

Chapter VII

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A NATIONAL CULTURE: TOWARDS A TWO PARTY SYSTEM

In the early 1920's Malta was more urbanized, less agricultural, rather more secular-minded than half-a-century earlier. There was a greater national and social consciousness, especially among industrial workers and lower grade employees. Economic policy began seriously to command the attention of politicians. Malta had better communications, more schools, was cleaner, and above all, felt reasonably free. Although certain topics of conversation and dispute were as familiar as the names of the party leaders, the grant of self-government marked a sense of achievement and naturally was accompanied by a determination to tackle the country's problems from a position of authority and responsibility. The theme of 'taxation without representation' could no longer apply: to that extent the often blind opposition to taxes receded into the background. Similarly, the constant claims for constitutional reform had now been very largely met: to that extent the constitutional problem was solved. 'Religious' problems were almost non-existent: anticlericalism in nationalist politics had originated from criticism of the church hierarchy rather than from different religious views or beliefs – secularisation had affected attitudes to government rather than to religion – and the danger of proselytism was no longer present, now the government had control over activities by Protestant groups and churches. In 1921 (as in 1887) all parties were agreed that Roman Catholicism should be Malta's established religion. But the earlier patriotic consensus with regard to the Italian language did not exist: the language question, with its multifold connotations and repercussions, was still at the fore of public debate, just as a religious disposition continued to be central to the way of life.

As the population doubled in half-a-century and educational facilities were extended and improved, the pro-English drive – first started by Savona and then pushed forward by Strickland – began gradually to displace Italian from its well entrenched position. More significant in the long-term, perhaps, was Savona's introduction of the grammatical study of Maltese in government primary schools, partly for its own sake but also as a means whereby to anglicize. This move somewhat de-railed the *italianità* creed

which had served Fortunato Mizzi's nationalists as the basis for asserting Malta's right to self-determination. In 1921 (as in 1880) electors were faced with a trilingual problem; but by now more than one-third of the population could read and there were about as many people who knew English as there were knowing Italian. The kinetic energy of anglicization at the mass level had been financial, 'practical', not educational or cultural. The utility of English had increased not only because of the availability of jobs with British employers, including the colonial regime itself, but also because of the movement of emigration away from the Mediterranean to English-speaking countries – Australia, Canada, the U.S.A. However, in view of past scholarship, family traditions and ideas about nationality, a proper Maltese education was barely possible without a knowledge of Italian. *Italianità* – the idea of Malta as 'Italian-Mediterranean' rather than 'British-Imperial' – still was at the heart of that secular patrimony which had aroused, inspired and guided the P.N.'s struggle for autonomy. Now that this constitutional ideal had finally been realised, the nationalists expected to make use of it. But whereas Fortunato had to uphold the Italian language-culture against a novel anglicization, Enrico would have to fight a rearguard action to try and rejuvenate the past. As a comparatively new and superimposed language, English in Malta did not have such roots as Italian had acquired throughout the centuries; but to a sizeable portion of the rising post-war generation Italian lacked the emotional or ideological commitment which at an earlier time, under different conditions, might have seemed natural and proper. As the electorate broadened, and Malta continued to be a vital part of the British empire, the appeal of *italianità* (so far as it was tied only or primarily to linguistic choices) was bound to decrease. Italy had sometimes served as a moral boost to the Maltese nationalist cause, but otherwise Britain provided jobs, prospects, security. Braudel's theory of the donor says simply 'he who gives, dominates'.¹

There was then the problem of Maltese which, being truly the language of the people, could and did inspire a different nationalism – an 'objective' rather than a 'subjective' theory of nationality – thus leading to a curious conflict of nationalisms. As had always been recognized, Maltese was indispensable as an aid to first instruction, but how far, if at all, was it worthwhile to study a language spoken only by a few hundred thousand people in a tiny island sixty miles away from a larger country whose language had long been the medium of education? So far only some avant-garde intellectuals, particularly Oriental scholars, had been keen on the study of Maltese *per se*, although Savona's association of Maltese with nationhood in the 1890s – developed later on by writers such as Emanuele Dimech, Giuseppe Muscat Azzopardi and Alfons Maria Galea – was already a pointer to what was to come. But the battle in the early 1920s (not unlike that during the 1880s) was chiefly, if rather superficially, between the supporters of English and those of Italian. Italian may have been on the

losing side, but still in the minds of many Maltese it was naturally linked to *patria* – Italian was ‘us’, English was ‘them’ – and it was the ‘pro-Italians’, after all, who were elected to power in 1921, not Strickland, or Bartolo, or even Willie Savona: Giuseppe Muscat Azzopardi, who has been described as ‘the father of Maltese literature’, contested the 1921 election as a Panzavecchian nationalist. The love of Italian, which was paradoxically both accentuated and mummified by the movement against it ever since 1880, necessarily involved a certain regard for neighbouring Italy with all the customary associations of culture and religion, but it was not, on the whole, at all irredentist. Equally, however, by the 1920s, English was, rather like Italian, more than just another language: it was a symbol, an affinity, a gateway; and obviously it could be treated as much as a carrier of culture and education as Italian – in fact the 1921 constitution recognized English and Italian as ‘equal languages of culture’. To the Stricklandian imperialist, who believed Malta’s fortunes to be closely and for ever linked to the British empire, English became what Italian was to the Mizzian-Panzavecchian nationalist: the measure and quantity of what was good, superior and worth promoting. The pro-Italian and pro-English standpoints became therefore a conflict as to what really constituted the ‘national’ or the ‘public’ interest: to a lesser or greater extent, both implied a practical as well as an ideal fulfilment. The *pari passu* system, endorsed in varying degrees by the Mizzian, Panzavecchian and Savonian parties, was a compromise well suited to the transition being experienced. But if Maltese was to be studied properly, this would have to take the place of one or other of the two major languages in conflict: Fortunato Mizzi had put the case decades earlier when he said “*inclusio unius est exclusio alterius*.” Unless children, somehow, were to be taught three languages, Maltese could not be studied much; on the other hand, if either of the two major languages was to win, the teaching of Maltese could serve as the wedge whereby to drive one or the other out, and consequently as a stool for anglicization or italianization. Maltese was, as someone said, a Cinderella. Influenced by cultural orientations, social classes, levels of education, financial interests and associations, and, not least, by party politics, the nationalists had one answer – *pari passu* – but the Stricklandians and also, conditionally, the L.P., had another: English taught through the medium of Maltese.

What is striking about the Maltese ‘language’ question – the pivot of party politics – is that it should have been so central and prolonged, so causative and divisive. To explain this phenomenon we must look outside it, to the stresses in Maltese society itself that caused and sustained it: the cosmopolitan and the insular; the national and the parochial; patterns of value, of change, of honour and shame; overcrowding; mass illiteracy; family rivalries; lack of resources other than labour; smallness of size and utter weakness before larger powers; economic dependence on, and political subjection to, Britain; literary and sentimental ties with Italy; the theocratic

nature of religious beliefs and structures; a romantic setting at the centre of a classic sea; an ancient history and a unique language without a literature. Boissevain's findings indicate that the study of rivalries at the parish level (between band clubs, saint feasts, family groups) could supplement what went on at the national level even in politics;² and it is amply clear that political parties from the start made use of such institutionalized rivalries as already existed at the local level – band clubs especially – for their own ends.

Political parties originated and evolved in the context of the British occupation: they were consequently products of the time, an effect of the opportunities and benefits, the pressures and frustrations of the colonial system in its operation on the Maltese way of life. Throughout the nineteenth century and later, Malta was governed primarily as a fortress. The constitution itself could be trifled with, granted and revoked; even the language of education could be undermined. At best, the Maltese were in the position of well-fed slaves, as Chamberlain once implied, jokingly, with regard to Fortunato Mizzi: when Mizzi, in a lengthy impassioned speech, referred to the political enslavement of the Maltese, Chamberlain pointed out that he had never seen any person who reminded him less of a slave than the honourable gentleman.³ The social-psychological effects of the persistently overbearing, soul-destroying treatment of the Maltese intelligentsia by the colonial regime could only be estimated from the ensuing effects – often the tangential, seemingly reactionary symptoms – in national politics. It may seem strange that the nationalists were not fighting about things other than languages, constitutions and taxes, that they seemed to insist on preserving not on reforming, that they looked backwards not forwards. But there was one reform they generally clamoured for: the one that mattered most to them, and that was the right to govern themselves. When people feel oppressed they have surprisingly little interest in drains and sewers, water cisterns and gas light: they yearn for freedom. Whether focussed on language or religion, nationalist demands for constitutional reform were a yearning for the rights of citizenship, the representation of grievances, a regeneration of public affairs. Anglicization – the supreme grievance – was a conscious policy on the part of the British, prodded by local anglophiles, utilitarians and collaborators. It was meant not only to widen the field of occupation for school-leavers or improve the prospects of emigrants; but also to assimilate the native population to 'superior' British ways, and to scotch mainly the lawyer-politicians, the so-called 'pro-Italians' and irredentists who were most critical of the colonial regime. As the anglicization drive began, so the nationalist opposition arose and intensified. Consequently the government tended to harden in its policy just as the opposition sought ways and means of being listened to – such as foolish elections, or else total non-cooperation. Those supporting the regime, usually a small minority, were a sufficient number to contest elections. Sir Victor Houlton had foreseen in 1879 that 'the adoption of the language of the governing race by the governed' would

be 'the turning point in the history of Malta'; and Sir Adriano Dingli had at the same time prophesied that the acrimonious feeling engendered by the attempt to anglicize could 'continue long after its origin would be forgotten'.⁴

For the most part, the anti-government side were 'anti-English' and/or 'anti-Protestant'; and they tended to be anti-everything because they simply had no confidence in the regime. The regime, on their part, usually treated opposition with contempt, indifference or discrimination: officials tried to play down what was said in criticism of government plans or actions, even to cast doubt as to the representative quality or mandate of the elected councillors. Yet after the franchise had been arbitrarily extended to illiterates in 1883, the P.A.R. still defeated the R.P. Even in 1921, when the franchise had been further extended, the nationalists did well. The P.N. was least popular in the 1890s when Savona's P.P. with some justification accused certain elected members of siding with Strickland's administration (a consequence of Alfredo Naudi's 'Party of Order'); but Mizzi had quickly severed connection with these elements. Those who were – or became – 'moderates' or 'liberals' – that is, critical of the regime but prepared to co-operate with it – were at regular intervals enticed to the official bench: in accordance with the system of 'appealing to personal interests' as laid down by Hely-Hutchinson and perfected by Strickland. These collaborators, whether executives (Savona, 1880–1887; Strickland, 1889–1902) or associates (Azzopardi, 1915–1919) became the whipping-boys of the opposition.

Maltese political parties were seriously affected by this unrelenting and often enough irrational enmity between government and opposition, as if the two had nothing in common. The 'individualist' pro-English party appealed to the doctrine of utility, of opportunity, and the grandeur of empire, associating this with social reform and progress. The 'communal' pro-Italian party appealed to the 'people', the 'nation', the 'patria', wanting a constitution by means of which to regulate their affairs as they themselves thought fit. In the seemingly endless clash between the colonial dynamic and the patriotic consensus, the notion of common endeavour in the name of the motherland had gradually to make way to the doctrine of opportunity, of security, and indeed of survival. It was a hard choice to make between the 'idealist' and the 'pragmatist': nor was it always easy to know whose side each was on. But the excessively 'pro' or 'anti' character of parties – almost reminiscent of the medieval duality of Good and Evil – was discernible from the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1880s the bitter division was between two parties – the *Riformisti* (pro-government) and the *Anti-riformisti* (anti-government). Inter-party differences, when not about language, or the constitution, were mainly about tactics and personalities. But the two party strain continued to characterize political alignments: as shown by the collapse of the *Partito Unionista* (1891–1893); and – from 1910 onwards – by the split in the P.N. between *Astensionisti*

(anti-government) and *Anti-astensionisti* (pro-government). The third or 'independent' party was never a strong or lasting force. Was this just because the colonial system tended to polarise the public's disposition into either a 'collaborating' or an 'agitating' function? Or was it that natural dualism, or predestination, so well expressed in W. S. Gilbert's poem?

I often think it's comical,
How nature always does contrive
That every body and every gal
That's born into the world alive,
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little Conservative.

In other words, were there two parties because it is natural to have one side opposing another, a party and a counter-party and then the labels stick? As party organisation increased, so did partisan fanaticism – fixed ideas, inborn prejudices, hero worship, stereotyped propaganda, as if life in a self-governing state was not any different, or any better, from that under the Crown Colony system. The 'entrenchment' of a two party system should not of course be understood to mean that each of the parties had identical 'democratic' qualities, that they differed only in matters pertaining to policy or priority. The parties were no doubt influenced by the British constitutional model, but they emerged in the grip of colonialism; so we have not in this case the gradual evolution of parliamentary government but rather the strained development of opposed forces in the shape of two large sections of the community – one more or less tending to adhere to the colonial government, its collaborators and intermediaries; the other more or less tending to identify with the native intelligentsia, mostly traditionalist notables and *professionisti* of a vaguely bourgeois character. Party divisions were not so dependent on autochthonous conditions: they were much influenced by super-imposed pressures, rules, regulations and indeed constitutions. Nor could party divisions be traced mainly to conventional 'marxist' social class criteria. In a fortress-colony so amenable to 'Mediterranean' patron-client relationships, with a system of government bent on playing one group against another for its own ends, the 'class struggle' was not between the rich and the poor, the capitalists and the proletariat. On the contrary, it so happened that native labourers often found themselves on the pro-British side, in opposition to the nationalists, whose leaders came almost exclusively from the middle-classes, who tended to be less well-to-do than the former but more self-reliant than the latter. The division was rather between those who looked up to the British (and/or the colonial government) for profit, security, advancement, material and in some way even moral improvements through 'progress' and, on the other hand, those who looked down on the British (and/or the colonial government) as overlords, intruders, heretics, exploiters and bigots. This goes some way to explain why the bulk of the proletariat tended to be on the

colonialist side; and so too there were, conspicuously, prominent members of the land-owning aristocracy and of 'big business'. In between, there were the numerous and varied middle classes, ranging from polite paupers, office clerks and prosperous small businessmen to *professionisti*, clergymen and farmers.

In discussing issues of languages, mixed marriages, taxes and constitutions, one cannot help wondering what really motivated the rank and file of the parties, what accounted for grassroot sympathies one way or the other, what (if anything) was in the minds of many of those who attended meetings and demonstrations, whether they were led by emotion – rather than by reason or principle, whether they attended to hear the band play or the speaker talk. Obviously issues relating to religion and taxation were more likely to draw the crowds (than questions of educational or constitutional development), but on the essentials of such matters the parties usually presented a similar or common facade. Was the party supporter's choice simply one influenced by face-to-face relationships, by 'public relations', by region, environment or occupation, or was it more simply one of private interest or opinion? These are unanswerable questions of motivation; and Maltese party politics were often personalized and parochial. One cannot say, for instance, that the middle class was for 'the nation' whereas the working class was for 'the empire': first because no such clear-cut division is possible and especially so with regard to Maltese party alignments and, secondly, because colonial politics were not really about putting the class before the nation – for what 'class', except that of the plantation slave, can exist outside the nation? There was much overlapping and flux. Mizzi's P.N. were staunchly Catholic on the whole, but they were not so fanatically religious as the adherents to the *Partito Popolare* led by Savona and Panzavecchia with the *beneplacitu* of bishop and pope. Savona's party held themselves to be patriots and indeed opposed to the elimination of Italian, but they undoubtedly had great admiration for the British empire and sought to promote anglicisation. Mizzi's party – and more so Panzavecchia's – held that they were not against the teaching of English provided that this did not serve to eliminate Italian: this was almost a contradiction in terms. In matters of taxation, Mizzi and Savona in the end were saying practically the same thing: 'no taxation without representation'; but whereas Savona originally had been more aware of relating social needs to fiscal policy, the Mizzi party saw taxation more as a political weapon. *Prima facie*, it would seem that Strickland's party was the easiest to explain, in so far as it was the most uncompromising; but, on reflection, it turns out to be, arguably, the most complex of all. Pretending to be simultaneously imperialist and patriotic; defending the nobility, the landowners, the capitalists, and at the same time posing as the champion of the working classes against the *bourgeoisie*, especially the *professionisti*; upholding the Maltese vernacular against Italian, but in favour of pushing English at all

costs; speaking a language of 'reform' and 'progress' but unwilling to treat local opposition with any respect; Strickland was hailed as 'saviour of the Maltese' on the one hand and castigated as 'a feudal lord' on the other.

In such 'primitive' conditions, one is justly tempted to ask how far, if at all, may the language question be regarded as the chief motivator of Maltese party politics. That would only be a fair question, however, if this was merely a question of languages, what it most certainly was not – involving (as it certainly did) job prospects, educational possibilities, family upbringing, environmental factors and possibly a whole outlook as to what mattered most in one's life. Another question then which lends itself to argument in this respect is whether *religion* may perhaps have been a more significant factor in party politics than cultural allegiance; whether, that is, one should speak of 'clericals' and 'anti-clericals' rather than of 'pro-Italians' and 'pro-Britishers'.

To answer this, one has to see what the relation was between the parties in their attitudes to linguistic and religious controversies. It rather transpires that it was the so-called 'pro-Italians', i.e. the Mizzian nationalists, who were the more secular-minded, liberal and mundane in their Catholicism; whereas those who had prided themselves on being utilitarian anglophiles turn out to be the ultramontanes, behaving in a hysterical, inquisitorial manner, inciting the faithful to intolerance of dissenters. The linearity – at least so far as the leadership was concerned – appears to be, essentially, one of human values arising from one group's disposition with regard to truth and to power in contrast with the other side: a consequence perhaps of educational attainment; which in turn could be simply the consequence of family conditions. To one side, you have as it were the individually more 'enlightened' mind, trained to be critical of authority, whether this be civil (i.e. the colonial government) or religious (i.e. the ecclesiastical hierarchy). To the other side, you tend to find the glorified *babu*, pretentious and overbearing in approach but in effect reverent towards constituted authority, and probably more addicted to spectacle. The operation of such traits of character or habits of mind should of course always be seen in a political context because in both cases these are liable to be substantially modified by the quest for power. Again Strickland appears to be the odd man out: being anti-Italian and anticlerical at the same time, but in leadership style and in ideological frame he would clearly fit best into the 'Savonian' typology of the strong man who has all the answers; he also fully realized that the poor man is more likely to want security from hunger than freedom from tyranny, unless these two factors are seen to be connected. This protracted, if camouflaged, differentiation in attitudes between the party of 'the educated' and that of 'the illiterates', the party 'against government' and the party 'for government', is probably the greatest and gravest internal contradiction of colonialism in the Maltese experience: the

ultimate expression of double standards, and false pretences, of the inversion and perversion of values; so that it may be possible to trace a polarization between the 'backward freedom-fighter' and the 'progressive hanger-on', or to put it still more bluntly, between those 'agitators' on the one hand who tended to be independent and critical, and those 'moderates' on the other hand who tended to be dependent and credulous.

The gravitation towards a two party system was strong indeed. By 1926 Malta was once more set on that path. In January 1926 there was a realignment of political forces as, on the one hand, the U.P.M. and P.D.N. united (or rather re-united) into a reborn P.N., while, on the other hand, the L.P. agreed hesitantly to form a 'compact' with the C.P. – it was thus with the help of Savona's L.P. that Strickland became prime minister in 1927.⁵ Strickland's ascendancy led to bitter partisan exchanges and culminated, as before, in a constitutional crisis and a 'politico-religious' dispute: there was 'trouble of a most every conceivable kind'.⁶ Throughout the inter-war period, the two outstanding figures in Maltese politics were Enrico Mizzi, on the opposition side, and Strickland, on the government side; the L.P. was very nearly squeezed out of existence. In the 1932 election the L.P. returned only one member, Dr. (later Sir) Paul Boffa (1890–1962); but after Strickland's death in 1940 the C.P. ceased to be a significant force. In the post-war election the P.N. were heavily defeated by Boffa's party and Boffa became Malta's first Labour prime minister in 1947.⁷ Henceforth Maltese politics were dominated by, on the one hand, the L.P., led by the Oxford-educated Dominic Mintoff (1916–), an architect, born in Cospicua, who ousted and succeeded Boffa in 1949, and, on the other hand, by the P.N., led by Dr. Giorgio Borg Oliver (1911–), a Malta-educated notary, born in Valletta, who succeeded Mizzi in 1950.⁸ As Ostrogorski observed in connection with his theory of social intimidation,

Two organizations, the two earliest in point of date, did just recognize each other's right to existence, but subject to the duty of every citizen to profess the creed of one or the other, according to his origin. . . . A place was vouchsafed to 'His Majesty's Opposition'; but all other opposition was 'illegitimate'.⁹

Partly as an outcome of the colonial situation, and partly because Malta was a small island caught in an international cross-current, the Maltese two party system was fomented by a confounded attachment to two 'mother' countries, Italy and Britain, thus substantiating Acton's poignant comments with regard to the dilemma of small states:

Their tendency is to isolate and shut off their inhabitants, to narrow the horizon of their view, and to dwarf in some degree the proportions of their ideas. Public opinion cannot maintain its liberty and purity in such small dimensions. In a small and homogenous population there is hardly room for a natural classification of society or for those inner groups of interests that set bounds to sovereign power. The government and the subjects contend with borrowed weapons. The resources of the one and the aspirations of the other are derived from some external source, and the consequence is that the country becomes the instrument and the scene of contests in which it is not interested.¹⁰

'For Malta is surely abnormal', observed Hancock in 1937:

There is surely no other community in the British Commonwealth whose domestic disputes are entangled so inextricably with the shattering controversies which divide principalities and powers. The petty politics of the island become suddenly oecumenical, awakening the slumbering thunders of the medieval Papacy. They blow upon the smouldering rivalries of two modern empires, whose sea-communications intersect where fragile-seeming Malta lies low in the sea, a British fortress twenty-two minutes by air from an Italian bombing base. Is it fair to expect self-governing institutions to root themselves in a territory exposed to such fierce gusts blowing from outside?¹¹

But the struggle to maintain Italian as the national language of education had taken place to ward off 'fierce gusts blowing from outside'. Anglicization similarly had been impelled by a fear of irredentism, hence the need of ensuring loyal submission.

Following a crushing P.N. victory over the C.P. and L.P. (21 seats to 10 and 1 respectively) in a record poll (95.53%) in 1932, Malta's constitution was (as in 1903) revoked by Britain. In 1934 English, as the language of the British empire, and Maltese, as the language of the people of Malta, were made Malta's official languages by the colonial minister: Italian was completely removed from government offices and elementary school curricula, made a subsidiary subject in the secondary schools and in the university (including the Faculty of Law) and Maltese was to replace Italian as the official language of the law courts. The Crown Colony constitutions of 1936 and 1939 confirmed these decrees: constitutionally, Malta was again in the hands of British generals and officials; culturally, Malta was supposedly a new creation.¹² Malta's identity conflict was resolved rather in accordance with Strickland's views and by his methods also; but the social currents on which political activity moved, though apparently very much more bitter and agitated than in the nineteenth century, may not have changed radically. There was however, particularly at the politico-constitutional level, the Mizzian inheritance in the form of a national consciousness and democratic values. Whether by force or suasion, the popular culture – so far as native qualities such as language were concerned – was coming to be more widely recognized and accepted, especially as the Maltese language slowly made headway in poetry, prose, journalism, and, eventually, in broadcasting and television.¹³ Maltese *italianità* received a fatal blow during the second world war when Malta Fortress was of vital strategic importance to the Allies; and Italy this time was on the wrong side. On the initiative of Strickland's party, Mizzi, who had escaped expulsion to Libya in 1917, was now deported to Uganda together with several P.N. supporters (arrested under section 18 of the Malta Defence Regulations of 1939, all without a charge): 'as a safeguard', said Bartolo's *Chronicle*, 'against any conscious or unconscious action which might endanger public safety'.¹⁴ Those deported included Sir Arturo Mercieca, the chief justice (who had supported first Fortunato Mizzi, then Azzopardi and subsequently

Enrico), and a number of nationalist dockyard workers (hounded by Stricklandians) as well as such veteran 'Quislings' as the architect Pasquale Calleja (who had been secretary of Panzavecchia's *Comitato Patriottico*), Daniele German (whose family had been involved in administering the *Malta* newspaper ever since the 1880s), the artist Vincenzo Bonello (who had been a committee member of Mizzi's 'condemned' *Dante* branch, subsequently the *Lega Nazionalista Maltese* and Mizzi's friend Dr. Herbert Ganado, who was president of the Malta Catholic Action and editor of the church paper. And yet, observed Ganado in his memoirs, Strickland himself could say in the Council of Government, as late as April 1940, that he had 'the greatest regard for the Italian Nation and people and that he admired the magnificent improvement made in Italy under the present Italian Government'.¹⁵ It seems the crime was not to be a fascist, but to be a Nationalist. According to Strickland's *Times of Malta*, the news that Mizzi 'along with some score of more of his immediate brood' had been interned

met with widespread approval. It is written in the Holy Scriptures that 'He that is not with me is against me'.¹⁶

In his study of Britain's Mediterranean crisis in 1936-39, Laurence Pratt erroneously referred to the Maltese deportees as 'anti-British Italians'.¹⁷ Ironically, that combination of anti-British and pro-Italian, pro-British and anti-Italian, accounted for much of what Maltese nationality was becoming. As English substituted Italian in administration and education, Maltese, akin to neither of the two languages by which it could have been swamped, came to be generally acknowledged as the 'national' language: Malta's independence constitution of 1964, obtained when the P.N. were in office, entrenched the clause safeguarding Maltese as such. Politicians could at least - at last - disagree writing their articles and speaking to each other in the same language. The acrimonious language battle, which mostly caused the formation of, and gave character to, Maltese political parties, had been fought, as Acton would have said, 'with borrowed weapons', but with Malta serving as a casting mould.

Nineteenth-century Maltese society is probably a unique example of the case in which trilingualism became a battleground in the successful quest for a national identity. Maltese nationalism rotated in time on this triple paradox: the championing of Italian as a non-Maltese national language; the active promotion of the Maltese vernacular by the British Imperial power as a means of expunging Italian; and the gradual emergence of Maltese as a national tongue and as the prime expression of anti-British sentiments. . . .

Anglicization could be accomplished only at great cost to human relations inside the colony. But in de-Italianizing Malta, the British forced the birth of a more home-grown product. In resisting assimilation and colonialism, pro-Italians and others engendered a national political consciousness upon which a body politic could feed. Paradoxically, the Maltese language emerged as a synthesis of the pro-English and pro-Italian rivalry. The Maltese vernacular served as a social and emotive bond and became a 'natural' unifier.¹⁸

To accept to speak in the same language, alas, is still not enough for a

people to break through the colonialist cycle. Even a home-made cultural stereotype may be only incidental to manifestations of nationality in practice; how much more so, then, when a nationality's colours and boundaries have been determined forcibly after the unleashing of bitter antagonisms in a prolonged conflict? Because, as Alfred Zimmermann observed, nations cannot achieve true freedom through diplomacy or even through war: they must win it for themselves in the region of the spirit:

... the aftermath of oppression will still remain – the bitter memories and the inbred intolerance which are so often the fruit of persecution, and the habits of servility and wire-pulling, of intrigue and agitation which inevitably grow upon individuals or groups who have been living for long years amid the excitements of propaganda, instead of leading a normal healthy social existence.¹⁹

Already during the inter-war period it was possible clearly to see recurring patterns in the Maltese colonial experience: both at the social level in the form of clientelism, parochialism and abject philistinism; as well as at the political levels of behaviour – indeed the acquisition and subsequently the loss of Responsible Government in the 1930s (after 'politico-religious' and 'linguistic-constitutional' controversies) may easily be compared to the movement for Representative Government in the 1880s followed by its abolition later one.

Colonialism was not just a question of the native versus the foreigner: on the contrary, it seriously affected the attitude of Maltese towards fellow Maltese. It is hypocritical or simply foolish of 'ex-colonial' politicians arbitrarily to blame 'the foreigner' for every ill they can think of when they themselves were so often and in so many ways parties to many original causes of the symptoms now complained of.²⁰ Suffice it to bring to mind how Malta's leading English-educated politicians, Sigismond Savona and Count Strickland, were at one time or another inclined to be outrageously tyrannical in order to pursue their 'reformist' ends when they had attained positions of power. The former at one point had recommended the abolition of representative government and instead a gubernatorial autocracy; he then changed course as it suited his ambition and the circumstances of the moment. The latter, a believer on his own admission in 'the survival of the fittest', hindered the path to self-government and (indeed) to its operation after 1921. Nationalists were affected in other ways. In their desperate effort to cling to traditional values, they suspected any move towards modernization in much the same way that they opposed assimilation and despotism. Their rapport with the working classes was limited, and no wonder if often enough they were literally not speaking the same language. It would seem that the colonial politician – particularly the 'progressive' or 'reformist' agent – could neither realise nor measure the hollowness of which he was the product and the carrier. The failure of the 'snob' (who may rightly admire the English aristocracy) or of the 'mission-house Christian' (who may sincerely adopt the creed of which he is so poor an advertisement) is due not to his *ideals* but to his *personality*:

Their failure is due, not to wrong ideals, but to wrong methods of pursuing them: it is a failure of education. In reaching out after something which they feel to be higher they have *lost themselves*: they have severed their links with the past: and with that past has gone a portion of their own soul and strength. As the scout-boys of Oxford and Cambridge dress up to imitate the young bloods and even bet on the same horses if they can discover their names, so does the ambitious young Boston Jew from a Russian ghetto ape the manners and customs of New England, or the nimble-witted Bengali student adopt the facile phrases and opinions of Macaulay and Mill.

In place of 'the young robust barbarians or heathens which they were before the Goddess of Progress laid her seductive hand upon them', this process of unregulated conduct and ill-assimilated education produced 'poor invertebrate and unamiable characters . . . miserable specimens of civilisation, enervated exponents of enlightenment. . . .'²¹ This too is what Dr. Enrico Mizzi must have meant when he stated that 'freedom is not a cargo that gets exported from England.'²²

The phenomenon of what may be termed the native colonialist class in its multifold manifestations has attracted the attention of various students of the colonial experience. Franz Fanon's intuitive exposition, with the Algerian experience in mind, is frightening:

When the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension. The settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious. . . . The native is always on the alert, for since he can only make out with difficulty the many symbols of the colonial world, he is never sure whether or not he has crossed the frontier. . . . He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter. The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor. The symbols of social order – the police, the bugle-calls in the barracks, military parades and the waving flags – are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating.²³

The suppressed yearning to make of hell his paradise as best he may is partly what produces and motivates the collaborator. It is what tends to make the overseer worse than the master, the manager worse than the proprietor, the chageman worse than the supervisor, the blackleg worse than the employer. At the same time the vicious circle produced thereby further contributes to give the opposition "an abnormal and almost diseased frame of mind":

Oppression and suppression have weighed so heavily upon them that they can think of nothing else, talk of nothing else, work for nothing else. There is a certain melancholy and tiresome monotony about the representatives of oppressed nationalities: their national wrongs and their national hopes are for ever on their lips. One feels as though they were reaching out after something which was indispensable to the completion of their manhood.²⁴

The worst offenders then in the process of inter-action between imperialism and nationalism are likely to be those who have had the dubious benefit of some education in the 'mother-country' or who are half-castes. These tend to be more exacting and insidious than the purely indigenous 'fixer'. As Albert Memmi says:

The recently assimilated place themselves in a considerably superior position to the average colonizer. They push a colonial mentality to excess, display proud disdain for the colonized

and continually show off their borrowed rank, which often belies a vulgar brutality and avidity. Still too impressed by their privileges, they savour them and defend them with fear and harshness; and when colonization is imperilled, they provide it with its most dynamic defenders, its shock troops, and sometimes its instigators.²⁵

Whether a territory is actually 'colonized' or merely 'occupied' the effects are substantially the same also with regard to certain occupations (e.g. in the militia or the police corps) or with regard to certain categories of jobs (e.g. inspectors, chargemen) that are made available to locals by the colonial government. Memmi continues:

The representatives of the authorities, cadres, policemen, etc., recruited from among the colonized, form a category of the colonized which attempts to escape from its political and social condition. But in so doing, by choosing to place themselves in the colonizer's service to protect his interests exclusively, they end up by adopting his ideology, even with regard to their own values and their own lives. . . . Such is the history of the pyramid of petty tyrants: each one, being socially oppressed by one more powerful than he, always finds a less powerful one on whom to lean, and becomes a tyrant in his turn.²⁶

In the 1980s a number of studies have appeared investigating various aspects of the Maltese colonial experience, sometimes tracing the story down to Malta's Independence, and even beyond that; there has also been a growing concern about national identity: linguistic, cultural, political; the human, economic and physical environment.²⁷

Making independence work in a new state is never easy, least of all perhaps in a small, strategically-located one without mineral resources and, due to successive foreign dominations, without a stable home-growth tradition of a liberal, democratic and constitutional life. Evidently more time is needed before the post-independence period can be fully assessed with scholarly authority; what follows is a personal overview of the last two decades by way of an update and an epilogue.

From 1964 to 1971 Borg Olivier's Nationalist government retained friendly relations with the former rulers. In return for financial aid and defence guarantees, the British retained a military presence while Malta continued to headquarter HAFMED, NATO's Allied Forces in the Mediterranean. In this climate, investment poured in and a substantive infrastructure emerged, re-orienting the economy from one based on British naval and military needs to one generating more tourism, manufacture and agricultural production. Educational facilities were expanded and modernized. The Malta government assumed responsibility for the former Royal Dockyard and its relatively large workforce. New jobs were generated, emigration decreased markedly. Although anchored with the Catholic Church, Borg Olivier's post-independence phase saw an opening up of society facilitated by secularizing forces, notably travel, tourism, TV and more international exposure. The government was liberal conservative, generally sober and unobstructive but increasingly lethargic, uninspiring and inconclusive. By comparison to Mintoff's charismatically propelled and tightly organized Malta Labour Party, Borg Olivier's Partit

Nazzjonalista was way behind, continuing to rely on traditional allegiances and networks, the electorate's presumed common sense, and distrust or fear of Mintoff among sections of the population. Borg Olivier [d. 1980] and his cabinet old-timers had long aspired to and finally obtained independence from Britain in 1964. After that, they had to deal with a more dynamic and unfamiliar post-independence situation. Following two free elections, the Mintoff-led Labour Party won the June 1971 elections by a hair's breath. There was a peaceful transfer of power.

Mintoff sought to re-direct public affairs differently. The British Governor-General, Sir Maurice Dorman, and NATO's Admiral Birindelli were given marching orders. After a stint of brinkmanship and uncertainty a more financially rewarding agreement was thrashed out with Britain by virtue of which the British military presence in Malta was extended from 1974, when it was due to end, until 1979. Constitutional monarchy was replaced by a republic and a Maltese president. Internationally, Malta ventured to re-define relations and perceptions and policies, as in the case of her insistence that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting in Helsinki agree to encompass Mediterranean security among its concerns. This posture was more controversial than earlier original initiatives sponsored successfully by Malta in the sixties had been, particularly the Law of the Sea at the UN. The government's bargaining stance rather soiled – although never spoiled altogether – relations with western Europe, which once Mintoff had the gall to refer to in Strasbourg as 'the Europe of Cain' in relation to the eastern half! In social policy, a new emphasis was placed on equality and spreading the cake, memorably in certain respects – while forgetting sometimes that wealth has to be created before it can be shared, and that certain politicians were not immune from such egalitarian principles as they were prone to preach. Banks were nationalized. The party card became precious. This brand of 'socialism' was increasingly abrasive and intolerant: from 1977 onwards political violence or the fear of it became rather characteristic of the place, just as external affairs veered towards treaties with such countries as Kim II Sung's North Korea, Ceausescu's Roumania and some other such countries. Malta's General Workers Union, for so long a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, was by mutual agreement statutorily incorporated into the government party and later remained 'wedded' to the Malta Labour Party in opposition – a stance which reinforced the appeal of the 'free trade unions' under the umbrella of the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions. 'Interference' by foreigners, including non-resident Maltese citizens, became a criminal offence. The intimate relations fostered between Mintoff's Malta and Gaddafi's Libya during the seventies, to the point where Mintoff once referred to Libyans as 'blood brothers', temporarily came apart in August 1980 when Libya intervened militarily to challenge and to stop Malta searching for oils in

waters claimed to be Libyan, a behaviour described by Mintoff as that of 'the worst enemy'. Relations with Italy were suddenly strengthened although the quarrel with Gaddafi was patched up when the matter was referred to the international court at The Hague.

The 1981 elections, conducted in a tense, intimidating atmosphere, saw some extraordinary things happen. Under a system of supposed proportional representation, the party polling an absolute numbers of votes – Fenech Adami's Nationalist Party – ended up with a minority of seats, whereas Mintoff's Labour Party continued to have a majority of seats notwithstanding its losing the majority it had enjoyed at the polls. Since the introduction of universal suffrage in post-war Malta this was the first time that the Nationalist Party had amassed an absolute majority of the popular vote. That feat must have been due in part to the authoritarian 'macho' attitudes and not infrequently ill-advised policies championed by Labour, but it was also in line with the P.N.'s post-war trend forward, as well as a pruned 'Christian Democratic' leadership advocating a 'social market economy'. Mintoff publicly described the electoral outcome as 'perverse', while the Nationalists called it a 'gerrymander' and initially boycotted parliamentary sittings and the at times outrageously biased state-controlled media. The economy sagged. In 1984 Mintoff gave up the leadership of his party [after 35 years] and also the premiership, passing this on to 'a protege', Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, who tried to rally the party around a less unpredictable image. Since 1949 a recurring slogan of Mintoff's had been 'either with us or against us'. After several grave incidents mainly against Nationalists, including some instances of police torture, it was agreed that henceforth the party polling an absolute majority of votes would govern. Fenech Adami thus assumed the premiership in May 1987 when his party retained 51% of the popular vote.

On taking office the new government became party to the European Convention on Human Rights and by preaching 'reconciliation' endeavoured to restore to the body politic its democratic and 'tolerant' mould for which Borg Olivier had been most favourably remembered by friend and foe. This seemed to show that ultimately, notwithstanding the teething troubles, personality idiosyncracies and fanatical clashes of the post-independence 'neocolonial' period, Malta had pulled through as a small democratic European state where government and opposition, however mobilised and polarised, could co-exist and alternate – subject to the rule of law and the majority principle.²⁸

By a pertinent coincidence Malta was the venue chosen by Bush and Gorbachev to have the Cold War hatchet buried, in the rough seas of Marsaxlokk Bay, in December 1989. In February 1991 it was again in Malta – this time at Valletta's former Knightshall – that, in their first meeting after the Paris Charter of November 1990, 34 states drew up a

first document meant to facilitate the peaceful settlement of disputes within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.²⁹

NOTES

- 1 F. Braudel: *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Lond., 1975), ii.826.
- 2 See J. Boissevain: *Friends of Friends* (Blackwell, 1974).
- 3 A. V. Laferla, *op. cit.*, ii.151. Mizzi had a stout, healthy-looking physique. Governor Grenfell's impressions of this incident as related in his memoirs (*op. cit.*, p. 160) were as follows: 'Mr. Chamberlain received the Elected Members, the deputation being headed by Dr. Mitzi, the chief opponent of the Government. He made an impassioned speech on the political enslavement of the Maltese. Mr. Chamberlain made an excellent reply, refuting a good many of his arguments and pointing out that the political difficulties were accentuated by the indiscreet actions of the elected members. As regards enslavement of the Maltese, he informed Dr. Mitzi - who was a short, very fat man - that he never saw any person who reminded him less of the slave than the honourable gentleman. This made all the other members of the deputation laugh and we all parted good friends.'
- 4 *Supra*, i.111.
- 5 The L.P. retained a separate identity but was pledged to work with the C.P. Panzavecchia died in 1925. Savona the younger was never as influential as his father had been.
- 6 W. K. Hancock, *op. cit.*, p. 420.
- 7 Boffa, who hailed from Vittoriosa, joined the L.P. in 1922, was first elected to the Assembly in 1924, became leader in 1927; during the war he was medical district commissioner in the Cottonera area. After the split in 1949, Boffa's party was known as the Malta Workers' Party, Mintoff's as the Malta Labour Party (M.L.P.).
- 8 Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami (1934-), of Birkirkara, succeeded Borg Olivier as leader of the P.N. and of the Opposition in April 1977.
- 9 M. Y. Ostrogorski, *op. cit.*, ii.615-616.
- 10 Lord Acton, 'Nationality', *Home and Foreign Review*, July 1862, reprinted in *History of Freedom and Other Essays* (Lond., 1907), p. 297.

- 11 W. K. Hancock, *op. cit.*, p. 406.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 425–428, J. J. Cremona, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–41; D. Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
- 13 See e.g. A. J. Arberry and P. Grech: *Dun Karm Poet of Malta* (Cambridge, 1961); *Contemporary Art in Malta* (ed. R. England, Malta, 1973).
- 14 D.M.C., 2 June 1940; H. Ganado; *Rajt Malta Tinbidel* (Malta, 1974), ii.213.
- 15 *Times of Malta*, 5 Apr. 1940; *ibid.*, p. 202.
- 16 *Times of Malta*, 1 June 1940; *ibid.*, p. 213.
- 17 L. R. Pratt: *East of Malta, West of Suez* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 40.
- 18 H. Frendo, 'Language and Nationality in an Island Colony: Malta', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism/Revue Canadienne des Etudes sur le nationalisme* (Univ. of Prince Edward Island, 1975), vol. 3, no. 1.
- 19 A. E. Zimmern, 'True and False Nationalism', *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- 20 On this see E. Shils: *Political Development in the New States* (Mouton, 1966).
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 22 'La libertà non è una merce che si esporta dall'Inghilterra.' *Supra*, v.165.
- 23 F. Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin, 1974) p. 41. Fanon's famous classic of anti-colonialism was first published in Paris by François Maspéro in 1961. Although Malta was not actually a settler colony the symptoms outlined by Fanon can be seen to apply to a large extent.
- 24 A. E. Zimmern, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- 25 A. Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Lond., 1974), p. 16. (This book was first published in French in 1957.)
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
- 27 See e.g. E. Zammit: A Colonial Inheritance [Malta Univ. Press, Valetta, 1984]; J. Bezzina: *Religion and Politics in a Crown Colony* [Bugelli, Valetta, 1985]; A. Koster[ed]; *Lord Strickland* [Progress Press, Valetta, 1986]; J.M. Pirota: *Fortress Colony* [Studia, Valetta, 1987]; V. Mallia-Milanes [ed]: *British Colonial Experience* [Minerva, Valetta, 1988]; T. Cortis [ed]: *L-Identità Kulturali ta' Malta* [Information Dept., Valetta, 1989]; H. Frendo: *Malta's Quest for Independence* [Valletta Publishing, Valetta, 1989], *Lejn Gvern Responsabbli* [Dalli, Pin, Valetta, 1990], and H. Frendo [ed]: *Maltese Political Development 1798–1964* [Ministry of Education, Valetta, in press]. On the influence of Italian fascism in Maltese colonial politics during the 1920s see this writer's contributions in *History of European Ideas* [Pergamon Press, Oxford, forthcoming 1992] and in S. Fiorini and V. Mallia-Milanes [eds]: *Malta: A Case Study in International Cross-Currents* [Malta Univ. Press, Valetta, 1991].
- 28 See, e.g., H. Frendo: 'Messages from Mintoff's Malta', *Quadrant*, Sydney, Dec. 1986, vol. xxx, no. 229, pp. 18–33; 'Freedom after Independence', *World Review*, Brisbane, June 1987, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 37–68; 'A Western European or a Third World Model for the Maltese Islands?', *Malta and the Security of the Mediterranean Region* [International Security Council, New York, Jan. 1987], pp. 89–104; 'Malta: Winning power needs more than voters', *The Australian*, 12 May 1987; 'Pro-Western party wins power in Malta after 16 years', *News Weekly*, Melbourne, no. 2222, 20 May 1987. Cf. also his *The Popular Movement for a New Beginning* [Valletta, 1981], a series of *Sunday Times* articles written in Geneva after the incidents of 15 October 1979 ['Black Monday'] under the *nom-de-plume* 'Marengo'.
- 29 This writer covered both events on short-wave radio and for Valetta's *Sunday Times* [cf., e.g., 26 Nov., 17 Dec. 1989, 27 Jan., 3 Feb., 18 Feb. 1991].