

## Ethnicity and Representation within the Maltese Media Industries

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<b>Towards Learner Autonomy</b>	<b>Nicholas Monsarrat (1910-1979)</b>	<b>The Benefits of Artificial Reefs</b>	<b>Poetry on Gozo</b>	<b>Ethnicity &amp; Media Representation</b>	<b>Chevalier dans l'ordre des Palmes Académiques</b>
<b>The Aged in Gozo</b>	<b>Young People In Gozo</b>	<b>Ix-Xjenza u s-Socjeta</b>	<b>Profile: Joseph Sagona</b>	<b>Front Cover</b>	

### Introduction

The media, as Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 7) reiterate, is implicated in core relationships. In this paper, audio-visual texts will be analyzed in order to demystify the manner in which the Gozitan people partake within the media industry within the Maltese islands and find out how they are represented. The focus of textual analysis will be a documentary realist series entitled *Ghawdex Illum* (Gozo Today) produced by the Gozitan director-producer Alvin Scicluna. This program is shown on the national broadcasting television Television Malta, every Tuesday at 11.15 p.m. with a repeat transmission on Sunday at 6.05 p.m.

Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 3) argue that our sense of what groups in society are and how we conceptualise social difference is often shaped and/or reinforced by labels and divisions transmitted by the mass media. Their argument is that the media product is shaped by various factors, namely the mechanisms of production, recruitment and socialisation of producers as well as the conveyance of the messages concerned. Other factors implicated here are the aesthetic and sociological values that went into the making of the content and the way this product is taken up by the audience/s. Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 7) underline the fact that the various groups that form an audience and their interaction with the media not only play an important part in creating meaning but in/directly play an important part in the shaping of the content. This paper therefore will take the three issues into question, namely the media industry in the Maltese Islands, the product and its producer together with the audience and their in/direct involvement in the textual production.

### The Context

The country known as Malta consists of a number of islands which are to be found in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. This archipelago is wedged in between the island of Sicily and the main land of Libya. The islands which are inhabited are Malta, the population of which comprises of 339, 173 inhabitants, and Gozo and Comino with a population of 27, 258, that is 7.4% of the Maltese population ( Demographic Review of the Maltese Islands 1993 (1994): 11). In spite of its size, Malta is an independent country with its own language and culture. Its position within the global economic market, however, impinges on the country's capability of producing media texts. As Burgelman and Pauwels (1992) point out, small countries have limited production capacity due to their small geographical area and a limited linguistic range which further constricts the market. At the same time, limited financial and technological resources render the cultural products 'manufactured' less competitive and less financially feasible than foreign texts. This means that the media organisations within Malta tend to depend on imported texts more than locally manufactured ones. Heung (1995: 83) concludes that a number of developing countries tend to have their imagination colonized by products deriving from the west, namely American produced texts.

In this paper, however, the focus is not going to be on the impact of external colonialism, but internal colonialism. Internal colonialism devolves from the fact that the public broadcasting services assume 'a monolithic and monocultural 'national' audience' (Mercer 1994: 78), where the majority are seen as universal and incarnating the norm (Juteau-Lee 1995: 17). The nation, however, consists of a coalition of interests and cultural differences, differences which often denote socio-economic inequality (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 191). The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the media, what Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 186) regard as institutions of production and organization of information and ideology, is as Mercer (1994: 73) points out, an arena of cultural contestation. The contestation devolves over the concept of what is the national and cultural identity. Traditional conceptions of the national identity define who is in and who is out (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 49) since the constitution of a 'people' is defined against the Other (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 32), whether the "Other" is a subordinate group within the social group, or a nation outside the geographical boundaries of the nation-state.

In this paper, the 'Other' in question will be taken to mean the people who live on the second largest inhabited island, that of Gozo. The fact that a channel of water cuts them off from the main island has resulted in the peripheral access of the Gozitans to political, material and media resources. This is evident, for example, in the fact that the bulk of media organisations are to be found on the main island - Malta. At the same time, these organisations are controlled by a minority of the population which attempt to speak for the majority through a limited range of discourses (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 188).

### Media Content

Gozitans suffer from institutional and cultural marginalisation within the media industry. Institutional and structural marginalisation can be made manifest by comparing the number of Maltese personnel working within the media organisations in Malta with that of Gozitans. Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 8), for example, found out that in Australia, Aborigines and ethnic minorities face large-scale exclusion as media workers. The low level of ethnic minority representation on a structural and symbolic basis was explained by the administrators of media organisations there in terms of the unavailability of talent within this social group and the expected hostility from audiences faced with programs which do not legitimate their experiences (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 15). This explanation is relevant also to Malta since such excuses are voiced to offer explanations for the systematic exclusion of ethnic minority workers. Few are the Gozitans who work within Maltese media organisations. When they do work within the audio-visual sector, they are more visible within the production section of the realist-documentary genre, than any other genre or sector. On the whole, Gozitans who work within these organisations tend to contribute their work as freelancers and are rarely found as full-time employees of the organisation in question. Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 43) quote Van Dijk when the latter argues that the percentage of ethnic minority groups in employment and control of the media is even lower than their numerical presence in society.

The low percentage of Gozitans as media workers and controllers means that they do not have the capacity to influence media industry decisions concerning programs and content (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 8). Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 13) are concerned by the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the media industry more than the negative portrayal of these groups by the same organisations. Their concern stems from their perception of how structural processes tend to reinforce the hegemonic control within the media. At the same time they are aware that the material aspect of production within media industries help to shape the ideas and values which are often turned into commodities to

be exchanged on the marketplace (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 17), and which in turn help to replicate structural racism.

Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 24) argue that often professional and institutional values are used as an excuse to exclude and/or intimidate cultural minorities employed within media organisations. These values, in turn affect media output, especially within news and current affairs programs, which often speak with the voice and from the perspective of the dominant ethnic group. Marginalisation to the means of production has resulted in what West (1990: 27) calls the invisibility and namelessness of the racialised group. Silences and absences of particular social groups within society, according to Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 35), helps to define the boundaries of the nation state.

Gozitan politicians and church dignitaries often complain that the national broadcasting services, the services which still attract the majority of the audience, render their presence within the public sphere invisible in mainstream media images according to Scicluna (interview on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1997). Borg (1994: 75) argues that power figures within the public sphere tend to get the limelight within news production. If the Gozitan politicians and Church dignitaries barely ever make it on the news, no wonder that the rest of the population are rarely mentioned. Gozitans are only mentioned in their roles as victims, as intractable citizens or as people living on the margins of society whose 'eccentric' activities and ideas might titillate the curiosity of the rest of the Maltese population. Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 43) quoting Van Dijk, argue that minority groups are rarely depicted in the media and if they are, the reports are minimal in size, frequency and are often negative. The images also tend to be stereotypical and tend to blame the victim and not the unequal institutional and structural milieu for the former's predicament (see for example the issue concerning ferry fares, *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1996, p. 1). Mercer regards stereotypes, what he refers to as 'products of audiovisual codes' (Mercer 1994: 82), with suspicion, because he argues that such stereotypes shape interpretations of reality which in turn help to reproduce and legitimate common sense assumptions about certain groups within society.

The stereotypical images promoted are products of how others perceive a particular social group within a historical nexus (Heung 1995: 85). As Williamson, quoted by Mercer (1994: 91), points out, the group with the power over the apparatus of image-making, hence with the power to speak for and represent the Other, is not required to be representative of the whole population. Ownership of the means of production gives them the right to define who has legitimacy, who is permitted to speak on behalf of the people (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 33). Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 15) argue that the group/s with access to the media present themselves as the spokespersons of the nation and in so doing, present their behavior as the norm and their interests as though they are the nation's interests. This, according to Mercer (1994: 93), brings about the centralizing monologism of traditional versions of national identity. Hall, quoted by Heung (1995: 84), regards this expropriation of cultural identity, as internal colonialism.

At the same time, practices of internal colonialism are accompanied by the appropriation and extirpation of cultural artifacts (Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 37). An example in point is the use of various Gozitan landmarks to promote Malta as a tourist destination abroad. On their arrival in Malta, the tourists are lucky if they get to see the sights which attracted them to the islands in the first place since the agents who use these images usually find them accommodation on Malta and not on Gozo. Other aspects expropriated from the Gozitan context are skills and crafts which are still in evidence in Gozo due to the relatively slower rate with which the island was developed. These are now used as emblems of the "Maltese" national identity, as in the case of Maltese lace, the art of which has died out in Malta but is still practised in Gozo.

Heung (1995: 90) argues that colonisation operates when lands and bodies are taken over and used as canvasses onto which cultural meanings are projected. Lands and bodies are thus judged through the aesthetics of the coloniser. Through aesthetic imperialism, the identity of the people within a particular context is found wanting, and replaced by projected cultural meanings. Heung (1995: 92) believes that psychic damage occurs when judgements of physical attractiveness and self-worth are derived from aesthetic imperialism, as will be demonstrated.

Heung (1995: 83) regards dominant systems of reproduction as producing and reinforcing mental structures and images which constrain, dehumanise and dis-empower particular social groups within a given social context. At the same time, however, these images are constructed and communicated within a historical nexus of competing as well as contingent representations (Heung 1995: 85) as will be demonstrated in this paper.

### Ghettoization

The de-regulation of the media which occurred in 1992 (Chircop 1994: 363) resulted in a plethora of television stations in Malta. These comprise of Television Malta (TVM), which is the national broadcasting service, Super 1 TV which is the voice of the Malta Labour Party, Education 22 and the Community Channel both set up with the intention of educating particular target groups of the public as well as Smash TV the only commercial television station in existence at the moment. There is also the intention of opening a new television channel, a channel which will act as the ideological medium for the Nationalist Party. None of these media stations are to be found on Gozo. The Gozitans are mainly consumers rather than producers when it comes to audio-visual images.

The Gozitans are more lucky when it comes to radios since Gozo hosts one of the commercial radio stations, Radio Calypso. There is also a sub-station for RTK (*Radio tal-Knisja*, The Church's Radio) which transmits programs produced in Gozo about events and issues which concern Gozo. The setting up of a sub-radio station on Gozo might be due to the fact that the present archbishop of Malta, who is a Gozitan, has acknowledged the Gozitan bishop's demand for Gozitan representation within public institutions. Radio Calypso on the other hand, being a commercial radio, allows the marketplace to determine the cultural content. Its primary concern is to get enough audience to attract advertisers. This means that the Gozitans's need to represent themselves to themselves and in so doing contest negative and degrading stereotypes promoted by other mainstream media is negated since the owner, who is Maltese, is 'out to earn a living and not to right a wrong' (interview with Ray Bajada, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1997).

When it comes to the press, the situation is not any better. None of the social actors with a monopoly in this field deemed it necessary to print a newspaper targeted at a Gozitan readership, not even the Church which often attempts to set up services not offered by the state, as happened with the setting up of child care centres and facilities for the elderly in Gozo. The only newspaper which makes an attempt to right this wrong is The Sunday Times of Malta, which every Sunday sets apart half a page for Castelaine who attempts to cover events which occurred in Gozo during a particular week.

The media in Malta is characterised by a ghetto treatment of minority groups. The experience of being a Gozitan has been relegated to minority content programs. This segregation makes the subordinate ethnic group appear as different from the dominant ethnic group. Differentiation and segregation helps to further depict the Gozitans as 'abnormal', further from the norm since their experience cannot be incorporated within the rest of the textual body. As Juteau-Lee (1995:17)

underlines, the dominant group tends to construct the minority group as different from the majority group, and in so doing claims the right to dominate over them. The perceptual and signification system used leads to the categorisation of certain social groups, a categorisation which often legitimates the exploitation and appropriation of bodies as well as the labour power these bodies produce (Juteau-Lee 1995:5). Socially constituted groups are assigned specific locations in the system of production and reproduction which legitimates their subordinate position in society (Juteau-Lee 1998: 14).

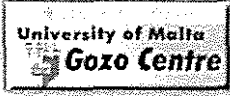
At the same time, ethnic minorities themselves deem it necessary to assert cultural distinctiveness in their struggle to overcome constant rejection and in an attempt to bring about equality of access to resources and power (Goulbourne 1993: 183). As Crosby (1991: 286) reiterates, pride and self-respect are realized through self-definition. This opportunity occurred, according to Scicluna (interview on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1997), in 1988 when TVM came up with the idea of transmitting a program on Gozo, which was to be produced by a Gozitan. This was *Ghawdex Illum*, a realist-documentary program of 30 minutes which was shown twice a week on TVM. As Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 13) point out, ethnic minority groups are more likely to appear in informational programs which are locally produced than in any other genres. Before the inception of *Ghawdex Illum*, *Il-Bronja* (The Conch) devoted part of its time schedule to covering socio-cultural events which took place within the Gozitan context. The crew for *Il-Bronja* were all Maltese. These used to visit Gozo for some hours once a week, and in this short time, reported newsworthy events which they came by. The station found it economically more feasible in 1988 to assign the program to a Gozitan producer who was based on Gozo and was more aware what were the issues and events which concerned the Gozitans.

Alvin Scicluna in the interview complained about the time assigned for the broadcasting of *Ghawdex Illum*. His argument is that the 11.15 pm (Tuesday) and 6.05 p.m. (Sunday) time slot means that the number of people watching the program is minimal. Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 20) comment on the tendency of television stations to broadcast programs from and concerning ethnic groups in marginal time-slots. The reason given by the Public Broadcasting Authority, the administrative section of TVM, for such a time-slot was that since *Ghawdex Illum* was a regional program, it did not benefit a prime-time slot (interview with Scicluna, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1997). As Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 34) point out, the dominant group regard the worldview of minorities as less important than their own perception. Hence the "ghettoization" of ethnic minority slots' (Mercer 1994: 78).

As Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 192) underline, cultural hierarchies and processes are reproduced when actors make conscious decisions concerning the employment of staff, the contracting of writers, as well as the purchase and shaping of content material.

[To be continued]

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