours with lessons and textbooks – the only books that are obligatory reading in our culture. That is, there is no comparable institution and discourse that is as massively inculcated as that of school (van Dijk, 2002, p. 154).

Social Studies is divided into three (CMELD, 2005a), and so are the textbooks used in Year 6:

- The Geographical Environment: *L-Ambjent Ġeografiku* (Gilson, 2006)
- The Social Environment: *L-Ambjent Soċjali* (Pace, 2007)
- The Historical Environment: *L-Ambjent Storiku* (Dipartiment tal-Kurrikulu, 2008)

The first two books are written by single authors while *L-Ambjent Storiku* is a collection of chapters by various authors. The textbooks involve text, illustrations (black and white) and exercises. Altogether, these form important parts of a discourse (Barthes & Duisit, 1975) that will be analysed. Omission of information is also very important (Ata, 2007; Ihtiyar, 2003). Since Social Studies is taught in Maltese, on quoting textbooks and curricula, I will translate quoted material myself, keeping in mind that I am no qualified translator. The original text will be quoted alongside translated texts to increase faithfulness.

All the above titles involve the definite article: Students at schools must learn about *the* geographical/social/historical environment notwithstanding the different realities, interpretations and contestations for each space. This suggests one construction of each type, attributing a single identity to Maltese society. The authoritarian knowledge selected in textbooks violently constructs an imagined, fixed reality (Mazawi, 2011). I will refer to this monolithic creation as *the* Maltese citizen/culture.

*Permezz ta' l-istudju tas-soċjeta',
L-ISTUDJI SOĊJALI, il-bniedem
jaġġraf iktar x'inhu dak li jsawwar
u jgħib 'il quddiem din is-soċjeta'
(Pace, 2007, p. ii)*

*Through the study of society,
SOCIAL STUDIES, mankind
better recognizes what is it that
holds and thrusts forwards this
society (Pace, 2007, p. ii)*

Who is *the* Maltese citizen, as the selected ambassador of *the* culture that propels *this* society, and who are his/her 'others'? Before trying to answer these questions using textbooks and syllabi, it is important to be aware of inescapable limitations of this methodology.

Although there is "an ambition on the part of a writer to deliver his text as an object whose interpretation (...) *has already commenced* and is therefore already constrained, and constraining, its interpretation" (Said, 1975, p. 9), the author can be deemed 'dead' once his work starts being interpreted (Barthes, 1968). My analysis can be thought of as the actual 'writing' of the text. I am by no means neutral (Dickson, 1988) as I "understand, or interpret, the new and unfamiliar by comparing it with that with which [... I am] already familiar" (Fleming, 2003, p. 260).

Such problem is more pronounced since these texts will be 'written' by children, according to instructions given to them by adults. Teachers are 'carvers' of curricula (Testa, 2002; Borg & Mayo, 2002; Alexander, 2001). While trying to sociologically imagine the effects that these texts have on children, I remain ignorant of the multitude of contexts in which this learning occurs and with which, according to Vygotsky (Vella, 2013), education is inseparable. Irrefutably, my analysis of the texts is a violent one.

Furthermore, non-state schools have the possibility of using alternative texts. Additionally, manifestations in textbooks differ by subject (Mazawi, 2011) and it cannot be assumed that Social Studies is the only citizen manufacturing line. The arguments proposed in this article are by no means hegemonic throughout schooling. Besides, even if they were, the effects of schooling would remain unpredictable (Vella, 2013; Herrera, 2004).

Nationality, Supranationality and the 'Velvet Curtain'

The Westphalia treaty, in 1648, laid the foundations of the nation-state (Seyhanoglu, 2006). "Eric Hobsbawm held that nationalism was originally a means for elites to exert control over the diverse, increasingly mobile, and often democratically inclined populations within their respective territories" (Warf, 2012, p. 273). Since the nation-state remains an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) it must be safeguarded through citizenship and nationalism. Schools are one such tool of reification.

Nationalistic ideologies can be constructed on three interrelated concepts: origin/race, culture/religion, and territory (Yuval-Davis, 1993). Yuval-Davis argues how nationalism can be viewed either in contrast with universalism (Kedourie, 1960) or with racism since, while racism is negative and transmitted within national boundaries, nationalism is positive and transmitted between them (Anderson, 1983). Yuval-Davis (1993, p. 183) rejects Anderson's dichotomy as "exclusions of 'the Other' can become a positive and inherent part of national ethnicities" with Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa mentioned as examples.

As ideologies, racism and nationalism have a common historical origin and formal characteristics that may simultaneously overlap and contrast with one another (Miles 1993, pp.53-79). In contemporary debates, the focus on culture and ancestry often provides an overlapping common ground between racism and nationalism in current signifying practices (Gullestad, 2002, p. 59).

After the Second World War, blatant racism was no longer supported (van Dijk, 2002; Gullestad, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 1993). However, with sharper definitions of nation-states, the importance of self-reliance and xenophobic depictions of the 'other' increased (Warf, 2012) and in "the 1990s problematizing and stigmatizing discourse on refugees and immigrants has reappeared more openly, even in mainstream parties" (van Dijk, 2002, p. 156). The construct of "'culture' now replaces 'race' in the rhetoric of the political right" (Gullestad, 2002, p. 59) with claims that the 'other' is 'unmixable' with 'us' (Yuval-Davis, 1993, p. 191). This has been the case in Malta, as witnessed by current politics vis-à-vis the possible 'push-back' policy for African irregular immigrants. The existence of neo-Nazi groups, such as Norman Lowell's, serves politicians who demonize them (Grech, 2011; The Malta Independent, 2005) to "gloss over the xenophobia and racism in their own parties" (Gullestad, 2002, p. 57).

"The national myth of Mediterranean islands grows in inverse proportion to their size - the smaller the island, the greater its myth of identity" (Johns, 2002, p. 84). Sultana (2008, p. 15), schooled when Malta was a British colony, recounts how he grew up thinking of himself "as white, as European, as Christian, and indeed as almost English". Schools depict a reality that is "generally monolithic and one-dimensional" by focusing on "white Christians (...) who are generally able-bodied and heterosexuals (...) who live in traditional families" (Calleja, Cauchi & Grech, 2010, p. 12).

Friggieri (2008) refers to religion and language as crucial in the making of *the* Maltese, along with his/her courtesy in welcoming people. Catholicism is, possibly, the strongest part of *the* Maltese identity (Lorenz, 2011) with 98 per cent of the Maltese population being Roman Catholics (Lorenz, 2011;

Rountree; 2011; Grixti, 2005). “Catholicism has traditionally permeated every sphere of public and domestic, social and political life” (Rountree, 2011, p. 851). Thus, when looking at Religion, Christian traditions and folklore become important marks of *the* Maltese identity. They are what Armstrong (1983) calls ‘border guards’ used in keeping the ‘other’ out of a restrictive definition of identity (Yuval-Davis, 1993).

In 1989, Education Minister Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, who later became president of Malta, “pointed out that Malta is formed by Catholic values just like the rest of Europe. In that sense, our culture defines our identity” (Chircop, 2010, p. 239). Thus, *the* Maltese citizen can form part of the ‘Christian Club’ (Marranci, 2004) called the European Union (EU): Christianity is *the* culture used to construct *the* Maltese as European.

The following excerpts from Social Studies syllabi are used to extrapolate the foundations used in imagining *the* Maltese identity:

l-Lingwa hija l-karatteristika ewlenija ta' l-identita` ta' Poplu u Nazzjon (...) Tajjeb li [studenti] jifhmu wkoll li meta n-nies ta' komunita` jirrelataw ma' simboli kulturali komuni, bħalma huma l-Lingwa, it-Tradizzjonijiet, il-Festi u l-istil ta' ħajja, tikber aktar il-komunikazzjoni bejniethom (CMeLD, 2005f, p. 96).

The Language is the main characteristic for the identity of a people and nation (...) [students] should understand that when people in a community relate with common cultural symbols, such as the Language, the Traditions, the Feasts and the way of life, communication between them grows (CMeLD, 2005f, p. 96).

It-Twemmin Nisrani baqa' niezzeżel sa żmienna u hu wieħed mis-sisien tal-kultura taġġna (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 130).

The Christian Belief has permeated through the ages and is one of the foundations of our culture (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 130).

[studenti] jagħrfu li Malta hi fl-Ewropa u li hi wkoll parti mill-għaqda ta' pajjiżi fl-Ewropa magħrufa bħala l-Unjoni Ewropea (CMeLD, 2005a, p. vii).

[students] recognize that Malta is in Europe and forms part of a group in Europe known as the European Union (CMeLD, 2005a, p. vii).

The Maltese identity, as extrapolated from literature and the analysed texts, seems to rest on three pillars: Language, Christianity and European. The last two, with their sets of border-guards, like traditions, folklore and values, are given the most importance.

Sultana (1995, p. 118) argues that a “world marked by economic, political and cultural internationalisation” has given birth to supranationalism as

communities become increasingly organised along “multinational non-state lines”. Europeanization and Christianity provide *the* Maltese with a broader identity. This “broadest level of identification with which he intensely identifies” is his/her civilization (Huntington, 1993, p. 24). Huntington predicted that a clash of civilizations, with the fiercest one between Western Europe and the Islamic World, will replace the Cold War. This conjecture has been widely criticized while at the same time all its critics have accepted worrying increasing levels of Islamophobia (see Marranci, 2004; Said, 2001; Brasted, 1997). Malta, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, can be considered as lying close to Huntington’s Velvet Curtain (replacing the Iron Curtain).

“In effect, Huntington seems to have constructed the ultimate stereotypical image – a doomsday image” (Brasted, 1997, p. 8). Accordingly, the negative representation of the ‘other’ is based more on religion than on nationality: Christianity and Islam are still perceived to be locked in war (Ata, 2007). Arabs are simplified as Muslims, and Muslims as terrorists (Merskin, 2004). Marranci (2004) also speaks of increasing institutional racism along with other forms Islamophobia.

There's since been a noticeable de-escalation in that discourse [Huntington's], but to judge from the steady amount of hate speech and actions, plus reports of law enforcement efforts directed against Arabs, Muslims and Indians all over the country, the paradigm stays on (Said, 2001).

The vilification of Arabs and Muslims is found in numerous media (Baramki, 2011; Merskin, 2004; van Dijk, 2002; Hamilton, 1991) and has increased after the Cold War (Merskin, 2004; Sayyid, 1997; Brasted, 1997; Hamilton, 1991) and again after the 11th September attacks (Maziak, 2005; Merskin, 2004; Said, 2001). Textbooks misrepresent Arabs in several countries (Ata, 2007; Ihtiyar, 2003). Malta is no exception with religious iconography constructing images of this ‘other’ (Calleja et al., 2010) which is not only the “Saracen”, but all non-Europeans and “the African in particular, represented as a deficient figure ripe for European missionary intervention” (Borg & Mayo, 2007, p. 180).

The Christian Maltese

“Roman Catholicism is established by law as the official religion” of *the* Maltese (Grixti, 2006, p. 109). “For centuries, Malta has been synonymous with Catholicism” (Gellel & Buchanan, 2011, p. 318) to the extent that “First Communion is an initiation into Maltese society as much as an initiation into the Church” (Rountree, 2011, p. 857). *L-Ambjent Soċjali* contains a total of twelve pictures showing Churches or Catholic Saints as the only religious

figures, while *the* Maltese culture is defined according to the following (Pace, 2007, p. 72):

- National Symbols: with the most common ones being the coat of arms of the Maltese Republic along with the national language, flag, anthem, bird, tree, plant and feasts;
- Folklore: old tales, legends, sayings, crafts, construction, games and *għana* (traditional music);
- Traditions: including Christmas, Good Friday, *L-Imnarja* (the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul), St. Gregory, blessing of animals, traditional food and others;
- Village *fešta*.

The vast majority of these symbols are Christian, serving as border-guards in keeping the non-Christian 'other' out. The national anthem, for example, is a prayer to God (Friggieri, 2008). This phenomenon is not exclusively Maltese: Europe has become closer to Huntington's myth that it is based on Judaeo-Christian values, meaning that for Muslims *in* Europe to become Muslims of Europe they must convert to 'Euro-Islam' or remain "aliens in a Christocentric European Environment" (Marranci, 2004, p. 106). This is not limited to Muslims, but to all non-Christians, whether they are born in the country or not:

Linking citizenship with Christian identity can be considered as a discourse of exclusion in relation to Maltese citizens who are not Christian. It conflates citizenship and religious affiliation, while the latter is not the same for all Maltese (Chircop, 2010, pp.239-240).

"The first Sicilian immigrants [who settled in Malta] were known to honour the Earth Mother" (Lorenz, 2011, p. 506). Social Studies instils children with the conception that prehistoric temples were built to worship "false gods" ("*allat foloz*" CMeLD, 2005g, p. 128), with the textbook adopting the term "some god of fertility or abundance" ("*Xi alla tal-fertilita' jew abbondanza*" [Grech, 2008, p. 21]). The neo-Pagan community considers these temples as places of worship (Rountree, 2011) and a Wiccan friend of mine have described the terms 'false gods' and 'some god', always with a small g, as 'outrageous'.

On the contrary, the Christian God is factual: The Bible is used in *L-Ambjent Storiku* as a source of historical knowledge. Grech (2008, p. 7) asks students "Who was born first, Jesus or Moses?" while Farrugia and Said (2008, p. 31) quote the history of St. Paul's shipwreck directly from the Bible. This story includes God's (the Christian one) miraculous healing of the father of the leader of the island after prayer to pagan gods failed to work, thus

emphasizing their fallaciousness, and the conversion of *the* Maltese, though not completely, to Christianity.

[*Studenti*] *Jaraw kif din il-ġrajja [in-nawfragju ta' San Pawl] għadha hājja fostna billi Malta baqgħet tħaddan it-twenmin Nisrani sal-lum* (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 112).
[*Students*] *See how this story [St. Paul's Shipwreck] is still thriving amongst us as Malta has continued to uphold Christian beliefs* (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 112).

Although the syllabus seems to posit otherwise, Christian Malta was not an outcome of St. Paul's presence but rather of "the immigration of Italians and expulsion of Muslims during the thirteenth century" (Johns, 2002, p. 84). However, as will be later argued, the Muslim period is annihilated from the history part of Social Studies. In line with other European nations:

In misrepresenting the Arabs and Islam, Maltese texts and mass media obscure Western culture's indebtedness to those other civilizations that are often denigrated in Western regimes of truth. Of course, this denigration becomes a feature of "common sense" that is manifest in a variety of ways (Borg & Mayo, 2007, p. 181).

Another construction is *the* Christian Maltese as welcoming of others. The word used in the Bible to refer to the way Maltese greeted St. Paul is '*hlewwa*' (Farrugia & Said, 2008, p. 31). This word is such an important part of *the* Maltese identity that '*oħla*', a related term, features in the Maltese national anthem (Friggieri, 2008). However, the Christian saying "I was a foreigner and you welcomed me" is not applied when it comes to some minorities in Malta - notably African immigrants (Calleja et al., 2010, p. 7).

Malta's tradition of hospitality is being slowly poisoned by the crisis [of irregular immigration]. New hard-line nationalist groups are springing up, while politicians from the two mainstream parties talk of "putting national interests before human rights" (Grech, 2009).

A Bridge between Europe and Africa?

"It has long been accepted that, during recent geological times, Europe and Africa were connected by a land bridge between Sicily and Tunis, of which Malta now forms one of the few remaining links" (Sinclair, 1924, p. 268). While some suggest that Malta was directly linked to Africa by a land-bridge (Goodwin, 2002; Sinclair, 1924; Spratt, 1867 cited in Magri, 2006), others limit their reference to a Sicily-Africa bridge (Voelker, 1999 cited in Sanmartin, 2003; Davis & Hedge, 1971). At circa 18,000 years B.P. Malta was only linked to Sicily which was separate from Africa (Pedley, Clarke & Galea, 2002;

Shackleton, van Andel, & Runnels, 1984). There seems to be some uncertainty whether Malta was directly connected to Africa or not in recent geological times and the syllabus, as shown below, recognizes this. The bridge to Africa is omitted in the textbook, stating that Malta was only connected to Sicily and continental Europe (Grech, 2008, p. 13).

Għar Dalam huwa l-akbar xhieda li Malta mhux dejjem kienet gżira (...) Malta kienet magħquda ma' l-Ewropa u forsi wkoll ma' l-Afrika (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 129)

Għar Dalam is the strongest evidence that Malta was not always an island (...) Malta was connected to Europe and possibly to Africa (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 129)

Whether a physical land-bridge or not, “Historically the Mediterranean Sea has acted more as a bridge than a barrier, encouraging trade and social contact between countries bordering it” (Gilmore, 1982, p. 177). Sultana disagrees and argues that history shows that Malta has served the opposite scope – keeping the African and Muslim ‘other’ out of Europe. This effect has increased with Malta’s membership in the EU and collaboration with Frontex operations to secure supranational borders (Sultana, 2008).

“Malta [still] serves as a bridge between Europe and North Africa and many refugees enter Maltese waters and are subsequently rescued and placed in Malta’s detention centres” (Durick, 2012, p. 27). The number of irregular immigrants, as boat people, arriving in Malta has been given the status of a ‘problem’ by local politicians (iNewsMalta, 2013; Times of Malta, 2013; Calleja et al., 2010; Rennie, 2005) even if others argue that the problem about immigration from Africa is “in people’s minds” as non-EU and EU citizens constitute a larger proportion of different ethnic minorities in Malta (Calleja et al., 2010, p. 3; Grech, 2009).

Visible inherited characteristics are very important in defining the ‘other’ (Ata, 2007; Marranci, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 1993). Falzon contends that the problem is not African immigrants’ number

but one of relative visibility of different groups and the way they were culturally constructed in the popular imagination (...) Black Africans have for centuries been deemed inferior (Grech, 2009).

I believe that, for many Maltese, the term ‘irregular immigrant’ brings to mind the picture of black Africans coming to Malta “uninvited” (Gullestad, 2002) by boats. The photograph below and the excerpt from *L-Ambjent Soċjali* seem to strengthen the image of Black Africans as immigrants. Question 6 reads “We should help refugees. They are people in need. (Discuss)”.

Isma' xi jghidu nies differenti fuq **I-OHRAJN**.

1. *Jien nghin lil kulhadd ghax kulhadd PROXXMU!* (din qalha siehbi tax-xoghol)
2. *Hobb lil ghajrek bhalek innifsek.* (din qalha Gesù)
3. *Meta kellna bżonn, dejjem sibna lil xulxin.* (il-girien tat-triq tagħna)
4. *Id-demm qatt ma jsir semm.* (Semm huwa velenu. Xi jfisser dan il-qawl? Għal min ngħiduh?)
5. *Dak li ma tridx li haddiehor jagħmel lilek, tagħmlux int lil haddiehor.* (Taqbel ma' dan?)
6. *Lir-refuġjati għandna ngħinuhom. Dawk nies fil-bżonn.* (Iddiskuti)
7. *Lill-vittmi tat-terremot għarnielhom il-flus. Fejn jaraw il-bżonn, il-Maltin iħobbu jgħinu mill-aħjar li jistgħu.* (Veru?)



Figure 1: Pace (2007, p. 4)

Africans continue to be viewed as people in need of 'our'/Western help (Grech, 2009; Borg & Mayo, 2007; Said, 2006) and a type of solidarity (fundraising) features in the Social Studies textbooks and syllabus (Pace, 2007, pp. 32-41) as not just a Maltese trait, but European:

l-EU turi hafna solidarjeta'. L-ikbar ammoni ta' għajnuniet imorru lejn l-Afrika. L-EU tgħin ukoll lill-Ewropa tal-Lvant u lill-Ewropa Ċentrali, speċjalment lill-pajjiżi Balkani li għaddew minn gwerra civili ftit taż-żmien ilu (Pace, 2007, p. 33).

The EU shows a lot of solidarity. The majority of help goes to Africa. The EU also helps Eastern and Central Europe, especially Balkan countries who have recently witnessed a civil war (Pace, 2007, p. 33).

Africans are mentioned further on in the same text as irregular immigrants (Pace, 2007, p. 42). In this instance, they are re-drawn as victims and people in need of 'our' help. Immigration is mentioned a third time, this time linked with having to leave a country due to dictatorship (Pace, 2007, p. 92).

Merino, Sqalli ta' 30 sena, ftiehem ma' Beneditt, Malti ta' 40 sena biex idahhlu madwar 30 persuna ta' nisel Afrikan fl-Italja (Pace, 2007, p. 42).

Merino, a 30-year-old Sicilian, made a deal with Beneditt, a 40-year-old Maltese, to bring about 30 persons of African lineage to Italy (Pace, 2007, p. 42).

The story of Africans being smuggled into Sicily is accompanied by a map showing Sicily and Malta, rather than a map showing the journey, and thus the proximity, between Northern Africa and Southern Europe. While the book contains three other maps showing parts of Europe (Pace, 2007, pp. 22, 33, 40), there is no map where Africa is incorporated.

It is repeatedly stated that Malta is part of Europe and the EU, and the EU is said to aid commerce, travelling and working abroad, a cleaner environment and a better life for its people (Gilson, 2006, p. 33). *L-Ambjent Ġeografiku* takes an increased Mediterranean perspective than the other books, with maps of the whole world and, especially, the Mediterranean. Social Studies expects students to know the countries surrounding this sea (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 108). Nevertheless, Maltese fail to strongly identify themselves as Mediterranean (Abela, 2006).

Local online newspapers are littered with comments problematizing illegal immigration from North Africa (see the comments to Cordina, 2013) while such 'nationalistic' discourse is never directed to the larger number of non-EU and EU citizens residing on the island. "African asylum seekers are generally considered to be the most 'culturally distant' from Maltese natives, in contrast to people who come from Europe" (Calleja et al., 2010, p. 4). Africans are seen as 'unmixable' with *the* European Maltese.

Social Studies vigorously promotes *the* Maltese as European. Euro coins are provided as the example where Maltese national symbols are exhibited (Pace, 2007, p. 66) while forgetting to state the greater number of symbols depicted on former Maltese coins. A good practice for antiracism in education would be to use communication technology to help students from different parts of the world get together (Bory & Mayo, 2007; Ministry of Education, 1999). Social studies does promote communication with students from other countries, as long as these countries are European (Pace, 2007, pp. 15-16; CMeLD, 2005g, p. 110):

[studenti] Jesperimentaw bl-e-mail u l-Internet biex jikkomunikaw ma' tfal oħra fl-Ewropa u jsaħħu l-valuri ta' ħbiberija u solidarjetà (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 110).

[students] experiment with the e-mail and the internet to communicate with other European children and strengthen the values of friendship and solidarity (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 110).

While Malta was sieged by both European and non-European countries, these stories are told differently. Probably in an effort to avoid over-romanticizing the Great Siege, this story is presented in short points (Calleja, 2008). The story of the Second World War is told by an old Maltese man on holiday in Italy with his grandchildren, after which story they go and enjoy an Italian coffee (Tabone, 2008, pp.64-69). The latter not only emphasizes that Italy and Malta are no longer locked in war, but are now friends. The same idea is not given about Turks, and, in a subsequent chapter, Valletta needed to be constructed, with the help of European leaders, to resist a possible further Turkish attack (Debono & Calleja, 2008). There are other instances where the construct of friendship between Maltese and Europeans is strengthened

throughout the textbooks with an indication that *the* Maltese became increasingly European with time:

Matul l-Assedju l-Maltin u l-Kavallieri taw sehemhom bi qlubija u għaqda kbira. Din id-determinazzjoni ta' l-Insara għenet biex it-Torok jindunaw li kellhom biċċa xogħol diffiċli quddiemhom (Calleja, 2008, p. 40).

During the Siege the Maltese and the Knights did their parts with great unity and courage. This determination of the Christians helped the Turks realize that they had a difficult task ahead (Calleja, 2008, p. 40).

Ġie deċiż ukoll li l-palazzi tal-Ordni ma kellhomx jinbnew maqtugħin għalihom mill-bqija tad-djar tal-belt; jiġifieri ma kellux ikun hemm il-Collachio riservat biss għall-kavallieri (Debono & Calleja, 2008, p. 53).

It was decided that the Knight's palaces had not to be separate from other houses in the city; meaning there was to be no Collachio reserved solely to knights (Debono & Calleja, 2008, p. 53).

Jifhmu li din il-gwerra [it-Tieni Gwerra Dinjija] gābet tiddil fil-mentalità tal-Maltin li issa kienu thalltu sew mal-barrani. B'hekk huma ddakkru wkoll mill-istil ta' ħajja tagħhom u mill-kultura tagħhom (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 135).

They [students] understand that this war [the Second World War] brought a change in the mentality of the Maltese who mixed up well with the foreigner. They learned from their way of life and their culture (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 135).

The supranationality of *the* Maltese is European. However, what makes up *the* European and *the* non-European? The Council of Europe (1997, p. 2) perceives values of “peace, mutual understanding and tolerance” as important in education. The syllabus provides the following overlaps between Maltese and European cultures:

[studenti] Isemmu r-rispett tad-drittijiet umani, il-ħidma favur il-paċi, id-demokrazija parlamentari, il-Qorti tal-ġustizzja, ir-rispett ta' twemmin reliġjuż u politiku differenti; jiktbu xi paragrafi qosra dwar temi komuni: id-drittijiet tat-tfal u l-ħidma favur il-paċi (CMeLD, 2005f, p. 96)

They [students] mention the respect for human rights, the struggle for peace, the parliamentary democracy, the Court of justice, the respect towards different religious and political beliefs; they write some short paragraphs addressing common themes: the rights of children and the struggle for peace (CMeLD, 2005f, p. 96)

Does linking of these values with *the* European, suggest that these are not shared by the 'other'? If so, and if, as suggested by Huntington, *the* European and *the* Muslim are enemies, it follows that they are exact opposites: Muslims do not support democracy, are violent (Marranci, 2004), and do not tolerate 'our' religious and political beliefs.

School textbooks present European values, views, societies and politics as superior to those of 'others', while third world countries are painted in a homogeneous way, usually associated with problems (Ihtiyar, 2003; van Dijk, 2002). Texts ignore and exclude minority children in the classroom (Ihtiyar, 2003; van Dijk, 2002). All the names found in Social Studies are Maltese or European, except for historical figures and Omar (Figure 2), who at 14 years of age witnessed the murder of his mother in civil war and is now trying to rebuild his life in Sudan. While the author has, commendably, not listed Omar as opting for immigration, Africans remain unable to rule their countries: they are undemocratic and need our help. The textbooks remain in line with other Maltese school texts that rarely "provide illustrations revealing an ethnic mix" (Borg & Mayo, 2007, p. 181).



Figure 2: Pace (2007, p. 18)

A Bridge between Cultures?

Under Muslim occupation between the years 869 to 1127 A.D., "Christianity disappeared from the Maltese archipelago" (Johns, 2002). Additionally,

Though Count Roger the Norman made the islands a vassalage in 1091, the islands retained their Muslim character for a number of years and Muslims continued to wield political power over local issues. It was King Roger the Second of Sicily who incorporated Malta in his kingdom (Calleja, et al., 2010, p. 9).

A census carried out in 1240 counted, excluding slaves and the poor, 771 Muslim, 250 Christian and 33 Jewish families (Vanhove, 2007).

Though Malta became one of the last European island groups to fall to the Muslims, ironically it would be the place where they would stay the longest and have the most lasting cultural impact. In this sense as well as many others, Malta truly bridges the Mediterranean (Goodwin, 2002, p. 17).

One should keep in mind that not all Muslims who settled in Mediterranean Europe were 'Arabs': "In reality, they were of many African ethnic groups as well as many populations in Asia" (Goodwin, 2002, p. 18). However, religion and language "capture the quintessential manifestations through which Arab societies can be known" (Mazawi & Sultana, 2010, p. 21).

Thirty years ago, Ballou (1983, p. 23) claimed that "The Maltese are not Italians, and never were. Not to put too fine a point upon the matter, they are Arabs in their manners, customs, and language". He went on to refer to the *faldetta* (*ghonnella*, a form of women's folkloristic head dress), a "semi-Oriental custom of sex" (p.45), *ghana*, architecture and the number of places of worship towering over the villages as exemplars of Arab culture in Malta.

Education can emphasize some parts of history and culture at the expense of other parts. Under British rule, the links to Malta introduced in the curriculum were

largely to emphasise how Christian we were, how European our roots were, and how glorious we were to resist Islam, the Turks and the Arabs (...) conveniently forgetting to tell us that linguistically, culturally, genetically and even religiously, we had absorbed our so-called 'adversaries' right into the core of our being (Sultana, 2008, p. 15).

There is "no religio-political formation today which does not have a demonized, therefore threatened, Other" (Ahmad, 2009) and thus "it is not surprising that anything associated with Islam becomes the object of repudiation in the Maltese psyche" (Borg & Mayo, 2007, p. 180).

This links with the analysis in the former section, where it was argued how Social Studies pushes the idea that Malta became increasingly European during the Great Siege (Calleja, 2008, p. 40), construction of Valletta (Debono & Calleja, 2004, p. 53), and Second World War (CMeLD, 2005g, p. 125). Whether Malta has managed to utterly proselytize itself into European values is a hot potato. When my friends from Italy visit they always remind me that most Maltese are Arabs in their behaviour and attitudes, yet become very irritated and possibly offended if one refers to them as Arabs. Maltese tend to

look up to Europe and down to Africa (Chircop, 2010). UNESCO lists Malta under two regions: 'Arab States' and 'Europe and North America'.

It is a notable circumstance that the native population, though so clearly Arabic in their origin, manners, and customs, have never, so far as we know, sympathized with the Mohammedans (sic) (Ballou, 1983, p. 121).

The history of Malta is elaborate. The first settlers arrived at around 7,000 B.P. followed by a myriad of conquests and rulers including Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Feudal rulers, Knights of St. John, French and British (Debattista, 2009). Not all parts of Maltese history feature in *L-Ambjent Storiku*.

The first rulers mentioned in primary school (Year 4) are the Normans who reached an agreement with the Arabs who were allowed to remain with the Maltese with whom they had well integrated. The Normans, on their part, were Christians and advanced the Maltese economy (CMeLD, 2005e, p. 79). Pace (2007) says that the Arabs *ruled* Malta while the Normans *arrived*, giving the impression that the Maltese and Normans got on immediately and naturally well. While accepting that Maltese language is a remnant of the Arab period, the Norman Conquest is identified as the beginning of Malta's Europeanization (Pace, 2007; Borg & Mayo, 2007). In light of this, it seems that the syllabus chooses to start history from Malta's Europeanization and de-Arabization.

Din il-lingwa tawhielna l-Għarab li gew jaħkmu fuq il-gżejjer Maltin wara s-sena 870 w.K. Pero' wara l-miġja tal-konti Ruġġieru fl-1091 w.K., Malta, bil-mod il-mod bdiet tħaddan il-kultura Ewropea (Pace, 2007, p. 68)

This language was given to us by the Arabs who came to rule the Maltese islands after the year 870 A.D. However after the arrival of count Roger in 1091 A.D., Malta, slowly started to embrace the European culture (Pace, 2007, p. 42)

In Year 6, *the* Maltese is attributed a European origin given that the first people arrived in Malta from Sicily (Grech, 2008) and then a Christian identity by the arrival of St. Paul in 60 A.D. (Farrugia & Said, 2008). The syllabus, though recognizing that not all Maltese converted to Christianity (Farrugia & Said, 2008, p. 33), skips the Arab part of history and goes directly to the Great Siege of Malta forgetting to mention that "the Knights of St. John (...) found the islanders universally professing the Roman Catholic religion, but yet entirely governed by Arab forms and customs" (Ballou, 1983, p. 62).

Though it was the Turks who besieged Malta, many Maltese fail to distinguish between Turk and Arab (Vella, 2013; Calleja, et al., 2010; Borg & Mayo, 2007). This might be because, as earlier stated, 'othering' is more dependent on religion rather than nationality (Ata, 2007; Borg & Mayo, 2007).

In fact, the arrival of African immigrants has often been paralleled to yet another siege of Malta (Durick, 2012; Flamini, 2006) given that Africans are usually imagined as non-Christians.

In stating reasons why the Ottomans attacked Malta, Calleja (2008) includes the raids on Turkish ships and the hate that the Knights fostered for the Turks. At the end of the chapter, writing exercises ask students how they would feel as a Maltese living in Birgu during the Siege and, secondly, as a Turk returning home after defeat. It is commendable that such empathy exercises are mentioned in the syllabus as they help in avoiding demonization of the other (Vella, 2013).

The account of the Great Siege portrays Malta as “the shield of Christianity against the Muslim” (“*Malta kienet qiegħda sservi bhala tarka tar-Reliġjon Nisranija kontra l-Mislem*” [Calleja, 2008, p. 38]) and emphasises the increased importance of Malta in Europe along the economic progress brought by the Knights (p.41). Valletta was built to resist any possible second Turkish attack (Debono & Calleja, 2008) and remains a symbol of *the* Maltese as the bastion of Christianity and European values against the ‘other’.

Conclusion

There are moves to avoid vilification of the ‘other’ in Social Studies like exercises of empathy, one mention that all religions promote love (Pace, 2007, p. 18) and the story of a Saudi Arabian (rather than European) company opening a computer production line in Malta (Pace, 2007, p. 50). Nevertheless, such commendable deeds cannot excuse the violence done to ‘others’ in the analysed texts. I feel that Social Studies falls short of its claim of supporting “critical thinking” (Pace, 2007, p. iv).

Social Studies, aiming to reproduce *this* society, constructs *the* Maltese citizen who, though speaking a language with Semitic roots, has Christian traditions and beliefs like his/her European ‘compatriots’. Border-guards associated with *the* Maltese religion and supranationality leave the non-European and the non-Christian as ‘others’. Maltese of different religious backgrounds, skin colour and traditions, living with (or amongst?) *the* Maltese society, are violently erased from Social Studies textbooks and syllabus.

The African in the analysed texts is presented as an irregular immigrant who has to leave his country as blacks (visible traits are important in defining the ‘other’) are unable to manage their nations. They are in need of ‘our’ help and subject to a European form of solidarity. However, Maltese have been unwelcoming of this ‘other’, eroding the myth of *the* Maltese as welcoming foreigners and, for some, questioning how Christian is *the* Maltese. A

monolithic form of national identity is a myth used to thrust nationalism. Nationalism and racism are intertwined and the surge of irregular immigration from Africa to Malta has clarified this link.

In Social Studies, Islam is only mentioned in the story of the Great Siege. It is, thus, the value system of the 'other' who besieges Malta, the bulwark of Christian and European values. The Arab/Muslim period of the history of *the* Maltese citizen is violently eliminated leaving *the* Maltese disliking the Arab/Muslim and, thus, rejecting a part of his own self. Rather than presenting the history of Malta, Social Studies stages the history of European Christian Malta. *The* Maltese is reimaged, destroyed and reconstructed as wholly European.

I am not going to argue how syllabi and textbooks can be modified: Besides this being beyond the scope of this article, I think that we should critically assess whether a prescribed, rather than a narrated, curriculum still makes sense for contemporary societies (Goodson & Deakin Crick, 2009). Huntington's simplistic fragmentation of the world, as a place where conflict will not end, seems to be an unfortunately fitting explanation of current affairs. In this sense, Malta has been described as a failed bridge across continents and cultures. However, we must realize that there are no bridges but openings through walls that separate 'us' from 'them' (Al Mayassa, 2012). We need not think of constructing bridges, but of deleting imagined curtains.

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