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### **TOWARDS AN ANTI-RACIST AGENDA IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF MALTA<sup>1</sup>**

One of the main features of the present historical conjuncture, the intensification of *globalization*, has brought in its wake not only the mobility of capital but also mass mobility of potential labor power across the globe - two types of mobility which, of course, do not occur on a level playing field. In a mode of production which, as indicated in the previous chapter, has always been characterized by uneven levels of industrial development (once again, see Marx and Engels, 1998), people in the subaltern part of the North-South axis move up north in search of a new life. The 'specter' of the violent colonial process the 'old continent' initiated has come back with a vengeance to 'haunt' it. This process is itself exacerbated by the fact that highly industrialized countries require certain types of labor and that this requirement cannot be met via the internal labor market, despite the high levels of unemployment to be found within these countries (Apitzsch, 1995, p. 68).

With Southern Europe witnessing mass scale immigration from North Africa, the Mediterranean plays an important role in this process. Like other countries of the Mediterranean, Malta is firmly caught up in the throes of this mobility process. Sharing with many countries of the region a history of having been an exporter of labor power to several parts of the world, ironically including North Africa but, most particularly, former British colonies of settlement (Attard, 1983; 1989; 1999), Malta has been witnessing an influx of immigrants from different parts of Africa and, most particularly, North Africa.

Racism against blacks and Arabs, previously played down in the media, is now a key issue in television programs, newspaper articles and letters to the editor.

Racism had, until a few years ago, been given lip service in the discourse, concerning oppression, throughout the islands forming the Maltese archipelago. This can be seen from the fact that the literature dealing with different forms of privilege and oppression in Malta rarely deals with the subject. Class and gender analyses feature prominently in sociological texts produced in Malta (see Sultana, 1992 and 1997; Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994; Darmanin, 1993; Baldacchino and Mayo, 1997) but in depth studies on racism were virtually non-existent until the end of the nineties. During the last six years, a study on racism in Malta (Calleja, 2000) and a sociology reader (Cassar and Cutajar, 2004), dealing with racism in a number of chapters, were produced.

### **Islamophobia**

Much debate on the airwaves and newspapers seems to be characterized by the expression of a particular form of racism - *Islamophobia* - which is rampant worldwide (Macedo and Gounari, 2005) and which has traditionally been a feature of the Southern European, or 'Latin Arc', context. This phenomenon has to be viewed against a Southern European historic backdrop featuring periods of Arab domination, which left indelible marks on the culture of these places, and long periods of European colonization marked by Christian wars against the Saracen 'other.' This is very true of the Maltese islands that had a three hundred year Arab period. One of this period's most tangible legacies is the native Maltese language that is a derivative of Arabic with an influx of romance words. It is also written in a European script. The legacy is also evident in several Maltese surnames (e.g. Abdilla, Caruana, Saliba) and in most place names (Rabat, Marsa, Zebbug,

Mdina). The three hundred-year Arab period was, however, followed by a lengthy process of European rule, a process that served to consolidate Catholicism as the dominant belief system throughout the islands. This process includes (a) the ‘Sicilian period’, (b) the period when the islands were ruled by the Order of St John of Jerusalem and, finally, (c) the British period (which followed a brief two-year interlude of French occupation under Napoleon). Catholicism was consolidated during the first two periods. The British period of colonization started in 1800 and officially came to an end in 1964 with the country’s independence, though British forces remained in Malta until 1979.

### **The Saracen ‘Other’**

The period of European colonization was long enough to leave a strong Eurocentric imprint on the islands and its inhabitants. A substantial part of this period was characterized by the war involving European powers, acting as the bulwarks of Christendom, and the Ottoman Empire. Malta was very much caught up in these wars, especially during its period of rule by the Order of St John (often referred to as the Knights of Malta), who had settled in Malta after losing the island of Rhodes to the Turks. The events of 1565, when the islands successfully repelled an invasion by Turkish troops, are commemorated every year. Images and anecdotes connected with these events are an important feature of Maltese popular lore. The iconography in works of art commissioned by the Order of St John also reflected an antagonism towards the Saracen. This type of iconography is nowhere more apparent than at St. John’s co-Cathedral in Valletta, one of the islands’ major artistic attractions that was also the Order’s conventual church. The Ottoman adversary is represented, in this iconography, as the ‘other.’ (Borg and Mayo, 2000 a & b) As always, and using Edward Said’s (1978) terms, the

iconography reflects an assumption of *positional superiority*, in the construction of *alterity*, by those who commission the work. Each sculpted figure of the Saracen ‘Other’, at St. John’s, constitutes an integral feature of the Cathedral’s ostentatious High Baroque setting. The figures, referred to here, are specifically those of the Turkish slaves supporting the ornate wooden pulpit and the marble slaves shouldering the weight of Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner’s monument. One of the latter slave figures brings to mind the typically Western construction of Caliban, the Shakespearean figure who, in conventional western literary criticism, often prompts commentators to refer to the ‘nature-nurture’ debate. What we come across here is an exotic representation of not only the Saracen ‘other’ but, more generally, the non-European. The figure fits the popular western construction of the non-European, the African in particular, represented as a *deficit* figure ripe for European missionary intervention. This type of image is a recurring one in the predominantly Roman Catholic country that is Malta. It features prominently in holy pictures and much of the Church’s other iconography.

The baroque marble figure of the young Turkish slave, in the Cottoner Monument at St John’s, is reproduced on the front cover of Calleja (2000). Given the argument (centering on the issue of *Islamophobia*) that Calleja carries forward in this book, the choice of such an illustration strikes us as being very apt. In these artistic representations, the Saracen is also demonized, rendered the personification of all that is ‘dark’ and therefore ‘evil’ or ‘irrational.’ This distortion has all the features of the (mis) representation of the ‘Other’ - “based on scientific proof” (Fanon, 1963, p. 296) - decried by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Of course, in Fanon’s text, it is the colonized Algerian subject who constitutes alterity.

Given such a racist and Islamophobic representation of the ‘Other’ in both so-called ‘High’ and popular culture, not only in Malta but throughout many parts of Southern Europe, it is not surprising that anything associated with Islam becomes the object of repudiation in the Maltese psyche. As a result, the feared neighboring Arab replaces the much-despised Turk, Islam being the common denominator. As Calleja (2000) points out:

Apart from the international media’s systematic campaigns against Arab interests, there is some popular Maltese cultural mythology that compounds these prejudices. Maltese have been nurtured...to associate the Arabs and Islam with hostility and oppression. We have popular myths about Count Roger who liberated Malta from the Arabs and numerous other myths about Arab raids on Malta. This continued with the Knights of Malta who annihilated all historical evidence of our Arab culture and Islamic religion. We thus construe an image based on a variety of stereotypical assumptions that Arabs are hostile, violent, untrustworthy and totally incompatible with our standards and values and must hence be ‘kept out’ both physically and attitudinally. (p. 44)

### **Misconceptions**

One point that emerges from this type of racism, predicated on *Islamophobia*, is an astounding lack of basic knowledge concerning Islam and the Arab world. The two are conflated, when it should be common knowledge that Islam is a world religion that knows no ethnic, racial or geographical boundaries. It makes its presence felt everywhere. (Shaykh’Abd Wahid Pallavicini, 1998). One can find Islamic communities in Malta, the UK and Italy, just to give three examples. These communities do not consist exclusively of people who would be referred to as ‘migrants’ but also include people coming from families who have been, say, British or Italian for several generations. Ahmed Moatassime underlines that the Arabs, strictly speaking, constitute a minority (approximately one fifth) in a milliard of Muslims (Moatassime, 2000, p. 113).

Lack of basic knowledge of the culture of those constructed as ‘other’ is manifest in the Maltese media that constructs Arabs as either terrorists or drug dealers. In the latter case, the media focuses exclusively on those caught, at Malta’s International Airport, importing drugs, without going beyond the surface to investigate such matters as who really lies behind the operation. Furthermore, such media as school textbooks are often guilty of distorting the culture of alterity. We come across distortions as serious as that found in a much used secondary school history textbook (Education Department, 1976, p. 129). We are shown the picture of a man sporting a beard and wearing a turban purporting to represent the prophet Mohammed. Distortions such as these border on ignorance of and lack of sensitivity towards the religious values of others. It should, after all, be common knowledge that the Koran prohibits representations of the Prophet and God. Of course, these distortions are, alas, to be found not only in Malta but elsewhere as Mahmoud Salem Elsheikh (1999, p.47) clearly demonstrates with regard to school texts used in Italy.

While such distortions are reprehensible *per se* they become all the more offensive given that our school population is increasingly becoming multi-ethnic as a result of the influx of foreigners in Malta. For instance, an Arab community has been present in Malta since the early seventies when the then Labor government forged strong ties between Malta and Arab states, Libya in particular. Furthermore, in addition to the presence of Muslims in our schools, there was a period, between the seventies and mid-eighties, when a number of Arab teachers, many of whom Muslim, taught Arabic in Maltese State schools. The Arabic language was rendered a compulsory subject in schools by the then Labor government. It is reasonable to assume that the more multi-

ethnic an environment becomes, the greater the contestation that takes place with respect to the politics of representation. It was, in fact, an Egyptian colleague, a teacher of Arabic, who first brought the distortion in the history textbook to the attention of one of us when the author was a teacher of English in a Maltese secondary state school.

### **Eurocentric curricula**

Of course, there is much to argue about the politics of representation in texts used in our schools. One rarely comes across texts in our schools that provide illustrations revealing an ethnic mix. This is often compounded by the fact that, as indicated in the preceding chapter, the State is still making use, as English language reading texts, of textbooks (e.g., the graded Ladybird reading books) published in England several decades ago. These textbooks are therefore not reflective of the multi-ethnic and multi-racial contestation and ferment that characterized British society in later years. Furthermore, little seems to be done in the way of rendering courses at our educational institutions less Eurocentric. A classic example here would be *Systems of Knowledge* introduced as a compulsory area in 1987 at sixth form level. It was originally criticized for attaching little importance to the writings of authors who do not fall within the male Eurocentric framework (and this despite the presence of a huge corpus of African literature available in English). Recall that *Systems of Knowledge* was also criticized for being similar in conception to the ‘Great Books’ and the process of ‘Cultural Literacy’ advocated in the US by Alan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch respectively (see Borg et al, 1995) and Chapter 3. A reviewer of a recent *Systems of Knowledge* official textbook provides a very positive appraisal of the work. He nevertheless makes the point that the book “could usefully have devoted more systematic attention to the implications of its own boundaries, and to

the fact that its orientations are exclusively Eurocentric”. (Grixti, 1996, p. 210) He goes on to state that “More could have been made of the fact that other cultural, artistic, intellectual and technological traditions were developed in non European contexts, and that some of the most stimulating developments in art and thought often resulted from contact between different cultural traditions.” (Ibid.).

### **Arab and Islamic contributions**

There is often the tendency, when dealing with the Mediterranean, to concentrate exclusively on the Southern European and particularly the Greco-Roman traditions, ignoring the other civilizations that have emerged in the African part of the region. These civilizations have also made tremendous contributions to the development of European civilization (see, for instance, Lê Thánh Khôi 1999, p. 444; 2000, p. 58), a point stressed by Predrag Matvejevic who states that one cannot construct a Europe without reference to its ‘infancy and adolescence’, namely the formative influence of the Mediterranean. (Matvejevic, 1997, p.119). The Mediterranean, of course, comprises the Arab and Islamic civilizations. Elsheikh (1998) regards the antagonism shown in Europe towards these civilizations as indicative of what he calls ‘the debtor’s syndrome’:

the person to whom one is indebted is constantly a hated person; particularly if the creditor, as in this case, is a strange body, rejected by the collective consciousness, hated by the political, social, cultural and religious institutions. If anything, the rage against the creditor, in these circumstances, becomes an almost moral duty and a necessary condition for the survival of that society. (literal translation, by one of the authors, from Elsheikh, 1998, p. 38).

In misrepresenting the Arab and Islam, our texts and mass media obscure Western culture’s indebtedness to those other civilizations that are often denigrated within western



regimes of truth. Of course, this denigration becomes a feature of our ‘common sense’ that is manifest in a variety of ways.

There is much to be said, in this context, about popular Maltese expressions. These include expressions such as “Am I black?” (*Mela jien iswed?*) (*sic*) uttered to express resentment at being excluded or overlooked. Other expressions represent Jews and Arabs in a pejorative light.

The ever-increasing presence of Arabs in Malta has also led to expressions of fear concerning the ‘threat’ they are supposed to pose to the preservation of the ‘Maltese identity,’ the ‘Maltese culture’ and the country’s ‘Catholic values.’ As is often the case, we are confronted in these situations, with an essentialist and totalizing discourse that negates the existence of multiple cultures and identities within a single society. There seems to be little recognition of the fact that there are no fixed identities, a point painstakingly underlined by the Vietnamese author, Lê Thánh Khôi (1999, 2000), through a detailed historical overview of the intermeshing of cultures in the Mediterranean. It is a point that underscores the problematic nature of the term ‘race’ itself. As Robert Miles has argued, “...owing to interbreeding and large-scale migrations, the distinctions between ‘races’, identified as dominant gene frequencies, are often blurred.” (quote reproduced in Virdee and Cole, 2000, pp. 52, 53).

Carlos Alberto Torres (1998) eloquently states:

Recognition of the complexities posed by the process of hybridization and the notion of multiple identities in the social and the psychological construction of the pedagogical subject should challenge any attempt to essentialize differences based on race, gender, class, nationality, ethnic, religious and sexual preferences.” (p. 254).

## Xenophobia

Columnists and opinion leaders often express the fear that the Arab population in Malta would grow to such an extent that Malta would eventually become an Islamic state, and therefore lose its ‘identity’ in the process. The following excerpt from an opinion column, entitled ‘Slay the Infidel’, which appeared in *The Malta Independent*, is typical of this position:

History has taught us that Islam has always spread at the cost of the culture of the people whose lands it has occupied. In larger countries, it would take centuries for Muslim proliferation to make a quantifiable impact. Thus the political aim would not be identified for a long while yet. But Malta is a drop in the ocean where ramifications will be felt much sooner because of its limitations. The race for conquest, if such a conquest is intended, will be quick. Worse, like a stealthy predator, it will be upon us before we know what has hit us. (Zammit Endrich, 1999).

Reference to the situation of women in certain parts of the Arab world is often made to justify this xenophobic attitude towards Arabs and Islam. Furthermore, the fear of Arabs and blacks has often led to very blatant and obscene acts of racism that take the form of shops and bars occasionally displaying notices barring Arabs from entering. There have been allegations that bouncers at entertainment spots<sup>2</sup> have been discriminating against certain potential patrons on the grounds of race. It was reported in *The Times*, a Maltese English language daily newspaper, on 25 November, 1999, that a “man of Nigerian origin is considering filing a constitutional case, claiming racial discrimination against the owners of a Paceville (Malta’s *main entertainment center for young people*) night club after black people were allegedly turned away on two occasions recently because of their skin color.” (Galea Debono, 1999a, p. 4). *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, of 8th August, 1999, reported a similar incident concerning

blacks (Balzan, 1999, p.1) while *The Times* (Malta) reported a similar complaint by a French professor of Arab origin who felt that he was being discriminated against, when denied entry to a Paceville night club, because he was ‘Arab-looking’ (Galea Debono, 1999b, p. 14).

Furthermore, a section of the Maltese broadcasting media gave prominence to the publication, in 1999, of a book entitled *Credo*. The evidence from the TV discussion programs suggests that this book expounds concepts, on a range of subjects, including race and disability, which smack of neo-Nazi ‘master race’ theories. The author’s ideas were, for the most part, decried in the course of the programs. This notwithstanding, the prominence given by certain TV stations to this book suggests that authors of outrageously racist works constantly prove attractive to sections of the media in their search for the sensational and the ‘provocative.’ In 2004, the author contested the European parliament elections, in the name of a party he founded named *Imperium Europa*, and polled well over a thousand votes in a country with a population of just a third of a million.

A section of the media, to its credit, was on the scene at a detention center in early 2005, to report and reproduce, through photographs and footage,<sup>3</sup> the appalling scenes at the Safi detention center where immigrants were being held until their applications for refugee status were considered. The scenes depicted members of the army using heavy-handed tactics to quell a protest by immigrants concerning their prolonged detention, unfair ‘criminalization’ and conditions within the detention center. The Prime Minister ordered an inquiry into the matter and the final report, concerning this inquiry, was produced in December, 2005. It was criticized in sections of the press as a ‘whitewash’.<sup>4</sup>

### **Need for legislation**

The foregoing is indicative of the fact that the gradual development of Maltese society into a multi-ethnic and multi-racial one is marked by tensions. An organization calling itself a National Republican Alliance (ANR), came into being and made the stemming of immigration into Malta and the need to safeguard the 'national identity' two of its main battle cries. It organized a march in Valletta in October 2005 that drew a sizeable crowd.

In a micro and densely populated state like Malta, that is also a frontier country with respect to North Africa, from where many people from North and sub-Saharan Africa attempt to cross the Mediterranean to seek a better life, the influx of many immigrants is likely to provoke such a reaction. There is always the fear that a micro-state like Malta will be swamped. This has to be regarded as one of the most visible effects of globalization on micro-states. Tensions abound and they often generate a racism that assumes different forms, some subtle and others not so subtle.

In a letter to the then Prime Minister,<sup>5</sup> sent in 2000, the left wing group, *Graffiti*, expressed their concern at the growing amount of racism and xenophobia in Malta. The group referred, in this letter, to the publication of *Credo* and the allegations that Africans are being denied access to nightclubs in Paceville. There is also reference, in the letter, to one specific case involving an African who was allegedly beaten up by bouncers at a particular locality in the area. The group also referred to a study by Anthony Abela (2000, p. 219),<sup>6</sup> from the University of Malta's Department of Sociology, which demonstrates,

empirically, that ‘intolerance’ is rife in Malta in various aspects of life including attitudes towards foreigners. The Graffiti group cited statistics from this study which indicate that 28% of Maltese do not want to live in proximity to Muslims, 21% consider the presence of Jews to be undesirable, 19% are averse to the presence of people of other races while 16% do not want immigrants/ foreign workers in the country. The letter called on the Government to introduce legislation against racism and xenophobia. It is only a few years ago that provision was made in the Maltese Municipal Law, governing internal affairs in the Maltese islands, for the prosecution of anyone inciting racial hatred<sup>7</sup>

According to this provision:

Whosoever uses any threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displays any written or printed material which is threatening, abusive or insulting, or otherwise conducts himself (*sic*) in such a manner, with intent thereby to stir up racial hatred or whereby racial hatred is likely, having regard to all circumstances, to be stirred up.... (in Cutajar and Deguara, 2004, p. 189)

We feel, however, that more legislation needs to be introduced to deal with the different and subtle aspects of racism. We also feel that reinforcement measures should be in place to ensure that such legislation would be effective.

While there is a pressing need for anti-racist legislation, there is an equal need for progressive transformative action, concerning race and ethnicity, in different spheres and sites of practice. This chapter focuses on one important sphere, that of education, the area being conceived of here in its broader context. We argue for an anti-racist agenda in education. We now attempt to identify what are the elements that make up an anti-racist agenda in education in Malta and Gozo.

### **Anti-Racist education - key characteristics<sup>8</sup>**

A learning community that is committed to resisting racism cannot afford to refrain from gaining familiarity with the glossary concerning this type of oppression. Educators who have a good grasp of the terminology will automatically understand the complex nature of racism and will be in a position to comment in a complex way on the multiple nature of this form of oppression.

Effective anti-racist educational programs reflect the perspective that racism is socially constructed and, therefore, can be reversed. Since most racisms are manufactured within particular contexts, good anti-racist programs are sensitive to the particular demographics of the geographic area in which the programs are situated. This means that it is important to address the complexities of racism by including all targeted groups within a given context. It also means that anti-racist pedagogies should be reinvented within a lived space to include indigenous knowledges (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg, 2001).

Another element that normally characterizes good anti-racist programs is their focus on praxis. Praxis-oriented programs consider advocacy, action and mobilization as complementary to analysis. Furthermore, good anti-racist programs shun insularity. There is a link between racisms and global capitalism. As a result, participants need to understand how racisms come packaged in cheap products and services.

### **The New NMC for Malta - A good start**

The new National Minimum Curriculum (NMC), published by the Ministry of Education in December 1999, and discussed in depth in Chapter 3, is inspired by an educational agenda that sets out to socialize students into a pluralistic, democratic and socially inclusive society. As a result, the document, which provides a framework for

compulsory Maltese education from the first year of kindergarten (age: 3) to the end of the secondary years (age: 16), constitutes a good reference point for local educators and learning communities interested in developing an anti-racist pedagogy within a scholastic environment.

The NMC document is sensitive to the fact that multiculturalism and, therefore, diversity and difference, are facts of Maltese life. The term 'multiculturalism' is here used in its broader sense (see McLaren, 1997; Torres, 1998). This immediate and concrete social reality demands that, "the educational system should enable students to develop a sense of respect, cooperation, and solidarity among cultures." (NMC, 1999, p.24). According to the NMC document, the development of these crucial skills should help students "better understand individual, local and regional differences and should enable them to live a productive and meaningful life in a context characterized by socio-cultural diversity." (NMC, 1999, p.24)

For the above project to materialize, the local educational community should discard methods of teaching built on the illusion that classrooms constitute homogenous groups. According to the NMC, the community should embrace "a pedagogy based on respect for and the celebration of difference" (NMC, 1999, p.30).

Awareness, respect, affirmation and celebration of differences, including bio-differences (see O'Sullivan, 1999), are not abstract concepts but concrete experiences which have to be accessed very early in a child's life. The National Minimum Curriculum asserts that, from an early age, children should participate in an educational process which helps them " identify, appreciate and celebrate the physical, intellectual, emotional and social characteristics as well as their differences; enable children to

develop a sense of co-operation; promote respect for human rights and the rights of other species" (NMC, 1999, p.74). The technological infrastructure is conceived of as an important asset in the anti-racist agenda. According to the NMC, "communications technology and information technology can help draw our students closer to other students located in different parts of the world" (NMC, 1999, pp.27, 28)

An educational program that is intended to imbue students with an anti-racist mentality cannot distance itself from an historical analysis of how racisms are created, reproduced and hegemonized by privileged groups/communities/nations. Moreover, the acknowledgment of and high regard for different cultures depends on the appreciation of the different facets of life within different countries and regions. The NMC document recognizes the need for students to enrich their cultural capital in this regard. In a section dealing with Educational Objectives (NMC, 1999, pp. 47-70), the document encourages schools to familiarize students with "the culture, history and different religions of the Mediterranean and Malta's history viewed within this regional context...[and] with the culture, history and different religions of Europe" (p.50)

In addition to this Euro-Mediterranean dimension, the NMC underscores the need to "ensure that the country can avail itself of a nucleus of people who have a mastery of languages deemed strategically important. These include Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic" (NMC, 1999, p.82). Also stressed is the need for students to know more about "the characteristics of the most important religions and how each one of them attempts to answer the same fundamental questions concerning human existence" (NMC, 1999, p.52). These areas of knowledge, among many others, provide the informative backdrop



for the promotion of greater interest in, understanding of and empathy and solidarity with societies and cultures.

Educators in Malta who are willing to help in creating an educational context that is culturally pluralistic and anti-racist in character should find, in the National Minimum Curriculum document, the basic ingredients for a pedagogy that could lead students to confront cultural territorialism. The drafters of this document were particularly sensitive to the fact that, as indicated in Chapter 3, the previous National Minimum Curriculum, published between 1989-1990, smacked of Eurocentrism (once again, for an analysis of this document, with respect to issues concerning 'race', class, gender and disability, see Borg et al, 1995). Eurocentrism contradicts the commitment towards genuine and critical multiculturalism, and destroys the possibility for students to understand racism and oppression within themselves and society. In fact, a Eurocentric curriculum supports, in an active or passive way, the perceived 'superior' qualities of western taught. It traps students within a cultural fortress centering around an essentialist and outdated notion of what constitutes the 'European', very much an 'imagined community' in Benedict Anderson's terms. This 'imagined community' does not reflect the contemporary reality of a Europe characterized by multi-racial/ethnic difference.

This cultural fortress breeds in students the mental attitude that whatever is good, advanced, progressive and sophisticated originates in the West. It keeps them trapped within their perceived and preset cultural boundaries, not allowing them to cross the racial and ethnic divides. To adapt a sentence from Henry Giroux, we would argue that, in crossing these borders, they can begin to "challenge" the white and eurocentric racism to which their "body has grown accustomed." (Giroux, 1998, p. 150). The challenge

here is that of moving from a Eurocentric towards a 'multi-centric' curriculum, to borrow George Sefa Dei's term (Dei, 1997). The traditionally subaltern would thus be encouraged to move, in the words of bell hooks (1994), from 'margin to center' (Dei, 1997, pp. 81, 82). The traditionally subordinated ethnic groups would be allowed possibilities to become major actors in the curriculum and not simply adjuncts to a cast formed of people from the dominant ethnic group (Dei, 1997, p. 83).

### **Educational programs in schools**

A genuine anti-racist project in schools does not create new subjects. Where there is a commitment towards this pedagogy, all stakeholders within the learning community are perceived as responsible for the concretization of the project. In this way, the school avoids creating 'cultural islands' that are incompatible with and/or contradict each other.

An educational program, characterized by an avowedly anti-racist stance, needs to be sensitive to the process of human development. In the context of early childhood education, the program should be concrete in orientation; that is to say, it should be close to the immediate life of the children. The development of self-esteem helps individual pupils appreciate friends and adults who form part of their life. Through the promotion and development of self-esteem, the emotional infrastructure weaves itself with the concrete and visible experience of difference. The concrete experience in this phase of the human continuum manifests itself physically, as well as in different national costumes, cuisine, traditional celebrations, music, dance and other forms of expressive

arts. This is only an initial step and we recognize that a genuine anti-racist education requires much more than this. We must ensure that all ethnicities, including those of the dominant groups, are included in this process. Furthermore, we must constantly oppose the tendency to exoticize minority ethnic group cultures. As Blair and Cole (2000) point out, with respect to 'multicultural' education in Britain:

The exoticization of minority ethnic group cultures and customs merely served to reinforce the notion that these cultures were indeed 'Other' and drew the boundary more firmly between 'Them,' the 'immigrants' or 'foreigners,' and 'Us,' the 'real' British. Needless to say, this approach itself came under severe criticism as a form of education that was said to be tokenistic and failed to address the real problems of schools and of communities within them. (Blair and Cole, 2000, p.70)

The aesthetic and tactile environments, which are so crucial at the early childhood level, should be particularly sensitive to the issue of difference. Accurate information about racial and cultural differences and similarities should be evident in the visuals, stories, and activity tables and corners, made available to children as part of the learning experience.

At the primary level (ages: 5-11), the educational program should continue to build on the process initiated in early childhood. At primary level, children familiarize themselves with international children's literature and with the history and development of local and regional traditions. Exposure to this literature would, hopefully, enable children to learn how different cultures, societies and communities respond to fundamental human needs. A primary-level program should also help students to develop: a positive attitude towards cultures; the will to learn from the experiences of different cultures; and the will to resist different forms of prejudices, intolerance and

discrimination. This attitudinal change, together with the basic knowledge, should facilitate the process of developing the necessary skills in cooperation, dialogue, critical thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution and empathy, amongst other skills. Without the development of these skills, the anti-racist project at the primary level will remain a mere academic exercise.

At the secondary level (ages 12-16), concrete experience remains the focal point around which an anti-racist pedagogy revolves. The strengthening and consolidation of critical and reflective thinking should lead to the program becoming more praxis-oriented in nature. This means that the personal and social experience of students is scrutinized in the hope that such self-reflection would lead to personal transformation and concrete action. In more specific terms, an anti-racist pedagogy at the secondary level should help students:

- realize how a racial/ethnic identity is created
- reflect on how they may be unconsciously or actively participating in the racist project
- understand how they are introduced to and socialized in the racist cultures
- familiarize themselves with the basic terminology used in describing and arguing against racism
- familiarize themselves with the experience of ethnic and racial groups present in Malta
- realize the historical and current link between racism and imperialism
- realize how racism can intersect with other forms of oppression
- realize their role as change agents and cultural workers
- engage in concrete action

At different points of the scholastic journey, students affirm their own identity, confront themselves, analyze and problematize their prejudices, intolerance and cultural ignorance, celebrate difference and become actively engaged in anti-racist action.

## Teacher Education

Teachers, who fail to admit the problem of racism in Malta or/and do not think that the means of confronting this problem should include educational intervention, will most probably resist attempts to develop an anti-racist project in their school. In a context marked by initial resistance or outright rejection, a dialogical approach is key.

A good way for one to start an anti-racist project in a school is through action research. This type of research would enable teachers to examine their knowledge of and attitudes toward different ethnic and racial groups and their level of awareness with regard to the different facets of Maltese racism. The results should provide an ideal context for dialogue with teachers.

A school community, which feels that there is the right cultural infrastructure to initiate an anti-racist project, can regard the school's development plan as its initial point of departure. The anti-racist project should form an integral part of the school's overarching vision and strategy. The inclusion of an anti-racist agenda in the school's development plan accords the project a sense of permanence.

The program of teacher preparation should be inspired and informed by the data obtained through action research and by the dialogue that ensues. While the program should target the specific needs of the educational community, international literature that reports on such projects generally suggests that teachers should be helped to:

- develop greater awareness of their identity
- examine their personal knowledge, attitudes and experiences
- examine the link between personal experience and systemic racism
- examine the link between personal and institutional racism
- examine how different forms of oppression intersect with and complicate the

- problem of racism
- examine how racisms are rationalized
- examine how Eurocentrism defines what is best
- examine different models of multicultural and anti-racist pedagogies
- engage in anti-racist projects

Teacher anti-racist education should not stop at the end of the aforementioned program. Ongoing preparation, in the form of dialogical and reflective meetings, should sustain the project. Simultaneously, schools need to invest in books and materials that address the foregoing issues.

### **Adult Education**

Adult education can also play an important role in the context of anti-racist education. In our view, it would be worth considering the idea of transforming the present detention centres into Immigrant Lifelong Learning Centres, with due focus on education for resettlement, given the situation concerning immigration in micro-nation states like ours. The potentially receiving country should help in the financing and provision of resources for programmes at the centres that will equip migrants with the linguistic and other skills necessary for them to relocate. The programmes should target both those who need to relocate and those who intend to stay in Malta. Intensive short in-service programmes in intercultural education should be provided to those sectors of Maltese society dealing with immigrants, including members of the police force, the army, the entertainment industry, the teaching profession, the broadcasting media and the judicial sector. As a matter of fact, we would like to see such an educational programme, comprising a strong anti-racist education component, become a feature of all sectors of the educational system, from initial to university education, and include continuous

professional development courses in various fields, given the appalling racism and xenophobia we are witnessing at present.

### **Conclusion: redemptive memory**

In all of the above programs of anti-racist education, one can make use of reflective and redemptive (in Walter Benjamin's sense) memory work (see Simon, 1992 and McLaren and Da Silva, 1993, on this). This work can possibly encourage a dialectical relationship between reminiscences of a past characterized by massive Maltese emigration (involving members of the teachers' and students' families), and a present marked by increasing immigration. The program can provide historical accounts and evoke memories of the perpetration of racist attitudes towards Maltese migrants who, together with other Mediterranean people and Asians, were often regarded by the receiving authorities (see, for example, what occurred in Canada as the result of a 1910 immigration act), as "undesirable aliens." (Attard, 1989, p. 68). We will return to this aspect of anti-racist education in the chapter that follows, a chapter that focuses on the larger Mediterranean context

### **NOTES**

1 This chapter was originally written for Macedo, D and Gounari, P. (Eds.) (2005), *The Globalization of Racism*, Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers. It was published, with permission from the book editors (Macedo and Gounari), in *World Studies in Education*, 2(2):47-64. It draws material from Borg (2000) and Mayo (2000, 2004).

2 For an indication of a Paceville bouncer's negative attitude towards blacks and arabs see the excerpts from an interview reproduced in Mifsud's (2005) grounded work.

3 Report in *The Times* (Malta), 14/1/2005 <http://www.timesofmalta.com/core/article.php?id=174864> accessed on 29/1/2005.

4 See 'Hal-Safi inquiry: what about the beatings?' in *MaltaToday*, 18/12/2005 <http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/2005/12/18/t9.html> and Pamela Hansen, 'Whitewash and dust, not snow, for Christmas' in the *Sunday Times*, Malta, 25/12/2005 <http://www.timesofmalta.com/core/article.php?id=209794&hilite=Hansen> Both accessed on 9/1/2006.

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5 Dated 19th July, 2000 and circulated by e mail.

6 See also Halman et al, 2001.

7 We are indebted to lawyer, Dr Leon Bencini, for his advice with regard to the formulation of this statement.

8 For grounded discussions, based on ethnographic data, on multiethnicity and education in Malta, involving Maltese schools, see Azzopardi and Gauci (2003), Chircop and Kind (2005).