

LANGUAGE AND NATIONHOOD IN THE MALTESE EXPERIENCE

SOME COMPARATIVE AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

In searching for Malta through her language question over the past two centuries, this comparative study posits a theory of the margins: where empires meet, periphery reaches out for mainstream, both revealing and transforming itself in the process. Accompanying this painful confrontational engagement, there are assimilation-resistance paradigms peculiar to the culture clash in colonial politics; these tend to be more pronounced and risky on the geographical fringes, in outposts between boundaries. Responses to divisive colonial policy on language status demonstrate how there is no simple historical or psychological correlation between native language and national identity, and no *de rigueur* monolingual nationhood. Discourse on language, culture and nationality can be a statement about what people think and feel about themselves rather than about a particular language *per se*. English snuggled Maltese to oust Italian, would the nest-builder now become a cuckoo? Or had the vernacular's buttressed emergence as an official language mirrored the nation's own growing-up, the language anguish having been, like a soul in purgatory, its catharsis?

Looking back with the advantage of hindsight at my Malta writings over the past 25 years, I realise that the main questions I was really asking about Malta were also indirectly questions about myself, as a Maltese, starved of self-understanding in time and space.¹ Einar Haugen used to say that motivated research usually results from wishing to solve a 'personal' problem; his was that his immigrant parents in the U.S.A. each spoke a different Norwegian. In my home we all spoke the same Maltese to each other, but at school I remembered being punished when caught doing so with my class-mates. Malta's 'problem', and my own, was that my adolescence coincided with that of the islands as a newly-independent state in the world, wondering what the future would hold in store, wondering too about subsistence, development and self-identity and the perceptions of others overseas ('barra minn Malta'). My late father, like several of his generation, was afraid of independence: of what a Maltese leadership, suddenly left to their own devices, would do with it. The nagging doubts were as real for Malta as they are in any teenage initiation; yet among the younger generation – less colonially conditioned and also more mindless – there was a characteristic optimism, or at least a disposition to rise to the challenge, whatever the breaks of the game might bring.

I was lucky to find an Alma Mater in so small an island, so new a state, and yet so old-established, so old-fashioned, 'The Royal University of Malta'; and to come to discover in it a History Department. Although himself a medievalist, the late Professor Andrew Vella, who led it, sincerely and disinterestedly sought to encourage original research work even about modern history, and to groom a school that would succeed him when he would be constrained to leave his Chair (by circumstances when he did, as it turned out, that were unfortunate in more ways than one; and that was too the end of that Chair). As much of an Oxonian as he was of a Dominican, with a faint but discernable 'Stricklandian' flicker from the 1930s, Patri Indri did not block audacious research, as when I proposed to unravel Emmanuele ('Manuel') Dimech: a convict, an excommunicate and an exile. In researching for my voluntary B.A. (General) dissertation on 'A Social Background to the Maltese Labour Movement', I had come across one or two persons who somewhat lowered their voice before hesitantly they mentioned to me this dead man's name. Vella chaired the Honours *viva* that came out with a First, and when all hell broke loose afterwards he had wise counsel to proffer and

1. Here I make liberal use of my Malta writings, published and unpublished (1968–1973, 1975–1980, 1985–1992). In preparing this festschrift chapter during Trinity Term 1992 I benefitted from informal discussions with, among others, Professor Peter Waldmann of Augsburg University and Professor Reinhold Kontzi of Tübingen University, and had access to the libraries of these two universities.

refused to be intimidated. The bewildering Dimech controversy in all sections of the press and elsewhere went on for years after 1970, whereas that provoked by my earlier *Sette Giugno* and 'Kwistjoni tal-Lingwa' articles had been limited to the daily newspaper carrying them, *Il-Hajja*, which soon afterwards I was asked to edit. Vella wrote the Foreword to my first publication proper in 1970, on the *Sette Giugno* rising. In an MTV quiz for Maltese school-children nobody, by 1969, had heard of 1919! And no wonder, since nobody had tried seriously to publish anything about it in the entire post-war period! Such history text-books as existed hardly mentioned it at all. In that Foreword, Professor Vella indicated Jules Michelet as a model for a 'national' historical approach. Independence touched him too, for he was a patriot. He loved Malta dearly, and the Maltese language. He was friends with Guze' Aquilina, a fellow-traveller at least since the 1940s, when Aquilina took the Chair of Maltese at Malta.

I became an undergraduate at the ancient Valetta 'campus' in October 1965, straight from the Lyceum Sixth Form. Thus, like that generation, I lived through the transition from colonialism to statehood in 'our country'. With countless others in that midnight light I shouted 'Viva Malta!' as I saw the Union Jack lowered and the Maltese colours ceremoniously raised. One thought of Don Gaetano Mannarino who had dared raise national banners on St James Cavalier in the aborted rising of 1775, or of the *Sette Giugno*; some survivors from among those Maltese 'pro-Italians' deported without charge by the British in 1942 were present on that day. With other student-comrades from various disciplines such as law and pharmacy, I became (simultaneously) active in the committees of both Vella's Royal University Historical Society, the RUHS, and Aquilina's *Ghaqda tal-Malti (Università)*. It was in such circles, and at such times, that a new national consciousness and international awareness was forming in Malta, and indeed a more rebellious one throughout the university world in Europe and North America, and yet another was even struggling to sprout in eastern Europe. Our campaigns for student participation in university affairs began in 1968; and – on a fully national scale through 'Djar għall-Maltin' – for subsidized low-cost housing, and against indiscriminate land speculation – in 1969.

'Independence is title to the land', one old Bibliotecha regular and half-aristocrat liked to say. 'The land, the land', to quote that seasoned liberal song: 'the ground on which we stand ... God gave the land to the people.' But title to what land, for which people?

What was Malta actually? Who were these 'Maltese'? Why, how, how far had they striven for independence? What had made their heart throb, given peace to their soul, anguished and agitated them, contented and consoled them, penetrated their being? Such fundamental queries could no more be addressed through antiquarian pursuits missing the wood for the trees at every turn; no

longer by a succession of bishops and governors arrayed in splendid regalia; not either by chauvinistic assumptions of 'look at us how good are we'; nor even by accumulated detail listed on particular events, subjects or persons unrelated to surroundings, to times, themes and trends.

'The method in which episodes of Maltese history have been recorded', wrote Antonio Emmanuele Caruana in *Sull' Origine della Lingua Maltese* in 1906, 'snaps every logical connection of sequences, and stamps too weak a concept of the moral force that maintains a people firmly on its own home ground.' Already in 1854 Gian Anton Vassallo had penned a similarly grave historiographical criticism of writings 'lacking in the sentiment of truth' and 'indifferent to national honour', especially by visitors and foreigners:

Preoccupati talora dell' importanza dei fatti relativamente all' impero, hanno appena diretto uno sguardo al popolo del paese; diguisacche il lettore percorre lunghi tratti della storia di Malta senza poter discernere quale fosse veramente il popolo abitatore; l' elemento nazionale piu' intimamente interessato nelle vicende del luogo; talvolta anzi vi e' condotto in maniera da avvertirne appena l' esistenza.

That was partly because such writers were handicapped by a lack of knowledge of Maltese, sometimes also of Italian or English, essential tools for serious research in nineteenth and twentieth century Maltese history; their concern may hardly be said to have been with the interconnections of people's actions and aspirations through time, to explore relations between events in the realms of ideas, values and activities within a dynamic which somehow pointed forward towards becoming and fulfilment.

Where and by whose hand had the Maltese people's various paths and ways, their searches for survival, for freedom, for self, been registered, annotated and conveyed meaningfully in the nexus of generations, in the moulding of nationality, in the making of nationhood?

From persons to parties, from economy to politics, underlying practically every significant movement, glazed into every facade, almost inevitably, one came across some aspect or other of the so-called 'language question'. The 'language question', I found, came into just about everything: *Sette Giugno*, Dimech, factions and parties, nationalism, imperialism, employment, emigration, education, literacy, illiteracy, roads and sewers, development and under-development, Italy and Britain, Vatican and Pope; Europeans, Arabs, Roman Catholics, Muslims, objects and subjects, conquerors and liberators, the past, the present and the future. Language problems! Language questions! Language issues! Were deaf-mutes learning how to hear and talk in spasms? Or could perfectly sane people not listen to each other in the din being kicked up by

politicians? Or were there hidden agenda, false consciousnesses, desperate straits, painful hurts, bullying tactics, deceitful projections, class pretensions, linguistic misconceptions, self-pride, self-negation, self-discovery all intertwined in a Medusan knot, institutional conflicts and internal contradictions in rapid, forced transition? In the end it appeared that all these questions were not solely or even primarily about language *per se*, the overall policies and grievances were not essentially and certainly not capriciously about speech-forms, syllabi, grammars, orthographies.

Maltese nationalism was more cultural than it was economic. The cultural nationalists were more articulate, because better-educated and less financially dependent than the working class, but on the whole the British presence rather helped to provide labour, markets, opportunities. Economic hardship was sometimes all too present, for instance in the years before and after the Great War, usually because of reductions in British spending or in naval activity. Nationalist or nationalist-incited popular manifestations came to have a more violent sting when new taxes or lost jobs featured prominently, as in 1901, 1919 and later in the 1940s and 1950s. Next to livelihood, the other factor that excited the Maltese masses was religion, which was often politically manipulated but which we shall not concern ourselves with here except in so far as it was an aspect of *italianità* in politics (at the same time as sustaining the vernacular in folk religious practices). At least from the 1880s right down to the 1930s, governors and consular representatives unmistakably indicate 'the language question' as the chief pot-stirrer, the recurring cause of ongoing friction and division in 'British' Malta.

The supporting phenomena on all sides were as complex and pervasive as they were perplexing and engaging: they remain to this day partly unresolved. Have a look at the newspaper columns. But I shall argue in conclusion – less unresolved than before, as a result of changing 'national' circumstances all-round. The Maltese case was *sui generis*, as indeed any case is wont to be; but it was not a God-forsaken insular, idiosyncratic craze, not half as bloody-minded as it might appear in the later politically-charged vocabularies, not at all out-of-this-world. Quite the contrary. Malta's problem of language, of discourse, of communication, of education, of media, of perceptions and interests at logger-heads, in clash and confrontation, in compromise and change, is characterised by universals; it is knowable, comparable, even theoretically explainable. We can put our mind at rest at least on that.

The intimate and mysterious, not necessarily straightforward or linear rapport between languages and culture, people, nations and states, their thoughts, beliefs and sentiments, has been the subject of fascinating investigation from Vico to Rousseau, Humboldt, Herder, Fichte to Renan, to Gramsci, to so many

near-contemporaries and contemporaries, among them Hans Kohn, Friedrich Hertz, Rundle, Levi-Strauss, Ferguson, Fishman, Giglioli, Berlin, Lipset, Deutsch, Goody, Weinreich, Hugh Seton-Watson, George Herbert Mead, Hobsbaum, A.D. Smith, Joosten, Snyder, Mazrui, Gellner, Grillo, Burke. Politicians came to have an important part in this movement too: from Cardinal Richelieu to Henri Bourassa, Mazzini to Hertzog. And they continue to do so, not least in the unfolding European Community with the recurring strains of centre and periphery, nation and region, dialogue and hegemony. The language debate has long been at the heart of the very country hosting the EEC headquarters. Increasingly, in scholarship, we get studies cutting across disciplines from archaeology and history to sociology and politics, or inventing comparatively new ones, such as sociolinguistics and anthropology with its variants. We still need to fix our bearings to some extent in time and empirical research before flying into theoretical speculations and generalisations derived from the particular or the peculiar, or indeed from compilations of other theories. As the breathless rush for knowledge and space in the print and electronic media proceeds apace, one can understand both the fascination with the small, the manageable, the remote, and the urge perhaps to see the universe in a crystal bowl, to get it all over and done with. And once language – ‘a form of life’ Wittgenstein called it in 1969 – comes to be equated with such imponderables as self-identity and self-meaning, individual or collective, social or psychological, academic quests risk becoming boundless unless held tightly in rein.

‘Borders between language groups are not borders that can be marked by a line on the map. Each language overlaps into the area of the other’, writes Anderson. ‘People manage to learn methods of keeping conflict down and of compromising; each language accomodates the other’:

But those methods in many places cease to be effective in the face of more rapid change ... the tempo of change tends to quicken. The language problems arising can neither be wished away nor tactfully ignored. Nor can the conditions which bring about change be wished away or ignored ... Compared with other types of social conflict, those concerning language are of a special order. They are painful and harsh in the most intimate sense. Such an issue touches people vitally and completely [1, pp. 1–2].

Briefly, in Malta, we had an ‘invited’ occupier who increasingly sought to assert power through colonial and cultural domination over the would-be hosts, who saw themselves as Europeans not wanting in civilization; but whose native non-literary vernacular did not correspond to their traditional medium of formal communication and their generally assumed self-image; and whose economic

condition was increasingly dependent, subject to changes over which they could exert little if any control. Constitutions came from the imperial metropolis with difficulty and, once having been put to the test, went the way they had come. The archipelago was small, watched on land, surrounded at sea but with open horizons, the people comparatively few in number but increasingly densely packed, important for some things (providing labour), unimportant for others (taking decisions).

To make some sense of anglicization from 1800 (and not merely from 1880) onwards, the resistance to it, and the consequences of it, let us pose three fundamental two-word questions, in this order, and subsequently take each in turn:

Question 1. *Who for?*

Question 2. *Why us?*

Question 3. *Us who?*

In answer to our first question we have to probe Britain's language policy. The answer to the second question is related to the first, but still more from the point of view of the respondent. One has to deal with it essentially in terms of colonialism. The third and ultimately most seminal question arises from such repercussions and possibly syntheses as are incipient in the other two, that is from the uneasy adjustment or rejection in a situation of language clash regulated by unequal or divergent strengths. All three questions broadly fit into the assimilation-resistance paradigm. A run-of-the-mill critique of colonialism would tend to personify them in Imperialism and Nationalism. But these 'isms' are not stereotypes, they beg specific definition as applicable in particular societies. The Maltese condition is exceptionally rich in complications, yet the bare features are discernable elsewhere and bear some comparison.

We get native collaboration. As Ronald Robinson's collaboration theory rightly suggests, indigenous participation in the colonial situation can be influential, even determining. Collaboration may be said to occur when interests and also ideas respond to studied encouragement or new stimuli and start to be expressed through a quick-and-ready cooperation with government – the dominating foreign power in a non-representative set-up. Such intermediary groupings can become forces for change, for intercession too, grist to the occupier's mill. They can become role models for the up-and-coming, or scapegoats, or objects of derision and hostility. Anglo-Indians – an extreme example – were useful to the Raj establishment while it lasted, but became near-outcasts afterwards.

Another characteristic phenomenon comes into play where empires meet. Where-empires-meet is a condition of usually intense cultural and political

tension observable in littoral and island contexts from the Caribbean to the Pacific. Here clash, overlap and residue result from successive occupations or territorial or cultural claims to – or mutual uses made of – the same territory by Americans and Spaniards (Puerto Rico, the Philippines), or Englishmen and Portuguese (Goa), Frenchmen (the New Hebrides, now Vanuatu), Spaniards (Gibraltar), Greeks (the Ionian Islands), Greeks and Turks (Cyprus), or any other combination of co-existing, succeeding or competing interests or powers. The central Mediterranean slots into this cymbal frame with classical resonance.

Geographical, geopolitical, strategic, military, demographic, economic and religious or ecclesiastical considerations are other vital components both in collaboration dispositions (or otherwise) and in linguistic (and cultural) tensions where empires or neighbouring peoples meet.

Generally speaking, British (or rather English) assimilation policy from the imperial metropolis appears to have been most assertive on the fringes: those closest to home – among Celts and Gaels – and in the outposts, all the way from Gibraltar to Bombay to Hong Kong. Collaboration was desperately needed, ardently sought and invariably engendered; this tended to become in turn ‘more English than the English’ and developed its own dynamics, as did the opposition or adjustment to it.

Sifting out such nationality traits as do evolve from these fragile but seminal encounters often becomes an exercise in shading boundaries, mounting fringes, tying ends and rounding edges. That, generally speaking, and all too briefly, may seem to have been the story of Malta and of the Maltese, at least until independence arrives. But there are times when the peripheral is also central, vital, pivotal. Our peripheral-centre theory asserts itself, clearly, when Malta’s role comes to the fore and is formative – regionally, continentally or globally – sometimes injected with a moral, crusading cause, or even a humanitarian dimension, not simply the more familiar strategic-military concern. Think of 1565-1566 (La Valette’s Malta versus Sulaiman’s Ottoman Empire); of 1798-1802 (Malta in Bonaparte’s design, the Peace and Treaty of Amiens); of 1854-1856 and 1914-1918 (Malta as staging post, resting place, hospital, nurse, in the Crimean War, in the Great War); of 1940-1943 (the George Cross Island standing out against relentless Axis bombardment), and just possibly also of 1989 (the fleeting but historically symbolic and consequential Bush-Gorbachev ‘end-of-the-Cold War’ encounter).

At one time central and peripheral, in the mainstream and in the margins, the frontier of Europe’s southern flank, the hub of imperial inter-continental routes, Malta’s slowly and haltingly growing statehood and nationhood were mirrored in a tortuous linguistic incubation.

In my 1975 *Canadian Review* article on language and nationality (inspired

by my unpublished 1973 M.A. thesis *Language of a Colony: A Study of the Maltese Language Question* and its accompanying 'Collection of Documents and Illustrations', used again here), I had thus summarised that difficult progression:

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.

With the above considerations in mind as to how languages jockeyed for position in the central Mediterranean *milieu*, and with what overt results, let us now direct our attention to tackling those three 'why' questions regarding anglicization.

Who for?

Shortly before the conclusion of treaties settling the final defeat of Napoleon, Lord Bathurst communicated his 'language' instructions to the first governor of Malta (and the Ionian Islands), Sir Thomas Maitland. Bathurst did so very explicitly: so explicitly, in fact, that he could hardly have been more arrogant in his country's new possession, where hardly a single inhabitant spoke any English. These instructions must also go some way to question the common orthodoxy that the French *outré-mer* were, linguistically, decidedly more assimilationist and integralist than the British, the latter being better known for their methods of indirect rule and informal empire. 'In reading about the development of languages like English', writes Haugen, 'one often gets the impression that like Topsy, they 'just grew'':

But this is an illusion. It is merely that the guidance may have been private and covert, and that today it can be disinterred only by the

diligent student who looks for it. Covert rules are indeed often more rigid than overt ones, since they are enforced by the pressure of one's peers, who punish by exclusion and reward by admission... While one might not exactly be thrown in jail for his language, one could be and often was frozen out of good society, which could mean loss of jobs or restricted opportunities. Shaw's Pygmalion was not just a comedy, but an Irishman's biting satire on the English attitude to language [5, pp. 7-9].

Malta's Governor Maitland had to attend to the diffusion of the English language among the inhabitants, and 'the promotion of every method by which English may be brought to supersede the Italian tongue.' All proclamations, the Secretary of State advised from London, were to be issued initially in English as well as in Italian, hoping that in a few years the latter language could be gradually disused. The proceedings of the Supreme Court of Justice should be carried on in English, London further instructed Valletta, 'in order to make it the interest of the Maltese advocates to acquire the language'. The reading and writing of English was to be taught in the public schools established; and so on. The Treaty of Paris had given the Maltese Islands to Great Britain 'in intiera proprietà e sovranità', so what could be more natural and less arguable than that their inhabitants should now all learn the language of their rulers? The inhabitants vividly remembered, however, how only fourteen years earlier these protectors had been asked to intervene by Maltese rebel leaders against Bonaparte's occupying force, after express permission had been obtained from the Neapolitan king (to whom Malta's sovereignty would have reverted after the expulsion of France). Moreover, at the time of the Peace of Amiens in 1801-1802, the British in Malta were thinking of packing up and evacuating the Islands, which by that treaty's article 10 would have been made independent and neutral under guarantee of the main European powers. (At that time too, Sir Alexander Ball, chief protagonist of the Anglo-Maltese connection, in a letter to a friend in Naples, had described Valletta as 'the most tranquil city in Italy'!)

'Not knowing the language', wrote William Eton of Major-General Pigot, who had master-minded the French capitulation of 1800, 'he entrusted the civil departments to a secretary, who conducted himself in such a manner that the island was on the point of an insurrection.' Eton assisted the first civil commissioner, Charles Cameron, who on 23 July 1801 published his first public notice in English with an Italian translation, and his second one on 5 August in English only. But the purpose of language being communication, it was pretty useless to issue and circulate notices which nobody of those for whom they were intended could understand a word of. The British soon came to realise this. In

February 1806 we find the Officer-Commanding-the-Troops, General Villetes, printing in Italian even invitation cards to a reception at the governor's palace!

The revealing impatience demonstrated by Bathurst's 1813 instructions could have had something to do with other factors: that the Maltese themselves were not seen to quite have a language of their own, Italian being confined to the educated class; and, further, a premonition that Italian, being obviously tied to the neighbouring Italian peninsula, had to be gotten rid of.

To justify the assistance rendered Cameron, William Eton prided himself on 'knowing the language of the country': 'If it be asked why I assisted him, I answer: 'I knew the language of the country, Arabic and Italian.' '

Until the mid-nineteenth century, when the elective principle was first allowed, it seemed not to be unusual for the Maltese to be dismissed or discounted as a separate people. In striving unsuccessfully to have the Maltese ('Neapolitan') criminal law codes changed and rewritten in English between 1825 and 1854, the governor, Sir Henry Bouverie, commented thus to the colonial secretary, Stanley, in May 1842:

Steam communication has reduced the distance between England and Malta so materially that it becomes daily more important that this colony should be English not Italian and that the spirit, at least, of English law should be introduced and every encouragement given to the dissemination of the English language.

'English not Italian.'

The Chief Justice was by now an Englishman, Sir John Stoddart. It was he who chaired the commission to revise and anglicize the Maltese code. Of its five members, three were British and two Maltese, but one of the British commissioners, John Kirkpatrick, voted with the Maltese side. A subsequent commission was chaired by the Maltese President of the Court of Appeal, Sir Ignatius Bonavita, and eventually the code remained in Italian, as it had always been, except for some minor changes regarding Court Martial. Pushing ahead with this 'juridical' anglicization plan could well have ante-dated the full-blown language battles fought after 1880 by four decades, or possibly pre-empted them by forcing the issue at a stroke before the public fora offered by a free press (1839) and elections to the Council of Government (1849) had been allowed to exist in this fortress colony. A balancing act was being undertaken, probably with more attention afforded to what was unworkable rather than illiberal.

In 1820 Governor Maitland had already laid down that no one could be admitted to act as an advocate, notary or law procurator unless he could read, write and speak English; but this remained a dead letter. In 1823 Maitland also

demanded that all petitions addressed to the government be in English, that government contracts be drafted in English, and he strongly intimated that a knowledge of English would facilitate appointment to government posts. He knew well enough that when in 1815 his government had offered to send Maltese children to receive an education in England, at the government's expense, only two Maltese children had accepted to be so educated.

Another specific target, together with the courts of law, was Malta's university. This venerable institution, not found ready-made or hastily established in any other possession acquired by Great Britain around the globe, dated back to its foundation as a Jesuit College in 1592 and had been a *studium generale* ever since 1769. The University of Malta produced a Maltese intelligentsia, or at least Malta-educated professional classes. Moreover, these were educated in and through Italian, which had been the language of education, after Latin, for practically all formal activities and professional pursuits. The governor therefore appointed a committee to inquire into the working of the University. The course of studies was revised and a general council appointed under the chairmanship of an Englishman. This Englishman, John Hookham Frere, was instrumental in appointing to the University its first teacher of Maltese (which vernacular actually was neither Arabic nor Italian but largely an amalgam of both, basically Semitic but written in the Roman script and influenced by Romance languages in its super-structure ever since Norman times). The appointee was no other than Michele Antonio Vassalli, an intellectual and pioneer who regarded Maltese as a 'lingua nazionale' deserving of study and respect. Of course the first letter addressed to Frere's council in September 1824, by the chief government secretary Fred Hankey, was in English.

In the University archives, Hankey's letter was appropriately qualified and categorised by the registry: 'Prima lettera di Governo diretta al Consiglio'.

As early as April 1802 Alexander Ball had appointed to the University of Malta a Professor of English Literature in the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts. Since April 1807, English parsing and easy translation had been included in the admission requirements. However all lectures continued being given in Italian 'in the form of discourses and not by reading' – according to the University's *Statuto Fondamentale* of 1838 – while some examinations required 'a dissertation in the Italian language.'

That Italian retained its status in the University, and possibly also in the Codes and Courts, would have been at least partly the consequence of the conclusions of a high-powered royal commission formed of Sir John Austin and Sir George Cornwall-Lewis, who were appointed by Britain's Liberal government to inquire into the affairs of the island in 1836. In marked contrast to an earlier commission during the Oakes regime in 1812 which, 'with a view to the

real happiness of the Maltese' had ruled out granting any political power 'to a people so singularly unfitted to enjoy it', these learned and liberal gentleman – Austin was a famous jurist, and his wife, who accompanied him, a social worker – concluded that the Italian language was 'far more useful to a Maltese than any other language, excepting his native tongue.' The Maltese, they found, were 'better acquainted than Englishmen with the circumstances of the country, with its laws, institutions and usages, with the prevailing opinions and manners and with the capacities of individuals.' As soon as a child attending a government school would have learned Maltese, he was to learn to read and write Italian through the medium of Maltese, they submitted (no doubt to the satisfaction of most Maltese whom they had met). The child could then learn to read and speak English 'if the time allotted for his schooling will allow him to do so'. The English language would be useful to him 'in as much as his native country is subject to the English Government, and Englishmen, in considerable numbers, are already residing or sojourning in it.' (The government's monopoly of printing, they also concluded, should be abolished and a free press permitted.)

Who then was anglicization meant for? The question so far appears rhetorical, but as time passed and circumstances matured, the signs marked out at the outset continued to be scratched more firmly into the ground. The next spate of royal commissioners, nearly half-a-century later, took the plunge. 'English – and English only', said the most controversial and influential commissioner, Patrick Keenan from Dublin, would be taught in schools. English through the medium of Maltese. Maltese teachers who could not learn English would be liberally pensioned off. Another commissioner (F.W. Rowsell, Director of Navy Contracts) advised, as an economy measure, that the University of Malta be abolished. This recommendation was not taken up, but on anglicization the commissioners had the sympathy of those who had picked and sent them out and, it seems, of the Valletta-based colonial apparatus as well. Most tellingly, however, by now they also had some significant support among a small section of the more articulate Maltese, some of whom (like Sigismund Savona, a former regimental schoolmaster made Director of Education and Rector of the University in 1880) had been trained in England, worked for the British in various fields, or been otherwise exposed to English influence. The answer to our question begins to change, slowly, ever so slowly; but it did so in the direction of T.B. Macaulay's famous 'Minute': that of developing a culturally distinct group who would form 'a class who may be interpreters between us and those whom we govern, a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect' [8, pp. 181–182].

I have dealt at length and in depth, elsewhere, with the origins of political parties, largely as a result of anglicization policy, from 1880 onwards. I have

noted how not only the internal situation – the ‘colonial dynamic’ – had begun to challenge the linguistic-cultural *status quo* – the ‘patriotic consensus’ – but also how the external, international situation had changed as imperial rivalry increased, the naval, maritime, commercial and *entrepôt* functions of Malta grew by leaps and bounds, especially after the opening of the Suez canal. Last but not least for understanding anglicization motivations, Italy next door had become a unified nation-state following the *Risorgimento*, which several in Malta had followed and lived through at fairly close quarters. Thus while it is wrong to suggest that anglicization policy in Malta resulted from the changed international situation in the 1870s, it having been on the cards from the very beginning, nevertheless the impetus for it, both internal and external, had grown. Opposition to it, however, was still adamant for a multitude of reasons, especially among the lawyer-politicians: those ‘advocates’ who would not bow to English codes, who would not bow to an English education, who would not bow. “*‘Slealta’ no, intransigenza si’.*”

Culturally speaking, here was no easy walk-over of one language by another, no hard-and-fast sell-out of the primitive to the enlightened. The Capitol’s Dante *versus* Albion’s Shakespeare was a clash of the titans. The Maltese *bourgeoisie* – the professional class more clamorously than the landed aristocracy – would not contemplate doing like the Hawaiian king Kamehameha who in an 1855 address to his legislature declared the firm conviction that unless his subjects became educated in English ‘their hope of intellectual progress, and of meeting the foreigners on terms of equality is a vain one’ [3, p. 167]. As in the Alto Adige or in Alsace-Lorraine, the language-cultures doing battle in Malta, off the Sicilian coast, were both European, both ‘Western’.

In the end, anglicization had to be forced from the top down, mainly at the behest of an Anglo-Maltese administrator, Sir (later Lord) Gerald Strickland (1861–1940), when he was Chief Secretary (1889–1902) and subsequently Prime Minister (1927–1930) and later still, until Italy’s participation in the war on the Axis side broke the camel’s back altogether. In this, from 1926 onwards, Strickland’s Constitutional Party was lent a hand by the Labour Party, which was not in power before 1947. The 1934 orders upgrading English and Maltese came from London at a time when Malta’s self-government had been taken away, and the colony’s constitutional life sent reeling back by a century. Throughout these steadily opposed but repeatedly put forward (and ultimately triumphant) anglicization *cum* de-Italianization measures, the Maltese market for English grew, wilynilly; so the constituency for a pro-English party also grew, all the more so as the franchise was progressively widened. By the time that the second world war ended – the Italian fleet surrendered at Malta – the popular answer to our first question would have been ‘for us’, or ‘for us too’.

That leaves the second question intact. Why us?

How widespread, profound and genuine in fact was British assimilationist policy throughout the empire, in the British Isles themselves? How burning was the British concern and desire expressed in Malta for raising a non-literary vernacular into an official language with English, or even into a national language?

There is no doubt that initially Maltese was seen as a means for facilitating anglicization 'on the Indian system'. Using vernaculars for anglicization to facilitate contact with subject peoples was a typical British policy, perhaps a necessary one if colonial government was to be at all possible, all the more so in countries where many different district or tribal languages existed. For example, in Nigeria, whose three main languages were Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, 'mother tongue education' was encouraged in many primary schools alongside the learning of English. 'The majority of school products only had enough of a smattering of the English language to fit them into their assigned roles of clerical officers, waiters, interpreters, etc' [2, pp. 285–286].

In Malta the British would only have had to learn Italian to communicate with intermediary classes, but clearly they were not interested in doing so. British governors between 1851 and 1946 were without exception army men, usually unattuned to the Horace and Virgil of Oxford and Cambridge, to whom Robert Browning's 'your England and our Italy' would have meant little or nothing, and whose responses to Byron and Thackeray, or Mazzini and Garibaldi, were not those of Bentinck or Gladstone. By and large, Malta to them was a flag-ship, not a country.

It is possible that some may have thought that – as had happened in Hawaii, and was then happening elsewhere – such a small and apparently uncouth vernacular, having served its purpose of ushering in the superior language of civilization (be it Italian or English), would itself decline or become extinct. This has been happening for example to the indigenous Chamorro language in Guam and to a lesser extent in the Northern Marianas. The heavy Hispanicization of the Chamorro lexikon left many Chamorros with the mistaken impression that presentday Chamorro was not really Chamorro but merely a mixture of 'true' Chamorro and Spanish. As affairs of state including religious instruction had to be conducted in the foreigner's language under Spanish rule, Chamorro began to lose ground. 'A Chamorro ruling class developed', writes Day, 'which not only spoke Spanish but tried to trace ancestry to the Spanish ... many Chamorros came to hold negative attitudes toward their language.' When Guam passed to the U.S.A. after 1898, English was made the language of court proceedings, education was made compulsory and Chamorro prohibited on school grounds. Chamorro dictionaries were collected and burned! 'The basis of progress in

Guam must be the English language', editorialized the *Guam Recorder* in 1925. 'The limitations of the Chamorro language must restrict the progress that could be made with that as the only medium of communication.' Further influenced by the mass media, and believing that English was the key to academic and economic success, Chamorro parents in Guam, taking after the Hawaiians, began speaking to their children in English [3, pp. 173–175]. Hawaiian is dead, Chamorro dying.

In Malta – where the British language policy may appear as the very opposite of the Spanish or American one – gradually it became clear that once Maltese and English would be taught in schools, it would become more difficult and generally less plausible for children to learn a third language. So the arguments initially employed against introducing English could be employed against retaining Italian. The straightforward justification for English – Malta belonged to Britain and English was the language of the Empire – did not cut much ice, least of all with the better educated and more politically conscious elements of the population. A more pliable argument was to show that it was a matter of self-interest – or, as Joe Chamberlain once put it, 'of bread and butter' – for the Maltese to abandon Italian for English. This could be done by fostering economic well-being and organizing political discrimination in appointments and promotions on the basis of language ability or propensity in line with the government's wishes. This took time, could be self-defeating, and still stuck in the nostrils of Malta's resolute 'italophile' nation-savers. Another option was to try and get round this class of people, these agitators opposed to progress and reform, by making it in the interest of an existing lower class, or seeking to mould another middle class that could differ from them, even oppose them openly and, in time, perhaps render them unrepresentative, uninfluential. This appears easier on paper than it is in the flesh, when 'us' and 'them' responses dominate allegiance; but it was a good try. But all this has little to do with languages. Languages become essentially a pretext for asserting domination and extending control on the one hand, and for resisting it and demanding self-government on the other hand. The Italian verse, sometimes quoted by nationalists, put it in a nutshell:

*Quando la forza con la ragion contrasta,
Vince la forza e la ragion non basta.*

But why us? To have 'cooks and servants in English homes'? Maltese society was homogeneous: Roman Catholic, Southern European, Maltese-speaking with an overall Italian layer. Unlike Cyprus. Here, however, Turkish co-existed with Greek, and 'anglicization' never sought to bring the two closer together to forge a Cypriot nationality bond. And unlike South Africa. There

managing differences and divisions was evidently a greater task than creating them. There Dutch co-existed with English. Nor was the British government a great supporter, let alone an initiator – with du Toit and his colleagues – of the Afrikaans language movement. That was Afrikaner nationalism pure and simple. Britain was hardly supporting Gaelic in Ireland. Or Welsh in Wales. Or even French in Canada. But Maltese, that was different.

To say that England never had a policy of ‘eradicating the patois’ would not be entirely correct, writes Grillo, adding that the extent and nature of hostility to a language cannot be judged solely by Acts of Parliament. In the mid-nineteenth century Welsh, for example, was being described in official quarters as ‘a vast drawback to Wales, and manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people... As a proof of this, there is no Welsh literature worthy of the name.’ That the Welsh people’s intelligence was not very high was, according to another savant, owing ‘to the circumstance of the adult population not having had the advantage of education in the English language.’ In 1775 Samuel Johnson had described the language spoken in the Western Islands of Scotland as ‘the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express’. Writing about the state of education in the Hebrides in 1866, Alexander Nicolson said they found themselves

in the predicament of dumb persons; and their sensitiveness to ridicule often exposes them to the pain of being reckoned barbarous by persons perhaps inferior to themselves in all the elements that constitute real civility, but endowed with the precious faculty of speaking some more or less intelligible form of the English language.

Not only was English necessary for government employment, schooling and even in certain functions for the act of speech itself, legislation also made English the authorised language of names of persons – whereby ‘ap Hyweo’ became ‘Powell’ and ‘O’Cinneide’ became ‘Kennedy’; and of places – thus we get ‘Swinefort’ for ‘Lis na Muc’, and ‘King’s Head’ for ‘Cnoc na Ri’ [4, pp. 84–89].

One of the boldest and most outspoken lawyers ever to sit in the Council of Government of Malta, Zaccaria Roncali, used the jargon of liberal representative government familiar in Britain and reduced the whole problem to this simple solution. If government was for the benefit of the country being governed, and the foreign government did not understand the language in use there, it was up to the government to learn that country’s language; it was not the people being governed who had to learn the government’s language. In a jibe at the decision of leaders of the anti-French insurgency to trust in the goodness of Britain, Roncali would employ the dictum ‘patres nostri peccaverunt et non sunt’.

Roncali was later raised to the bench and could not continue in a political career; but he was the only judge to have the courage, or perhaps the decency, in 1905, to attend Fortunato Mizzi's funeral. Mizzi, dubbed the *pater patriae*, had effectively founded the Maltese 'anti-English' or nationalist party in 1880 and had for the most part led or inspired it, through thick and thin, practically until the day of his death. A man of integrity and commitment, Mizzi stood his ground against obstacles and inducements alike, never accepting any government offers. Like most of his contemporaries in the circles in which he moved, Mizzi believed it would be both wrong and humiliating for Malta, steeped in 'italianità' for centuries, to succumb to anglicization; instead the Maltese should assert their rights and pursue their aspirations for national autonomy, albeit within the British empire. He could not initially accept the inclusion of English on the same standing with Italian, and Maltese on top of that, in the education system or in public affairs, the principle here being 'inclusio unius est exclusio alterius'. Faced by growing pressures for anglicization, both political and social, he and his party came round to accept having the two main languages on the same footing in schools – *pari passu* – a compromise adamantly opposed by Strickland and his closest followers, but not always by the British governors. Mizzi and his growing *entourage* who saw themselves as representative of the national interest and dignity, would not regard the Maltese vernacular, which they spoke, as a language. They saw it rather as a dialect, a *patois*, one that only had a limited currency for local purposes only, whereas Italian had in history and tradition as well as in the human geography – in Maltese emigration throughout the Mediterranean littoral, in the routine commerce and trade with Sicily and the Italian mainland – incomparable utility and credibility in the quest for Maltese nationhood. Italian was not only the language of law and all notarial deeds, it was the language of the church, of Rome; even under the Knights Italian had retained a predominance, and it long served as a basis for the Mediterranean *lingua franca*. Italian was seen as Malta's passport to Italy, to the continent, to Latin Europe, to Roman Catholicism. A buffer against the British occupiers and settlers, it was a bridge reducing insularity and isolation, a target against sheer incomprehensibility and unaccountability in the region and in the world. Just as early Maltese settlers in Louisiana were regarded (and buried in New Orleans cemeteries) as 'italiani di Malta', so these culturally threatened and politically subordinate middle class activists tended to consider themselves as or as most closely akin to Italians, Italians of Malta to be sure, and under British rule, deeply attached to and proud of their island home. In this very process, and faced with an anglicization programme which they pledged to stop, such people tended to see themselves as 'Latin Southerners', 'Mediterranean Roman Catholics'. That is not to say that they wished Malta to become a part of United Italy, which until

1929 was a state not recognized by the Pope. Exceptions in this respect confirmed the rule. By force of circumstance over a protracted period, this *italianità* aspect of Maltese nationality was liable to change further, as in time it did, but not through any collusion or self-denial on the part of these italophile Maltese protagonists, who like their ancestors were truly and thoroughly italianite in their education, in their *forma mentis*, in their socio-cultural pursuits and haunts. Nationality was not, as the younger Mizzi once put it, 'like a change of clothes'; it was quite different from citizenship ('nosta sudditanza britannica'). Addressing the Council of Government in October 1916, shortly before he was court-martialled, the more italophile faction's leader of the *Partito Nazionale* explained that the constituent elements of nationality corresponded to names of territory, race, language, religion, law, customs, history and above all national conscience. 'These elements, natural and moral, clearly show that our nationality is neither English nor African, but simply and uniquely Italian.' While indicative of the possible extent of the affinities of *italianità*, such a decided allegiance to an Italian nationality, however 'unique', would not have been readily accepted, and even less readily proclaimed, by the mainstream nationalist movement under Canon Ignazio Panzavecchia during the first decades of this century, nor by the subsequent P.N. leaderships of Sir Ugo Mifsud and Borg Olivier, who succeeded a tamed and tired Mizzi as premier in 1950.

Nationalism may be described as a complex of values, norms and aspirations operating within a social collectivity and based on togetherness originating from sharing a common history, writes van der Plank:

It is a complex which evolved historically and internalized in a way which the individual members of a nation accepted and which they decided to continue in a formal and legal framework: the state. It appears to be a contradiction: states which evolved in early medieval times are seldom an expression of the feelings described; it is often just the opposite: national feelings seem to have arisen – even when more than one linguistic, religious, or cultural group participated in that state – only after a long period of living together and sharing the same vicissitudes. [17, p. 429]

Such were these Maltese nationalists: they saw the national community somewhat *in abstracto*, so long as their linguistic community was not the social one in the ideological sense of nationhood. In this they were also, let us not forget, in moral and political combat with a Northern dominating power, eager to present a credible European and civilized picture of themselves, conscious of region and of size. They saw any championing of Maltese itself as preposterous; and anyway that would have pulled the carpet from under their feet. In this sense

they were pragmatists rather than idealists. They refused to go under and be swamped. And they truly felt an affinity with Italianness.

As it is 'the subordinate groups who, in accomodation, do most of the adapting' [12, p.4], in many countries with a mixture of nationalities, writes Hertz, the language of the upper classes obtained complete predominance and alone adapted itself to the needs of the new civilization; the tongue of the people became 'a vernacular, spoken by unlettered people only, and therefore did not acquire the vocabulary and flexibility needed to express the thoughts and feelings of cultured people'. In this way the intellectually active elements of many peoples abandoned their native speech for another language: in Brittany, Breton for French; in Flanders, Flemish for French; in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Celtic for English; in Bohemia, Czech for German; in Slovakia, Slovak for Hungarian; in Galicia, Ruthenian for Polish; in Dalmatia, Croatian for Italian; in Norway, Norwegian for Danish. French was the language of the aristocratic world, German that of the traders and the professions in wide parts of central and eastern Europe, while Italian and Greek were used in other parts for international intercourse [6, p. 85]. Thus Maltese 'literati', all those aspiring to education, social promotion and a higher grade of civilization, had over the centuries appropriated and practically internalized Italian.

At the turn of this century we find Fortunato Mizzi and his well-read colleague Cachia Zammit in London insisting that they would speak 'English with Italian words', for their thoughts, their sentiments would be Italian, 'however English the phrases may sound.' The stand for Italian was not simply linguistic or cultural, historical or political, religious or social: it was ecological. They belonged at one time to the Latin and to the Mediterranean worlds; whereas English they associated with 'the Nordic snows'. Actually much of the support for Italian among the 'nationalists' had a liberal, cosmopolitan, humanist, supra-national tint. Their sense of Maltese nationhood was voluntaristic not doctrinaire. They were right at the other end from Shankarrao Deo who no sooner had the Indian Constitution been proclaimed in 1949 than he issued this declaration: 'If by a national language is intended a language for the whole country, well, I am against. I have to say it clearly. India is a nation and I am an Indian, but my language is Marathi' [11, p.8]. A century earlier the regenerating Greek nationalists of Korais were intent on 'Hellenizing' modern Greek, in the face of popular resistance.

Mizzians were hardly betraying the national cause: for that they were the ones to strive and to suffer against the odds. But they were not *de rigueur* nationalists either. 'While in Italy and in France those who strive to maintain language purity are called the eunuchs of the language,' protested the elder Mizzi in January 1884, 'here some think it reasonable to purify a useless dialect.'

The telegraph, the railway, the ship have made one country of all countries, and so all countries tend to adjust the diverse languages, through continuous relations, so that all languages are losing some of their native purity: but here some think of purifying a language which isolates us all the more in the Mediterranean.

More political than linguistic, Mizzi's 'renaissance' posture here is that of a secular forward-looking Europeanist, verging on that of an 'Esperantist', rather than of a reactionary dog-in-the-manger parochialist. The Irish nationalist leader O'Connell spoke Gaelic but, like Parnell, Redmond and various Irish writers published in English such as Swift, he would not champion a Gaelic revival: Gaelic was on the decline, they thought it would suit Ireland better to employ English. In Malta efforts were made to show how 'Italian' Maltese itself was (and how 'Latin' the Maltese were) – unending lists of Romance loan-words and Southern European surnames – which seemed to imply a wish that Maltese was or would be creolized with an Italian stamp, not unlike some other mainland dialect.

While such efforts have since been dismissed and ridiculed by British and Maltese politicians and *litterateurs*, there is nothing extraordinarily ridiculous about the language-dialect position, or the official-informal one, or the major-minor one, if seen in the context of the time. Much of the driving force behind anglicization was predicated on a similar philosophy *a fortiori*.

As Jonathan Steinberg reminds us in his recent studies, and as the Italian historian of language Tullio De Mauro has shown, in 1861 not more than two to three per cent of the Italian population would have understood Italian. One dialect was often incomprehensible to another in the same country. Frederick the Great, a German, spoke French. Eugen Weber noted that in 1863 a quarter of all French communes spoke no French. 'Quand il s'agit de la terre,' wrote Emmanuel Labet in 1912, 'on pense en patois'. The odd thing about the *questione della lingua*, Steinberg writes, is 'how rarely historians ask it':

As recently as 1968 a leading historian of French education published a study of its evolution from 1800 to his own day without mentioning the existence of patois. In effect, he left out the single most obvious fact confronting the typical schoolmaster in the French countryside for most of the period covered – that his pupils spoke either no or very halting French. The myth of the one, indivisible French State obscured the realities from the observers who bothered to look. In other respects those who saw turned away in disgust. To the nineteenth-century French or Italian observer dialect was the language of 'savages'. Peasants were often thought

of as ignorant brutes whose tongue was simply bad speech, an attitude not unknown today in inner city schools in the English-speaking world [14, pp. 198–200].

The standardization of language, the degree of officialdom and currency granted to it in a state, was to a large extent a political decision not a linguistic one. In colonized Malta, the leading Italian-educated Maltese class saw the colonizer's language being progressively, almost unstoppably, imposed on them, in place of their traditional and dearly cherished 'lingua di Dante'. But most of the inhabitants of Malta, no doubt like those of Italy (who, like them and their French counter-parts were mostly illiterate or semi-literate), would not have heard of the Divine Comedy. Much of Maltese nationalism's support in the countryside stemmed not from any special predilection for Italian as from associations of this with religion and native-like tradition, from deference to the beliefs of village notables and the 'national' leadership from the city, and possibly a certain independent spirit among farmers. Among the British-employed working class in the 'proletarian' dockyards centred in the Cottonera district, the nationalists were never too attractive; that was their Achilles' heel. To be marked out as a nationalist in Malta's dockyard was always dangerous. Those seen to be inviting disloyalty to the strictly-enforced peer group service ethic there, from Manwel Dimech to Nerik Mizzi, were severely dealt with.

In Malta, in addition to growing collaboration among the 'newer' classes and occupational categories, especially in the Royal Dockyard, the British had undoubted strategic, military and naval interests to protect and to promote, for which at least a smattering of English among the labouring population was seen to be necessary. At the same time anglicization served to distance Malta culturally from Italy as much as possible and was meant to endear it, instead, to the British Empire. One of the slogans for anglicization became emigration to the far-flung corners of the British Empire, especially when the consolidation of first French and then Italian domination of the Maghreb countries made Maltese settlement there more problematic.

Us who? Italians? Not quite, but some more than most. 'How can we adapt our way of thinking and of feeling to the way of thinking and of feeling of the English people? And if we cannot strip away the soul from the word, that is the thought, how can we ever dress this thought in any other form but that which suits our sentiments, that is the Italian form?' implored the *Partito Nazionale* leader. In the first generation language debates Roncali was more blunt, ebullient and categorical:

We are not irredentisti – we have the pleasure to be governed by Great Britain and want to continue being so... We are Italians under

the British colours; we salute that standard and are pleased to remain united; but we desire John Bull to have some better esteem of us. Apart, now, from every ethnographic and philological aspect of the question, I maintain – whether we might even be Arabs, Mongols, Japanese, whatever you wish – we are however a free people, who have not been conquered, who have been able to wring the neck of dominators...

And again:

We are a free people, we have been a civilized people since ancient times, and we were already civilized when another people, who today pretend to have mastered civilization, were in a savage state. We have a civilization of which every civilized people may be jealous. There are our most ancient monuments, not to be found anywhere else in Europe.

This Italian thoroughbred ranting about Malta's European individuality and demanding the rights of the Maltese 'people', was the same one who in an orchestrated national commemoration of the 1565 Great Siege victory as Malta's 'National Day', on 8 September 1885, shouted that Malta belonged to the Maltese not to the British, and the British could get out. ('*Viva Malta! Malta è dei Maltesi non degli inglesi! Fuori lo straniero!*'))

Englishmen? In spite of the penetration of English even for day-to-day use in the civil service, in commerce, in education and in publications, the firmly-held Stricklandian ambition of making the Maltese as English as possible in fact, in thought, in deed; or of passing them off as of Phoenician descent hence British rather than Latin; never took root in a Maltese soil, however well contrived, convenient or consequential that may have been politically. What is remarkable however is that in spite of its more pervasive currency in a universal suffrage, obligatory education and mass market situation, English would seem never to have penetrated the deeper layers of culture in at least certain important Maltese domains, most notably perhaps in poetry, as Italian had done. As we now realise, most of the best Maltese language poets and writers dating back to the inter-war period, such as 'the father of Maltese literature' Giuseppe Muscat Azzopardi and the 'national poet' Dun Karm Psaila started off by writing in Italian; it was directly from Italian that they moved gradually into Maltese. Maltese poetry in English remained always insignificant by comparison to the corpus of works in Italian and subsequently, increasingly, in Maltese. Nor did English ever make much headway in the Maltese courts, where again the shift tended to be from Italian to a still noticeably Italianized Maltese; or indeed in religion and the

churches, where Maltese had always co-existed with Italian – and Latin – anyway.

Neither quite Italian nor properly English. Apart from historical memory and legend, the Maltese islands had retained as a culture carrier, the in-group Maltese vernacular. Even if seemingly in hibernation, and however unofficial, this medium survived one foreign occupation after another. It belonged to the islands; and the islanders, to a greater or lesser extent, consciously or unconsciously, belonged to it.

'Language is one of the dearest things a people can have', wrote Dr Salvatore Cumbo in his *Filologo Maltese* in 1841. 'It is a compendium of the people's history. This is what gives character and nationality to a people.' 'How on earth can our pupils be taught through Italian', he wrote, 'when the vernacular is of a form totally different from the Italian language and the native idiom totally opposed to that of Italy?' English, Cumbo persisted in another article, would mark out an Englishman, and Italian an Italian, but Maltese was 'a language Nature herself had given us and we should cultivate it'. In a memorandum to the Malta University Council, Hookham Frere, Vassalli's friend, held that 'to speak one's own language without a knowledge of its grammar and construction is the true characteristic of ignorance in an individual, or of barbarism in a people. A native of any other country in Europe, by acquiring any other of the languages which are usually learnt, acquires at the same time the grammar of his own.' It was by such principles that the *Società per la Coltura della Lingua Maltese*, formed in 1876 (and led by another foreigner, Dr J. Koppel) was imbued, as was the later *Xirka Xemja*.

In his unpublished etymological dictionary, the nineteenth century Maltese educationist Fortunato Panzavecchia wrote that the Maltese people was perhaps the only one in Europe who spoke in one language and wrote in another.

The problem of minority peoples and languages throughout Europe, not merely in the Alpine valleys, was far more pronounced and complex than this simplistic and erroneous supposition of Panzavecchia would have it. Spare a thought for Belgium and Switzerland, or indeed Italy and France; for Yiddish, the Hungarian Germans, for Alsatians and Vosgians, the Slovenian Wends of Carinthia, the Polish Shopnsakians of Silesia, the Cashubs and Mazurians of former west and east Prussia; the Netherlandic-French around Brussels, the French-German around Berne; or the serene cohabitation of Catholic Piedmontese-speakers with their Waldensian French-speaking neighbours in Torre Pellice – 'Geneva Italien' one poet called it [1, 17]. In 1976 Stephens described over fifty surviving linguistic minorities in sixteen states of Western Europe [15].² In many

2. There is no reference to Maltese.

cases, noted Katzner, 'as one travels across a region the language gradually merges into a neighbouring one and it becomes impossible to state for certain just what language is being spoken.' In his 'Languages of Europe' section, we get Basque – and Faroese, Romany and Yiddish – but not Maltese! 'Maltese', Katzner tells us, 'is spoken on the island of Malta, in the Mediterranean Sea. Its basis is Arabic...' [9, pp. 41–109].³

However important the language factor may be, and it always is, that language is the criterion determining nationality is a gross historical nonsense, in Europe and even more outside it. Were it not so, Serbs and Croats, Czechs and Slovaks should be happily united peoples in their respective nation-states; Danish and Norwegian, like Dutch and Flemish, are similarly very nearly the same languages.

Panzavecchia, like Cumbo and Vassalli, among others, was keen to identify 'people' with 'nation' with 'language' (and with Europe too). He saw the need of Maltese mainly for educational purposes; he was by no means sold on anglicization. 'Speaking in one language, writing in another.' This was a situation to which Fishman's variant of Ferguson's well-known *diglossia* theory may be applied without much difficulty. We had not a High and Low usage of the same language, but different languages in the same society, both of which were used for different purposes by at least its literate members. In our bilingual societal condition, one speech, Maltese, served a daily and mundane familiar purpose: it was the 'lingo' of hearth and home, of chapel and confessional, a more intimate and spontaneous means of expression, less refined and sophisticated because less acknowledged and barely utilized for writing purposes until comparatively recently. The other language was more fully-fledged, spoken and written by millions of others in the region, and had from time immemorial served as the language of officialdom and public affairs for the Maltese themselves. It was to some extent, socially if not also linguistically – ecologically – a Maltese Italian. But anglicization complicates this situation still further. Forcing choice, preference, priority, allegiance, it puts a finger into the still open wound of Maltese nationality and nationhood, unsettled and increasingly swollen as these were.

For two or three generations we get at least among the more literate segments of the population not *diglossia*, but a limited *triglossia*. There is considerable overlap in between the first bilingual situation of Italian-Maltese (say in 1800) and the second one of English-Maltese (say in 1950). The literate pre-1934 generations had been raised on Italian, with at best a smattering of non-standardized Maltese. (One orthography for Maltese was only decided upon,

3. Maltese is listed under languages of the Middle East (p. 172).

finally, in 1931.) Hence a degree of uneven and confused societal trilingualism was inevitable; in addition to which the languages could still have somewhat different uses. Thus, if you went to the opera your *libretto* would almost invariably be in Italian, as would your missal, and prayer book, unless it was in Latin, when you went (regularly and devoutly) to church. But if you had to make contact with government or any of the British service establishments, which still dominated the economy, you would have recourse to English. Traces of such a mixed cultural baggage were discernable in everyday parlance in the 1950s, if not later, and even overlapped into Maltese. In the meantime, the Maltese on radio since the mid-1930s increased, and the Maltese press grew, but until 1960 you still had one daily in Italian (*Malta*) and another in English ('The Times of Malta'). The 'triglossia' aspect has disappeared in contemporary times, English has evidently had the better of Italian in a big way. Mainly as a consequence of Italian TV reception since the 1950s, however, a measure of trilingualism is almost certainly growing. For it was also true, as the younger Mizzi once put it, that empires come and go but geography stays put.

Nineteenth century Maltese was not a pidgin or a creole. It was not the language challenging foreign intrusion by a dominating power (the latest one to make its presence felt on the scene). It is difficult to find clear analogies or parallels. We do not exactly have here the case of Québec where French-speaking Canadians have ever since the British connection feared and still fear being swamped by English – they fear, as Professor Louis Balthazar of Laval University put it to me recently, 'not bilingualism – unilingualism'. A comparison could be drawn with Luxembourg where Luxembourgish, a German dialect, co-exists with German and French [16, pp. 381–418]. In Belgium, and in Switzerland, the main 'national' languages are really 'foreign' ones: French and Dutch in Belgium, French, German and Italian in Switzerland. (Swiss Romansch is recognized as a national language too, but is not really one at all.) Something resembling that might have happened in Malta had Italian and English benefited from greater social and political 'democratization' and jointly rode the wave, but by the 1940s it was too late for Italian. But that is to underestimate the persevering vitality of Maltese, which earned its niche as the national language thanks to a growing realisation among several Maltese writers, that it expressed their sentiments best. That Maltese was linguistically organized and politically raised into a national language fits the strict pattern: in Europe the best known such language-nationhood-statehood strategems were employed in Finland and Israel. In the European-settled British empire, the most intriguing field for comparative investigation is probably Afrikaans. The effect of colonialism, of repression or disadvantage, and of attempted assimilation has often provoked conscientization of regional or national language-cultures. The Gaelic League

in Ireland was a case in point. Castilian was making serious inroads into Catalan until the latter's resurgence. Attempts to magyarize or germanize, italianize or frenchify, hispanize or hellenize have frequently, similarly, back-fired in varying degrees, depending however on many variables (such as the brutality used) [7, pp. 407–426].

Such a conscientization occurred in Malta as well. A striking unorthodox exponent of pedigree Malteseness was Dimech, who repeated and publicized earlier ideas, injecting these with a strong nationalist, anti-British fervour. Dimech, like Nerik Mizzi, had spent some years in Italy, and admired the *pater patriae*, but was a left-winger. Defending himself against any suspicion that by supporting Maltese he was anti-Italian, or indeed that he was not a 'strenuo difensore della lingua italiana e dell'italianità di Malta', he would rather sing the praises of 'la bella, l'incantevole isola di Malta' in Maltese. There was only one motherland, and that was Malta: 'Jena Malti!' No sooner had he discounted his second jail sentence in 1898 than in his *Bandiera tal Maltin* we begin to find articles identifying the Maltese language with Maltese nationhood, and insisting on the pedagogical utility of Maltese, even in the teaching of other languages (such as English, which Dimech also gave lessons in). 'There are no books in Maltese which spread any light', he laments. He had ideas about a Society of Maltese Writers, an Academy, an orthography, a dictionary, all aspects which had interested scholars in the course of time. 'Maltese, demand that as a Maltese nation you have your own language, which is Maltese, taught in the schools.' 'We are Maltese and the Maltese language we have always wanted in the Courts, in street names, in the letters we write one another, in the Council, in the Government Gazette, in the bishop's pastoral letters, in sermons', he insisted:

The children of other lands have short stories about their country, written in their own language, and so from their childhood days their hearts glow with a love of country.'

And again:

How much easier and how much better would it be if, instead of having a young child strain for a whole day to learn how to repeat like a parrot 'The noun is a word that denotes a person or thing', you would simply tell him 'Cull ma narau, cull ma immissu u cull ma nsemmu, isem.'

Without entering into the merits of Dimech's methodological or pedagogical skills – he was a self-made man *a outrance* – nevertheless the message is crystal clear and there can be no doubt that it found a receptive ear among a growing audience, starting with 'illuminati' in his *Xirka tal Imdaulin*.

By a twist of fate, therefore, opposition to anglicization delayed its implementation while arousing a national political awareness, whereas the vernacular teaching system for anglicization proved to be the thin end of the wedge for Maltese to emerge as the national language of a small but tenacious society. In somewhat topsy-turvy encounters between enlightenment and pragmatism, between voluntarism and *zeitgeist*, nationalists would rather appear to have been the liberals; the imperialists, nationalists; and the rationalists, romantics.

One can identify some *triglossia* situations, as in Palestine in the first century, where Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek were simultaneously used for different purposes [13, pp. 95–109]. Or, in contemporary Tanzania, where in addition to the tribal language, people may know Swahili as well as English; thus one gets the local vernacular, a regional *lingua franca*, and an international language [20, pp. 129–147]. One can even identify languages which manage to survive, at least in a restricted area, historically sandwiched for example in between Spanish and American influence, as in the (delicate) case of Chamorro, or between French and English influence, as in some South Pacific islands.⁴

In certain places the vernacular died out, was simply done away with, by the inhabitants themselves or by default, on the ground that the foreign or national language to which they were becoming more exposed was much more widely used and, consequently, better suited to their communication purposes than their own native language. This too could eventually have been the case of Malta: had Maltese been either creolised into Italian, or 'purified' into Arabic. Or rendered practically extinct and useless, or secondary and inferior: more restricted to familiar and hidden uses: through a widespread general preference for English. Such a prospect is not altogether absent in the independent and sovereign nation-state of Malta in the nineteen nineties. English interference and code switching are all too observable among younger and potentially formative and influential peer group cohorts, especially in what might be described as the Sliema-centred 'sub-culture'. Had the seeming nest-builder of Maltese become its cuckoo? A reservation about English in various countries – from Singapore to Lagos, from Delhi to Dar es-Salaam – is that this disrupts the value system by introducing, mainly through the media, norms and attitudes which go counter to those of the societies exposed to it. Again Malta would not be exempt from similar influences,

4. In a forthcoming study Geoffrey Hull (Sydney University) suggests the Filipino language Tagalog as a possible comparison with Maltese. Faced by competition from Spanish and then (American) English, Tagalog declined and English became predominant. A similar situation prevailed in Portuguese Goa where since its incorporation into India English effectively displaced the local vernacular, Konkani, while Portuguese receded into the background. In Dominica and St. Lucia a French-derived Creole survives together with French and English, the latter in the ascendant. The Seychelles and Mauritius could also bear some comparison.

which however Italian television – and mass tourism – would have been propagating just as well. The peripheral centre being home to its inhabitants no less than an outpost or gallery to its sojourning visitors, such strains and reconciliations continue to be crucial. A quick prosperity at the expense of home-grown *survivance* would add nothing to Malta's life-soul: the land and the people together.

Is it a taboo question to ask if Maltese has a 'restricted code', in the accepted sense used by Bernstein? Research beckons here too. What Maltese would seem to suffer from, understandably enough, is not a restricted code but a restricted currency. On the other hand, all people live in communities, and most people are not globe-trotters. As must be the case ultimately with any living language, the flourishing of Maltese or otherwise rests in the mind of its users and potential users. Maltese patriotism and nationalism have not been the preserve of the Italian-educated classes, even if it has been generally from within their ranks that a literary interest in Maltese slowly developed. Between the occasional poem in intelligible Maltese from Caxaro in the fifteenth century to Bonamico in the seventeenth, various other specimen of Maltese writing may yet come to light. One of the outstanding insurgent leaders in 1798, the Birkirkara cotton merchant Vincenzo Borg 'Brared', only spoke Maltese; as E.B. Vella pointedly noted, he was an illiterate by British and Maltese upper class standards. Another torch-bearer of the Maltese cause a generation later, Giorgio Mitrovich, was well served by the fact that he knew English. Cornwall-Lewis, who disliked Mitrovich's 'very inflammatory language', told Lord Glenelg in 1838 that 'the main reason for being an agent is that he knows English... He is a good book-keeper and accountant, writes a good hand and understands English.' But he also knew Italian of course. In this century Borg Olivier (1911–1980) and Mintoff (1916–), the latter a Rhodes Scholar, both knew the three Malta languages, although neither ever excelled in written Maltese; the former would have felt at little more at ease in Italian than English, the latter in English than in Italian, but Maltese served them very well indeed for their respective political careers.

Since 1934, when by London's *fiat* Maltese (with English) was made official and Italian thrown out, and since the Malta Independence Constitution of 1964 entrenched Maltese as the national language, with English as a second language, Maltese made noticeable progress in literature and in education, it has been obligatory in all schools at practically all levels and for entry into University, for all government jobs, and has become increasingly a main language of TV, of the (now) several radio stations, as well as in print journalism. The two daily party-associated mass circulation newspapers *L-Orizzont* (1962–) and *In-Nazzjon* (1970–) are in Maltese, as are their respective weeklies, although the onetime Strickland press establishment still has the best-selling

daily and Sunday titles: in English. Maltese still suffers from some misuse, from lingering uncertainties and from a fudged politicisation which does not do it justice. This is sometimes evident in the media not only through the want of idiomatic expression by poorly-educated speakers but also conceptually, as with the standard TV usage of the supposedly 'purist' term 'Ġnus Magħquda' (lit.: Joined Races) instead of 'Nazzjonijiet Uniti' (lit.: United Nations); or with strained re-naming of public arteries, as in the case of the main entrance to the capital city of Valletta, for so long known in Maltese as 'Putirjal' (from 'Porta Reale'), changed by the Mintoff government to 'Bieb il-Belt'. With more liberalisation, competition and better-trained exponents, the usage and respectability of Maltese could improve. There continues to be an undoubted social preference for English in various sectors and for certain types of expression. This is partly because the tourist industry has replaced the garrison and, like it, tends to capture a larger market, and because English has taken off so speedily as a world language.

A growing Malteseness, jointly with a lingering outer layer of anglicization, rather gave the lie to convictions that the Maltese, 'in the central Mediterranean and surrounded by Latin peoples', could never adopt the Anglo-Saxon tongue – or indeed Maltese as a 'high' language; just as it also flew in the face of attempting to transform a Southern European Mediterranean people into a blueprint of Englishness in whatever way. And yet some of the organizational, institutional and attitudinal influences are still marked, accentuating the Maltese identity which would otherwise have been more emphatically an extension, a variant of the Italian one. Foremost among this character is the widespread use of English as a second language. An Italian womb, an English midwife, a Maltese bed.

Italian, in post-*Risorgimento* Europe, may have been 'the language of liberty'; Maltese, if identified with the Saracen occupation, allegedly 'the language of slavery'; and English, depending on which side of the fence you were on, the language of 'domination' and 'despotism' or of 'progress' and 'reform'. The old antagonisms between England and Italy in Malta have gradually passed into the old-time memory, and only survive, decreasingly, among football fans.

If the Maltese were Italians, as some claimed, they still spoke a language which was neither Italian nor even an Italian dialect. Like Basque it was a language in Europe that did not belong to a European language family. Unlike the Norwegian language variants, it could not potentially be wound into a synthesis making use of common denominators. Possibly worst of all, in the politics of language and nationhood in Malta, was the fear that Maltese-users risked being identified with Arabs and Muslims: the last thing any Maltese wished to be or to be seen to be: precisely that which, to their mind, the Maltese

had 'always' fought against being or becoming. This sentiment was put to the test in the Mintoff period when Arabic was made obligatory in schools but when, with the change in government in 1987, that was no longer so, hardly anyone still opted to learn it. The sustained preference for much closer-to-heart and familiar European languages resumed and may be intensifying: English, Italian, French, even German, Spanish.

The Maltese vernacular, now a language in its own right, was the toe-hold of a more distinctly separate Maltese nationhood, which the British themselves seized upon. This kernel a slow but steady stream of Maltese intellectuals, educationists, journalists and politicians similarly adopted and internalized, with a growing fascination and ardour, until by the 1960s upholding and safeguarding the Maltese national language became dutiful and, on paper, almost sacrosanct.

Thus Malta became an independent nation with her own language, a full member of the United Nations, of the Council of Europe, of the Commonwealth of Nations, later of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Malta began to speak up and sometimes made bold to raise her voice. In 1992 Malta G.C. – the multilingual, multicultural Christian European bulwark of the Knights Hospitallers – waits patiently to be received into the European Community, but is not sure of if, how or when; not sure either, if this be manifest destiny, of the would-be consequences.

After Independence Day was removed from its pedestal in the Mintoff years, Malta remained without a consensus on her National Day: in an attempt to prevent further squabbling on this issue the Fenech Adami administration decided – with parliament's unanimous approval – on having five national days, including Independence Day, Republic Day and the *Sette Giugno*. Notwithstanding such misnomers, and other trials and tribulations, political parties became institutionalized and integrated. More self-conscious and knowledgeable about their respective (and sometimes very nearly joint) pasts, through home-grown experiences and expedients, these have on the whole conformed themselves to parliamentary democratic norms: since independence both the main parties – Nationalist and Labour – have peacefully transferred power to each other after regularly-held general elections.

The emancipation of the language has gone hand-in-hand with the growth of nationhood in other spheres. The Latin-European and Arabic-Mediterranean strains played so incessantly in the language question for the best part of sixteen decades have somehow woven themselves into the fabric of Maltese identity, and indeed into Maltese foreign policy as this has developed, matured and assumed a degree of *continuum* since independence. The post-1964 economy too slipped out of dependence on British military spending but British tourists still lead in numbers over those from Germany and Italy now approaching one

million odd annually, straining the much extended infrastructure to its limits.

The language-nationhood equation has settled down within a broader agenda just as bilingualism – if not, indeed, trilingualism – increasingly takes hold of the educational and occupational goals of rising generations of Maltese to whom the Empire now means little or nothing, but for whom a peaceful, prosperous and open United Europe dances tantalizingly on the horizon.

The thought-world of nineteenth century and pre-war Malta having passed away never to be relived, the spectre of a material culture that commercializes, consumerizes, hedonizes and robotizes has not ruled out Malta: that modifies the uses and connotations of language and of speech, threatening conversation. On the other hand, exposure in the liberalized media has become easier, and University enrolments have galloped in recent years. The Malta language question was a very bumpy ride, rupturing a spiritual continuity in the life of Maltese society. We cannot be sure that such uprooting and deprivation as it entailed may ever be made good: if in a Maltese environment the transplanted supra-national language will ever rest on foundations as strong or deep, or if it will prove an inheritance so firm and proud, or command such native-like loyalty as its long-embedded predecessor had done; or else if, in our *fin de siècle* mass production, post-colonial and globalist mood, this will not eventually sweep everything before it in the name of a ready-made, cash-and-carry expedience. In retrospect and optimistically, given the historical resilience and latter-day flourishing of Maltese among the now independent islanders, the 'language question' may be seen as a part of their growing up until Malta came of age; but never as a monolingual nation.

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