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**The evolution of immigration discourse in the Maltese press
from 2005 to 2015: A case study of the *Times of Malta***

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Resumen del trabajo

El drama migratorio del cual está siendo Europa testigo en estas últimas semanas es en parte el resultado de una falta de políticas comunitarias en relación a este tema, hecho del cual, en los últimos años, se han hecho eco multitud de medios. Europa, y en especial los países del Mediterráneo, ha experimentado un incremento sustancial en el número de inmigrantes que llegan a sus costas en condiciones cada vez más deplorables y arriesgando gravemente su integridad física. Este hecho está principalmente motivado por el aumento y la intensidad de los conflictos bélicos en países de África y Oriente próximo.

En el caso de Malta, un diminuto archipiélago ubicado entre los territorios de Libia y Sicilia, el cambio en la tendencia migratoria que se produjo en 2002 le hizo pasar de ser un país de emigrantes a un país receptor de inmigrantes. Este cambio dio como resultado la aparición de grupos y partidos anti-inmigración, como *Azzjoni Nazzjonali*, y de un sentimiento de preocupación frente a la llegada de inmigrantes que crece de manera constante según se refleja en encuestas europeas (véase Eurobarometer 82-83).

Desde el punto de vista lingüístico, el discurso discriminatorio empleado por los medios de comunicación, organismos y figuras políticas ha sido ampliamente estudiado dentro de la rama del Análisis Crítico del Discurso (Charteris-Black, 2006; Fairclough, 1989, Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Santa Ana, 1999; Van Dijk, 1984, 1992, 1999, 2000, 2006, Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). En los últimos años, se ha potenciado el uso de un enfoque cognitivo en el análisis de este tipo de discursos. Dicho enfoque utiliza elementos tomados de la lingüística cognitiva para explicar cómo la representación de eventos y participantes en el discurso atiende, o está motivada por la conceptualización mental de dichos eventos y participantes (Charteris-Black, 2006; Hart, 2011; Musolff,

2012; Núñez-Perucha, 2011; O'Brien, 2003; Santa Ana, 1999; Van Dijk, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2006; Wodak, 2006).

El Análisis Crítico del Discurso es una disciplina cuyo principal objetivo es analizar cómo ciertos fenómenos sociales que se basan en relaciones de abuso de poder y dominación se representan en el discurso de las denominadas élites (Van Dijk, 2001). Muchos de estos discursos atienden a lo que en lingüística se ha denominado discurso de discriminación, en donde un grupo dominante ejerce poder sobre otro mediante el uso de diversas herramientas discursivas. Generalmente, estos estudios sobre discursos de discriminación se han centrado en fenómenos como el machismo o el racismo. Dentro de este último campo, cabe destacar el trabajo de Van Dijk en el análisis del discurso del racismo y del discurso de la inmigración (Van Dijk, 1992, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006).

El presente trabajo se centra en analizar cómo la prensa maltesa ha representado el fenómeno de la inmigración y a los inmigrantes desde 2005 hasta 2015. Dentro de esta línea temporal, se presta especial atención al día 2 de abril de 2013. Esta es la fecha en la que la *Associated Press*, una organización de prensa independiente con subscriptores alrededor del mundo, decidió incluir un importante cambio léxico en su manual de estilo. El motivo del mismo era modificar el uso del adjetivo “ilegal” recomendando su uso para referirse exclusivamente a acciones (ej. Inmigración ilegal) pero nunca para referirse a individuos (ej. Inmigrante ilegal). Nuestro estudio pretende identificar hasta qué punto esta medida se ha puesto en práctica en los periódicos malteses y qué repercusiones ha tenido su incorporación en la representación de los inmigrantes y la inmigración. Para ello, se ha seleccionado como caso de estudio uno de los periódicos en lengua inglesa más leídos en el archipiélago, *Times of Malta*.

El estudio se ha centrado en el análisis de un total de treinta artículos de opinión repartidos de manera homogénea (quince y quince) en dos corpus. El primer corpus contiene artículos pertenecientes a un periodo de tiempo que va desde 2005 hasta la fecha en la cual el cambio léxico de la *Associated Press* fue publicado, es decir, el 2 de abril de 2013. Por otro lado, el segundo corpus contiene artículos desde el 2 de abril de 2013 hasta mediados de 2015. Para agilizar y facilitar el análisis de los artículos, se ha hecho uso del programa llamado WordSmith Tools, el cual está especializado en el trabajo con corpus. Este programa se utilizó principalmente para analizar la representación semántica de los distintos participantes y eventos.

Los resultados del análisis demuestran que el periódico ha aplicado el cambio léxico sugerido por la *Associated Press* al no encontrarse ningún ejemplo de “inmigrante ilegal” o “migrante ilegal” a partir del 2 de abril de 2013. En estos mismos resultados también se aprecia una representación más positiva de la figura del inmigrante en el segundo corpus, donde el inmigrante abandona la categoría léxica de “criminal” para comenzar a ser visto cada vez más como la víctima. También a nivel léxico, se puede observar cómo los autores tienden a usar cada vez más el término “migrante” en lugar de “inmigrante”. A pesar de que este último continúa siendo el término más utilizado para referirse a la persona que llega desde otro país, el significativo incremento del uso de la palabra “migrante” en el segundo corpus es llamativo y puede deberse a que la palabra “inmigrante” haya adquirido connotaciones negativas por su repetido uso junto al adjetivo “ilegal”. De entre las estrategias discursivas empleadas en la representación de la sociedad maltesa, cabe destacar dos. Por un lado, tenemos el uso de la victimización, mediante la cual la población maltesa aparece como una víctima frente a la inmigración, que es vista como una amenaza, al mismo tiempo que Malta es también víctima de la falta de apoyo internacional. En segundo lugar, es también común

encontrar artículos en donde el autor destaca las cualidades positivas de la sociedad maltesa, especialmente su generosidad. Esta última estrategia es lo que Van Dijk denomina *national self-glorification* (2000:220; 2006:738). En cuanto al uso de las metáforas, el cambio es menos significativo. En general, ambos corpus muestran ejemplos de metáforas en las que el inmigrante aparece conceptualizado como parte de un fenómeno natural incontrolable, un invasor o un organismo dispuesto a infectar o dañar de algún modo el país. En el segundo corpus, sin embargo, desaparecen las metáforas en las que el inmigrante se percibe como un animal inferior, que sí aparecían en el primer corpus. Esto supone un cambio positivo.

Hasta este punto hemos resumido los cambios en la representación de los inmigrantes. Respecto al modo en el cual el fenómeno de la inmigración aparece representado en los periódicos, también encontramos cambios importantes. A nivel léxico, el cambio que mencionábamos relativo a los términos “inmigrante” y “migrante” también se produce a la hora de nombrar este fenómeno social. De este modo, la palabra “migración” es más usada en el segundo corpus que en el primero, aunque sigue ocupando el segundo lugar por detrás de la palabra “inmigración”. En cuanto a los contenidos, se puede observar un cambio positivo hacia una mayor concienciación social. Por ejemplo, vemos cómo en el segundo corpus en ocasiones se pide una respuesta estatal a temas como la integración de los inmigrantes o el racismo entre la sociedad, mientras que en el primer corpus la integración era una labor del inmigrante y el racismo era un tema incómodo. En el segundo corpus también encontramos la queja más clara hacia el uso de centros de detención en la isla. En el primer corpus, aunque algunos autores manifestaban su disconformidad con las condiciones en las cuales los inmigrantes vivían dentro de los centros de detención, todos asumían que tener dichos centros era una medida necesaria. Esta especie de consenso social y político acerca del uso de centros de detención se

consigue mediante el empleo de herramientas discursivas que representen la inmigración como una amenaza de la cual hay que protegerse (*negative other-presentation* Van Dijk, 2000:221; 2006:738).

En resumen, podemos decir que este trabajo muestra una progresión en el discurso de inmigración en Malta hacia una representación más positiva y amable del inmigrante y de la inmigración. Aunque las limitaciones de este estudio hacen imposible establecer una relación única y directa entre los cambios experimentados por el periódico y el cambio léxico sugerido por la *Associated Press*, lo cierto es que la descriminalización de los inmigrantes a nivel léxico (mediante la supresión de términos como “ilegal” o “detenidos”) ha influido de manera positiva en el tono y la forma en que este periódico se refiere al fenómeno social de la inmigración.

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1. Introduction

Immigration is a social phenomenon that has always existed throughout human history. However, in the last years, Europe has witnessed an increase in the number of people who come to the continent by sea, normally risking their lives inside small dinghies attempting to reach the shore. Originally, most of the immigrants who used the Mediterranean routes to reach Europe came from countries such as Somalia or Eritrea located in the Horn of Africa, an area known, among other things, for its political instability and poverty. However, the recent armed conflicts in Syria and other areas of the Arabic Peninsula have forced hundreds of people to move from their countries to safer places. They run away from their homelands in which they find no future but persecution and death. After a journey of perils they become the victims of people traffickers and, if they are lucky enough to survive the trip across the Mediterranean Sea, their fight must continue once they reach Europe¹. For some of these people, the countries located in the Mediterranean just represent the beginning of their journey across Europe to northern countries. The images that arrived from Calais this summer, where a large number of people located in makeshift camps were waiting for their chance to cross the Eurotunnel to the UK; or from Macedonia, where trains full with desperate people made their way to the Serbian border with Hungary, are good examples of how difficult and dramatic that journey to the north can be.

It is in situations like the above described when the lack of an efficient and unified European policy regarding immigration is more obvious. Immigration has become a common topic in the European debates and immigration figures are a frequent element of political and media discourse throughout the year.

¹ According to official figures provided by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in the first five months of 2015, 54,000 people arrived to Italy, 48,000 to Greece, 920 to Spain and 91 to Malta. Information taken from <http://www.unhcr.org/557703c06.html>

In Linguistics, the study of immigration discourse has become one of the favourite areas of research in Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) in the last decades (Charteris-Black, 2006; Gales, 2009; Hart, 2011; O'Brien, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Santa Ana, 1999; Van Dijk, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2006; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Since CDA is concerned with studying “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001:352) immigration discourse represents a fruitful area of research. Recently, researchers have tended to follow a cognitive approach in the study of immigration discourse (Charteris-Black, 2006; Hart, 2011; O'Brien, 2003; Musolff, 2012; Santa Ana, 1999; Van Dijk, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2006). This approach understands discourse as a “window” to the study of conceptual processes (Fauconnier, 1999:96). In other words, the way in which someone represents an event in discourse echoes the way in which that event is conceptualized in their minds.

So far, investigations in immigration discourse have been confined to synchronic studies, which frequently emphasised an ideological dichotomy between conservative and liberal representation of events and participants in discourse at a given period of time (see for instance Charteris-Black, 2006 in the UK or O'Brien, 2003 in the US). However, diachronic studies are not that common. The present research paper aims to analyse the evolution of the immigration discourse in the Maltese press from 2005 to 2015, especially after the 2nd April 2013. That was the date when the Associated Press² (henceforth AP) changed its stylebook to modify the use of the word “illegal”, establishing that this word could be used to qualify an action (e.g. illegal entry or illegal

² The Associated Press is an independent cooperative news agency. Although its central office is located in New York, the Associated Press has subscribers worldwide and, therefore, its decisions are influential. Information taken from <http://www.ap.org/company/about-us>

immigration) but it was not acceptable to qualify a person (e.g. illegal immigrant or illegal alien)³.

Despite the fact that Malta is the European country that is most concerned about immigration according to the last Eurbarometer⁴, the study of immigration discourse in Malta still remains unexplored. That is the main reason why it was decided to analyse the possible effects of the AP's suggestion about avoiding the term "illegal", in the Maltese press.

1.1. Research hypothesis and objectives

As mentioned before, the aim of this study is to analyse the evolution of immigration discourse in the Maltese press before and after the 2nd April 2013. In order to do so, two corpora were elaborated. Both consisted of articles from the period before and after the AP's suggestion, which were selected from one of the most read English newspapers in Malta (see the subsection 4.1). Given that the lexical change was just a suggestion, it is expected that the Maltese press was hardly affected by the AP's suggestion. In order to prove or refute this hypothesis the following research objectives were established.

- To analyse the representation of events and participants before and after the given date.
- To examine the extent to which the lexical changes suggested by the AP have been implemented and their possible effects on immigration discourse.

In an attempt to be neutral, the use of the word "immigrant" is preferred in this paper to refer to those people who are forced to move from their homelands to Europe,

³ Information taken from the Associated Press' blog: <http://blog.ap.org/2013/04/02/illegal-immigrant-no-more/>

⁴ According to this survey Malta is the country that was most worried about immigration (65%) in the first months of 2015. Information taken from Eurobarometer 83 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_en.htm (page 15)

rather than using other terms. The reason behind this lexical choice is basically etymological since the word “immigrant” etymologically just means someone who immigrates, that is, someone who moves into a new country to stay.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections. The following section summarises some of the most important elements of the Maltese identity, and its legislation regarding immigration. After that, the next section provides a brief description of the main literature written about this area of study. In the method section, there is a description of the data used in this study, as well as a summary of the procedure used in the analysis. The section after that is devoted to the analysis of the data and the presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, the last section explains the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data provided by both corpora.

2. Socio-political background

2.1. The Maltese identity: geographical, historical and religious aspects

As Van Dijk (1998:248) points out, ideologies are mental and social constructions that individuals acquire as part of their group identity. In order to understand the Maltese identity as a national group it is necessary to pay attention to several factors: its insularity, its history as a colonized territory, its unique language, its bipartisan political system and its religion as a unifying bond.

According to official figures, the Republic of Malta is one of the smallest countries in Europe⁵. The archipelago total area is 316 km² and it contains five islands although just three of them are inhabited: Comino, Gozo and Malta. The capital of the country is Valletta, which is located in the central eastern harbour of the biggest and most populated island known as Malta. The country is 93 kilometres separated from

⁵Information taken from “Malta in figures” (2014), an annual report published by the Maltese government every year with important data and statistics (pages III – VII).

Europe and 300 from Africa. Regarding its population, Malta shows one of the highest population density rates in Europe (1,346) with 425,384 people inhabiting the country in 2013. This last fact is especially emphasised and commonly repeated in the Maltese political discourse regarding irregular immigration as an argument for restricting the number of arrivals.

Due to its strategic location in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta has been the target of several processes of colonization throughout its history. The territory was inhabited by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans and Byzantines. In 870 AD the country was no longer under the control of the Byzantine Empire since it was conquered by the Arabs. Some scholars (Bonnici, 2010:49) support that the Semitic structure of the Maltese language dates back to 1048 when a new group of Arabs introduced the Maghreb dialect into the island. Malta remained under Arabic domination until the 13th century when it became the territory of several Romanic kingdoms such as the Normans, Angevins, Castilians and Aragonese, who ruled the land from Sicily minimizing the impact that their languages had on the Maltese language (Bonnici, 2010:49). In 1530 the Knights of Saint John were sent to protect the islands during the Crusades. They introduced the Italian language into the country which acquired official status in the 15th century. The Knights stayed in the islands until 1798 when Malta fell under the control of Napoleonic troops for two years. The French domination ended when the troops of Napoleon were expelled by the British. The country officially became a British colony in 1814 and it took an active role in both World Wars, reason why the country was awarded the Cross of St. George that is now part of the Maltese flag. Malta achieved its independence in 1964 with the creation of its own constitution which recognised Maltese as the national language of the country, although it also gives official status to the English language. On 13th December 1974, Malta stopped being a

subject of the British crown to become a republic. Despite its separation from Great Britain, Malta still maintains some similarities with its former colonizers regarding legislation, education system, cultural aspects, etc. (Baldacchino, 2002:199) apart from being a member of the Commonwealth since 1964.

Each of the diverse cultures that occupied the islands inevitably contributed to the creation of the Maltese identity and they also had an effect on the national language of the country (Bonnici, 2010:47-53). The Maltese language, which is only spoken in the Maltese territory, became the first official Semitic language in the European parliament when Malta joined the EU on 1st May 2004.

Another important aspect in the creation of the Maltese identity is the strong bipartisan political system that has ruled the republic since its beginning. The main political parties in Malta are the Malta Labour Party (*Partit Laburista*) and the Nationalist Party (*Partit Nazzjonalista*). Although there are other political parties such as the *Alternattiva Demokratika*, they hardly ever manage to achieve enough representatives to be part of the Parliament. As some researchers have suggested (Baldacchino, 2002:197; Lutterberk, 2009:141) the alignment with one party or another frequently indicates belonging to certain family or neighbourhood.

As mentioned before, religion is one of the most important national symbols that serves as a national bond and homogenises local differences. The second article of the constitution establishes that the religion of the State is Roman Catholicism and its teaching is compulsory in all the State schools of the country. According to official

data⁶, more than 90% of the Maltese population identified themselves as Catholic in 2008 and more than 50% of them attended masses regularly.

However homogeneous the Maltese society might look like, Baldacchino defends that the Maltese national identity is elusive (2002:191). According to Baldacchino (2002:194)

[...] an island people's identity as such, and the emerge of an island nation-state, need not be automatic, but should be seen as the outcome of a formative cultural process that involves a struggle, even if only psychological or virtual with an external 'other'. In the absence of any such referent, a sovereign island state may have little inducement towards developing a territorially based nationalism.

Kårén (2008:22) suggests that, first, the EU and, more recently, the immigrants who arrive to the islands have been identified with the “external other” described by Baldacchino, and they have contributed to boost the development of a national identity.

2.2. The Maltese legislation on immigration

Immigration is a rather recent phenomenon in Malta, which has been historically a country of emigrants. During the nineteenth and twentieth century, several groups of people had to leave the islands due to the rate of unemployment and other issues related to the space limitations and scarce natural resources of the islands. Their most frequent destinations, especially during the twentieth century, were countries such as Canada, Australia or the United States, which shared linguistic and colonial links with Malta⁷.

As can be seen in the following graph, the number of immigrants arriving by sea drastically increased in the year 2002.

⁶ 2008 International Report on Religious Freedom. Consulted at:
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2008/108459.htm>

⁷ The People for Change Foundation (2013). *Researching Migration and Asylum in Malta: A Guide* (pages 11-18)

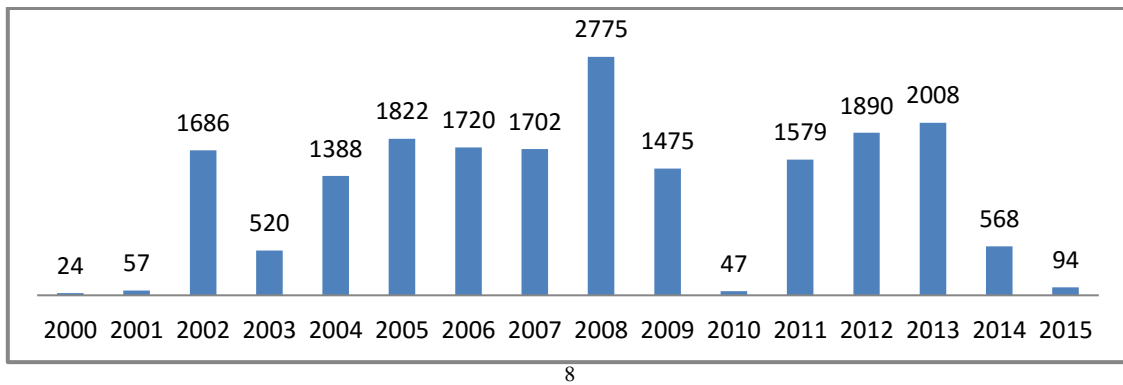


Figure 1. Number of people arriving by boat according to the UNHCR.

Lutterbeck (2009:122-123) suggests that the increase in the number of immigrants arriving to Malta in 2002 is due to the Italian success in controlling the Adriatic coast from 2002 onwards with the cooperation of Albania. The necessity of people smugglers to find alternative routes affected not only Malta but also other Mediterranean islands like Lampedusa and Sicily (2009:122). Therefore, it seems inadequate to establish a correlation between the access of Malta to the EU and the increase in the number of immigrants arriving to the island as it has been suggested⁹.

The Maltese society perceived this sudden increase in the number of arrivals as a threat for their way of life and for what they considered to be a small and vulnerable country that was unprepared to cope with that new issue (Roderick 2013:8). In the following years, the country witnessed the creation of racist groups such as *Alleanza Nazzjonali Repubblikana* (ANR) which organized several demonstrations in the capital city against irregular immigration, or the political party *Azzjoni Nazzjonali* (AN) which promoted a more restrictive immigration policy.

⁸ The data from 2015 only covers the period from January to July.

⁹ See "Tidal Wave: A small European country fears it may be swamped by immigrants" In *The Economist* <http://www.economist.com/node/9370651>

Currently, those immigrants who arrive to the shores of Malta in boats or who are rescued by the Armed Forces of Malta in the sea are sent, after a brief medical examination, to detention centres for a maximum of eighteen months or until their application for asylum is processed. Up to 2002, entering into the country without the proper documents was legally considered a crime but that changed with the Immigration Act, where that action was regarded as an administrative offence¹⁰. Nowadays, there are two detention centres in Malta, the Lyster Barracks in Hal Far and the Safi Barracks with three military compounds for detainees in Safi. At the beginning, the centres were designed to hold men and there was not gender segregation until mid-2009 (Gerard 2014:134).

Although the use and conditions of these detention centres have been harshly criticized by international organizations¹¹, there seems to be a political consensus about the necessity of these centres (Lutterbeck, 2009:137). Moreover, the last European report¹² shows an improvement in the quality of the facilities with respect to the previous report of 2008.

Once the asylum application has been processed, there are several possible outcomes. If someone is granted refugee status, they are given an ID card, a work permit and access to health system and education. In 2014 the 18.4%¹³ of the applications submitted to the Maltese Officer of the Refugee Commissioner were recognized the refugee status. However, the majority of them were given subsidiary

¹⁰ Information taken from http://www.pfcmalta.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12174934/researching_migration_and_asylum_in_malta_-_a_guide.pdf (page 15)

¹¹ Information taken from the Human Rights Watch website <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/18/malta-migrant-detention-violates-rights>

¹² Report to the Maltese Government on the visit to Malta carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 26 to 30 September 2011. Published on 4th July 2013 and taken from http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/mlt/2013-12-inf-eng.htm#_Toc313525426

¹³ Information taken from UNHCR Malta <http://www.unhcr.org.mt/charts/category/17/year/7>

protection or humanitarian temporary protection which means a more reduced set of rights and time limitations since those permits have to be renewed. If their application is rejected, immigrants have to wait for their deportation or, if they have demonstrated signs of integration, which is not an easy task being held inside a detention centre, they can be granted 'New humanitarian protection' for at least one year. When their status has finally been determined or the 18 months maximum detention period is over, immigrants are sent to the only open centre in the country which is located in Marsa.

Despite the efforts of some organizations such as the Jesuits Refugee Service to integrate the newcomers into the Maltese society, the last Eurobarometer shows that immigration is still the main concern among the population of Malta. In fact, despite the low figures of arrivals this year, the Maltese population is even more worried about immigration this year than before.¹⁴

As a member of the European Union, Malta must fulfil some international agreements regarding immigration, such as hosting all the undocumented immigrants that are rescued within its SAR (Searching Area of Rescue). That area has a size of 250,000 km² and goes from Tunisia to Crete. The country has complained several times about the lack of support to cover such a wide maritime area, as well as for the scarce cooperation in distributing and relocating those people who arrive to its shores. Malta has frequently supported that those immigrants who are rescued within its SAR should be disembarked in the closest harbour instead of being systematically sent to its islands.

Besides, Malta has frequently argued that its small size and high density rate make impossible for the country to welcome the entire amount of people coming into

¹⁴ According to the Eurobarometer 83, the percentage of Maltese population's concern about immigration was higher in the first months of 2015 (65%) than it was in the last months of 2014 (57%). Information taken from Eurobarometer 83 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_en.htm and Eurobarometer 82 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_en.htm

the country without the proper documents. In order to demand a more flexible policy from the EU that could allow immigrants to move freely throughout the continent, the country emphasises the fact that the intention of many of the immigrants arriving to its country is reaching mainland Europe, where some of them have relatives. However, according to the Dublin Convention that initially intended to avoid “asylum shopping”, immigrants must stay in the first country in which they have been registered, which leaves the Mediterranean countries in an unfair position being obliged to take full responsibility for those who attempt to reach Europe from Africa. This also provides negative consequences for the immigrants who are sometimes left unattended in the sea until someone decides to take responsibility for them (Lutterbeck, 2009:130-132). In 2010, the programme of intra-EU relocation of migrants from Malta (EUREMA) was launched as the EU’s answer to Malta’s demands for support. As a consequence of it, some countries have voluntarily accepted immigrants who originally arrived in Malta. However, Maltese authorities would prefer the implementation of compulsory quotas for all the member states. For instance, last year, 577¹⁵ people were resettled in the US but none in European member states.

Although humanitarian crisis, such as the shipwreck of one boat carrying more than 500 people in Lampedusa in 2013, have urged Europe to find a fast and efficient solution for the phenomenon of immigration in the Mediterranean Sea, the truth is that this issue is still far from being solved.

¹⁵ Information taken from UNHCR Malta <http://www.unhcr.org.mt/charts/>

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Introduction to CDA

In the last years, Critical Discourse Analysis has become one of the central areas of research in Applied Linguistics (Charteris-Black, 2006; Gales, 2009; Hart, 2008, 2011; O'Brien, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Santa Ana, 1999; Van Dijk, 1984, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2006; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Wodak, 2006, 2009). The origin of CDA can be traced back to Critical Linguistics, which developed in the 70s at the University of East Anglia (see Fowler, Kress, Hodge and Trew, 1979). The label CDA began to be used in a more consistent way from 1991 onwards, when a group of linguists including Gunther Kress, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun Van Dijk, and Theo val Leeuwen met in Amsterdam for a two days symposium in which they had the opportunity to discuss different methods and approaches to the study of discourse analysis (Wodak, 2009:3).

Probably, one of the most relevant elements of this new school was the term “critical”. Wodak (2009:6) points out that the word “critical” stems from the “Critical Theory” developed by the Frankfurt School, which promoted a more active role of social theory, moving from simply describing and explaining to trying to influence society. This goal is also pursued by CDA which, rather than simply describing a linguistic phenomenon, it is also concerned with its social implications. As mentioned in the Introduction section, CDA is especially interested in those social phenomena related to social inequality, relations of dominance, and power abuse (Fairclough, 1989:1; Van Dijk, 2001:354; Wodak, 2009:10). This explains why many studies in CDA are often linked to social problems such as gender inequality (Talbot, 2003), or racism (Van Dijk, 1992, 1999, 2000). Discourse is a tool by means of which these social problems can be created, perpetuated and, sometimes confronted (Van Dijk, 2001:353).

CDA addresses these social issues by making visible what is implied in discourse and by creating social awareness among the recipients of that discourse (Fairclough, 1989: 4; Wodak, 2009:7). In fact, the social orientation of CDA appears as the first of the eight features that Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271-280) discussed as the major tenets of CDA:

1. CDA addresses social problems.
2. Power relations are discursive.
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
4. Discourse does ideological work.
5. Discourse is historical.
6. The link between text and society is mediated.
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

As can be inferred from this list, CDA understands discourse as a social practice rather than an isolated phenomenon. Discourse is a social construction but, at the same time, it contributes to the creation of social structures (Wodak, 2009:7). In the same way in which it is necessary not to dissociate discourse from society in any CDA research, it is essential to take into consideration the context in which the discourse is produced and delivered as well as the participants, their values and ideologies, their cultures and other circumstances under which the discourse is used. In other words, the interpretation of a given discourse is always context-dependent.

Regarding the methodology used in CDA, as Van Dijk (2001:353) mentions, CDA does not follow an established and unified theoretical framework that must be shared by all the analysts. Instead of that, CDA can be defined as a multidisciplinary and eclectic approach that gathers studies from different backgrounds and disciplines not necessarily linguistic (Wodak, 2009:5) (e.g. psychology, anthropology, cognitive science, etc.). Therefore, the methodology and also the theories supporting any CDA study will be always determined by the research objectives of that study.

In their book *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Wodak identified a series of different approaches to CDA (2009:26-28), such as: the Discourse Historical approach (DHA), the Corpus Linguistics approach (CLA), the Dialectal-Relational approach (DRA) or the Socio-cognitive approach (SCA). The DHA, mainly represented by Ruth Wodak, establishes “a connection between fields of action, genres and discourse” (Wodak, 2009:26). Its studies focus on political discourse mainly and they have a historical understanding of context. The CLA has the introduction of new tools and devices into the linguistic analysis as one of its major characteristics (see, for instance, Gales, 2009). The DRA, represented by Norman Fairclough among others, focuses on the analysis of dominance and power relations. This approach benefits from the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar developed by Halliday (1978, 1985). Finally, the SCA, represented by Van Dijk among others, includes the study of the cognitive dimension. Special attention will be paid to the description of this approach in the following subsection.

3.2. Discourse as a representation of ideology: Van Dijk’s model

As mentioned above, studies on CDA focus on analysing how relations of dominance, power or inequality are manifested in discourse. These relations can often be reduced to a struggle between opposite ideologies (e.g. environmentalism vs. anti-environmentalism, racism vs. anti-racism, nationalism vs. pro-independence, etc.).

Van Dijk (1998) established a theoretical framework for the study of the construction, reproduction, and perpetuation of ideology through discourse. In this framework, he defends that any proper analysis of ideology must take into account three dimensions: cognition, society and discourse (1998:132). However, this subsection will

focus on describing only the first two dimensions, cognition and society, since the following subsection will be devoted to the explanation of discourse.

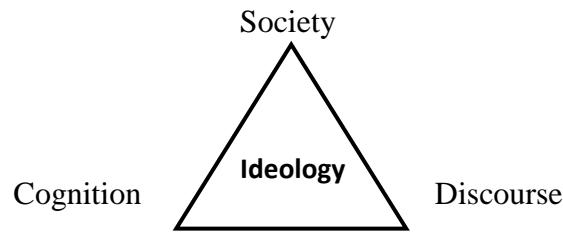


Figure 2.

According to Van Dijk (1998:26), ideologies can be defined as a set or “cluster” of general beliefs that are shared by all group members. In order to fully understand this definition, it is essential to explain first what Van Dijk understands as beliefs.

Van Dijk defines beliefs as “socially based, mental constructions that constitute the ‘facts’, typically so of social and cultural ‘reality’” (1998:25). In other words, beliefs are mental constructions that shape and determine the way in which someone understands and experiences the world. Besides, beliefs do not simply appear or emerge automatically in our minds from one day to the next; they are acquired, constructed and, sometimes, slowly changed through daily social practice, which includes discourse (Van Dijk, 1998:26).

Still in the realm of cognition, concepts such as *knowledge* and *attitude* also have an important role within Van Dijk’s model. Van Dijk defines *knowledge* as “true factual beliefs” in opposition to false factual beliefs that are classified as mistakes or illusions (1998:34). The criteria that establish whether a factual belief is true or not is socially decided, and must be shared by the whole social group or culture. On the other hand, *attitude* is labelled as an “evaluative belief” (1998:33). This means that its validity

is not based on a true or false criterion, but on whether attitudes succeed or not in reflecting our opinions and personal appreciation of a topic. They are “domain-specific social opinions of a group” (1998:33). That is, while an ideology represents very general and abstract beliefs (e.g. racism), attitude represents the group’s opinion about a specific topic within that ideology (e.g. opinion about intercultural marriage).

Once we move to the social dimension, it can be seen how, although, the existence of different, or even opposite, ideologies does not necessarily promote social conflicts (Van Dijk, 1998:169), the truth is that ideologies are often used by group members to legitimate their position of power as the dominant group (1998:138).

The concept of social group is not easy to define since sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between social groups and other collective organizations. Van Dijk acknowledges this fact (1998:46) and he tries to provide a general definition of social group by establishing the following criteria that all social groups should meet (1998:158).

1. the development and sharing of social representations;
2. identification of members with the group;
3. the defence of specific resources (such as citizenship or equal rights in all domains);
4. relations to other groups (e.g. resentment against immigrants);
5. specific activities (such as discrimination) and at least a vaguely shared goal (segregation, immigration restriction, etc.).

Although minor ideological differences or approaches are expected among the group members, social groups tend to present an image as homogeneous as possible for strategic reasons. For instance, a unified group is perceived as being stronger than a fragmented one in which there are different approaches to the same ideology. In a similar way, it is easier for a dominant group to target another group when the last one is perceived as a homogeneous block, which is easy to identify (e.g. the immigrants, the

communists, etc.). That is why those members that show a dissident position within the group are excluded or marginalised (1998:151).

The third point of the list above included deals with the groups' resources. As Van Dijk (2001: 356-357) points out, access to the different media, for example, is one of the specific resources associated with dominant groups. These dominant groups tend to marginalise the discourse of other ideologies that are contrary to theirs. Due to this use of resources, dominant groups are generally in control of the established discourse. Their discourse is never presented as an ideology, but as the only commonsensical and true version of the reality (1998:262). In this way, they force minorities to assume the dominant ideological discourse as factual knowledge and to accept domination as something natural and justified (Van Dijk 1998:166, 2006:729).

In the following subsection, some of the strategies used in discourse for the reproduction of ideology, especially in the discourse of discrimination, racism, and immigration, will be explained to complete, in that way, the three-dimensional framework established by Van Dijk.

3.3. Discrimination in discourse: the discourses of racism and immigration

Discrimination discourse is an umbrella term that encompasses any discourse in which a minority is marginalised by a dominant group based on prejudiced criteria such as gender, religion or nationality in CDA. The study of discrimination discourse has been widely analysed from different angles: the study of gender inequality and how women tend to have stereotypical functions in discourse (e.g. passive roles, objects, etc.) (Núñez-Perucha, 2011; Talbot, 2003); the study of religious discrimination, which is represented, for instance, by Wodak and her studies about antisemitism in Austria (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999); and the study of racism

(Van Dijk, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2000), which will be further discussed later in this section.

In order to explain how discrimination is rationalised and justified, Van Dijk stated what he called the 7 D's of discrimination, which are briefly explained below (1984:40):

- **Dominance:** Applying power and control over the dominated group.
- **Differentiation:** Providing a differentiated treatment to those who are perceived as different (e.g. different salary, neighbourhood, seats in public transport, etc.)
- **Distance:** Avoiding any type of contact with the other groups, maintaining them as far away as possible (e.g. by the use of refugee camps or centres).
- **Diffusion:** Transmitting the group's negative beliefs against the outsiders.
- **Diversion:** Attributing social or economic problems of the ingroup to those who are seen as the others (e.g. blaming immigration for unemployment or other social problems that existed before the immigrants' arrival).
- **Depersonalization or destruction:** Mistreat the others, considering them as inferior (see animals, plants and subhuman metaphors below), hurting or destroying them.
- **Daily Discrimination:** Perpetuating discrimination throughout everyday activities.

With the aim of explaining how discrimination is justified in discourse, Reisigl and Wodak presented their own categorisation of what they called "pragmatic fallacies" (2001:71-74). Some of the fallacies that they identified and explained are briefly summarised below:

- ***Argumentum ad hominem:*** In this fallacy, the speaker verbally attacks the opposite participant instead of disproving the opponent's arguments,

for instance, claiming that the opponents have hidden interests or trying to de-legitimize them by attacking their honesty, competence, etc.

- ***Argumentum ad misericordiam:*** By means of applying this argumentation, the speaker tries to gain sympathy presenting their group as the victim of a difficult situation. It is similar to what Van Dijk defines as “victimization” (Van Dijk, 2006:739).
- ***Argumentum ad populum:*** In this fallacy, the speaker supports their own arguments on the basis of “prejudiced emotions, opinions and convictions” of the general public (2001:72). In other words, since a sector of the population believes that one argument is true, it must be true.

From these explanations it can be inferred that a common pattern in discrimination discourse is to avoid direct discussion of arguments by means of defocusing the attention from the real debate towards other issues such as the opponent’s life or by reversing the situation.

As mentioned above, one of the social problems underlying discrimination discourse is the construction and perpetuation of racism. Before dealing with how racism is represented in immigration discourse and the different strategies used, there are some key concepts that need to be defined.

The first important idea to be explained is the term “race”. In general, it can be said that the term race has usually been used to categorise entities along the history. Geoffrey Hughes points out how the first reference to the word “race” in the English language appeared in 1520 in relation to a variety of wine (2010:165). Reisigl and Wodak (2001:2) refer to previous uses of the word “race” in other languages, always

with the meaning of type or variety. They mention that, before the 18th century, the term was associated with high class or nobility when applied to a person, and that it was during the 18th and 19th centuries, that pseudo-scientific taxonomies of human “races” began to appear (2001:4). Soon, hierarchical systems of “races” and theories were elaborated, establishing some “races” as superior and some “races” as inferior. This tendency reached its climax during the Nazi period in Germany, where the romantic misconception of a superior Aryan “race” led to the slaughtering of thousands of people.

As Reisigl and Wodak (2001:5) point out, this historic event meant a turning point in the European and North American perception of the notion of “race”, and it fostered the creation of the concept of racism. Current trends acknowledge that “race” is not a biological condition, as it was suggested in previous centuries, but a social construction (2001:2). According to Reisigl and Wodak (2001:2), the notion of “race” was created with the aim of legitimating social oppression and discrimination under the basis of racial inequality. However, as these authors note (2001:2), throughout history, the idea of “race” has also been embraced by some dominated groups as a sign of group identity in their fight for rights and equality (e.g. This can be the case of Black Power).

Regarding the term “racism”, Reisigl and Wodak (2001:5) suggest that it could have first appeared in the title of a book of Magnus Hirschfeld written in 1933/4, which was translated and published in England in 1938. The term has been stigmatised and avoided in political debates, especially in countries such as Germany or Austria (2001:5). The term is frequently substituted for more euphemistic synonyms such as xenophobia, although, the use of this term has received some criticism since it regards the discrimination against different people as a “pathology”, thus victimising those who defend that ideology (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:6). For this reason, the term “hatred of

foreigners” has been proposed as a more updated definition of xenophobia (Hughes, 2010:165).

Racism and anti-racism are the two ideologies that the recipient is more likely to find in immigration discourse. In fact, the literature about the analysis of racist discourse and the denial of racism in immigration discourse is vast, and it has been especially developed by Van Dijk (1989, 1992, 1993, 1999 and 2000).

There are many discourse strategies that can be used in the reproduction of racist ideologies but, in this subsection, we are going to focus on those which are most used in immigration discourse, which is the object of our analysis. Lexis, for example, plays an important role in the representation of events and participants. For instance, by using euphemisms “poor countries” may become “developing countries” and “wars” are normally referred as “armed conflicts”. However, the opposite can also happen and the author may use exaggerations to create a more dramatic representation of events. For instance, using the term “hooligans” to refer to “demonstrators”, or defining the arrival of a small group of immigrants as “an invasion of biblical proportions”.

Although terminology is an essential part in the analysis of immigration discourse, there are other discourse strategies that are used to legitimate a dominant ideology. One of the most important strategies used is what Van Dijk defines as the ideological square (Van Dijk, 1998:267; 2006:734). This strategy is based on the polarization between two groups, our own social group (US) and the group that is seen as the opponent (THEM). Once this dichotomy has been established, the social square works, on the one hand, by emphasising the positive aspects of the own social group while minimising those aspects which are perceived as negative and, on the other hand, by emphasising the negative attributes of the others while minimising their positive

characteristics or actions (Van Dijk, 1998:267; 2006:734). All this is achieved by means of other related discourse strategies as well.

For instance, one way of de-emphasising those actions that damage our group's positive image is using agency and nominalization. In this way, we displace or suppress the actor and, therefore, the responsibility for the events (e.g. "The shell killed fifteen people" instead of saying "our soldiers killed fifteen people by firing a shell"). Another common strategy is the use of disclaimers such as "I am not a racist, *but...*", to protect the speaker's positive face in front of the public opinion.

In order to emphasise our group's positive image, we can either highlight our own achievements, for example mentioning the big amount of immigrants that our country has welcomed in the past, or we can present ourselves as the weak element in this struggle. The latter strategy, which Van Dijk calls "victimization" (2006:739), has a dual effect since it improves the image of the dominant group by presenting it as the victim of the dominated one while, at the same time, it damages the image of the others by representing them as the attackers.

Generalizations and exaggerations are normally used to portray a negative image of the others. In the case of immigration discourse, immigrants, for instance, may be represented as criminals by extending the isolated criminal behaviour of one individual to the whole group.

It is important to remember that dominant groups are normally those which are in control of the media, as mentioned. Controlling the amount and type of information provided by the media, as well as the way in which this information is presented, is the commonest type of manipulation. In the case of racist discourse, negative actions performed by the immigrants may be highlighted while their good actions may be

concealed. Regarding the form, it is frequent the use of evidentiality to support someone's arguments. Actions that are told as if they were experienced by another person (e.g. I was said that...) are less reliable than those that are narrated as first-hand experience (e.g. I saw that...). Providing figures, examples, and testimonies of experts or other authorised sources are also frequent ways of supporting a given argument making it seem objective.

3.3.1. Metaphors in immigration discourse

Before finishing this section, it is necessary to mention the use of metaphors, which is one of the discourse devices that has received more research attention in the last years (Charteris-Black, 2006; Hart, 2011; Musolff, 2012; O'Brien, 2003; Santa Ana, 1999). The use of metaphors in discourse dates back to the ancient Greek and the great orators who mastered the art of rhetoric. However, in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson adopted a cognitive approach to the study of metaphors arguing that metaphors were not just a linguistic embellishment of discourse but a cognitive element in the construction of meaning (1980:6). There is not a proper discussion of the role of metaphors in CDA (but see Hart, 2008). The application of Cognitive Linguistics, especially metaphors, to the study of CDA has been favoured in the last years (Charteris-Black, 2006; Hart, 2001; O'Brien, 2003; Musolff, 2012). This is due to the fact that, as Musolff points out, "cognitive linguistics' recognition of metaphors as a fundamental means of concept- and argument- building can add to CDA's account of meaning constitution in the social context" (2012:301).

Stated briefly, metaphors are mental constructions used to achieve a better understanding of complex and/or abstract notions. By the use of metaphors, we can conceptualize abstract ideas or processes, such as immigration, in terms of something

that is familiar to us because we have previous experiences of it. The structure of a metaphor is based on two elements, the target domain, which is the concept that we want to explain or understand, and the source domain, which is the most familiar concept. In the metaphor, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, LIFE is the target domain whereas JOURNEY is the source domain.

The study of metaphors in CDA contributes to identify hidden ideologies underlying discourse since the speaker's attitude, either positive or negative, towards a given event affects the metaphorical conceptualization of that event in discourse. In the case of immigration discourse, Santa Ana points out the lack of positive metaphors to conceptualized immigration and immigrants (1999).

In 2003, O'Brien gathered and explained some of the most common metaphors used to conceptualize immigration and immigrants. His findings are summarised below (2003:35-44).

- **Organism metaphors:** O'Brien states that in this metaphor the country is conceptualised as a human body, whereas immigration is seen as an organism that is about to enter the human body to infect it and damage it from the inside. This organism is normally identified with indigestive food or substance that is ingested by the person/country making it feel bad or sick. A variety of this metaphor is the "immigrants as diseased organism" metaphor in which immigration is represented as a virus that is coming to infect the body, which is the country. The latter metaphor also suggests that immigrants can be a peril for the health of the country and its inhabitants since they are assumed to live in places with poor hygienic conditions as well as to be prone to acquire diseases

more easily than the rest of the population. This could generate fear among the native population.

- **Object metaphor:** This metaphor uses objectification to represent immigrants as some goods that can be trade with. The impersonal way in which immigrants are normally referred to, for instance, in the media, by presenting raw figures and no faces, fosters the image of immigrants as objects. Within this same metaphor, immigrants can also be represented as material that can be beneficial for the country, as a cheap source of labour, or, on the contrary, they can be represented as a burden because there is an excess of “material”.
- **Natural Catastrophe metaphor:** In this metaphor, immigration is described as a natural disaster that can potentially destroy or, in any case, damage the country. Unlike in the diseased organism metaphor, in which the body/country can take medicine to recover from the illness, natural catastrophes are unstoppable and their consequences are far more dramatic. The most common natural disaster used in the conceptualization of immigration is a flood.
- **War metaphor¹⁶:** This metaphor represents the Us vs. Them struggle by portraying the immigrants as invaders who have set course for the host country with the aim of invading it. From the use of this metaphor the recipient can infer that immigrants are aggressive since they are compared with invading warriors. The use of this metaphor is fostered by the fact that immigrants normally do not come individually but in groups and that their presence in the country can represent the introduction of new values or cultures, which the native population perceive as an attack to their own national culture.

¹⁶ Although it has been decided to maintain the terminology used by O’Brien, a more suitable name for this metaphor would be the invasion metaphor since this is the most frequent event recalled by the use of this metaphor.

- **Animal and subhuman metaphors:** As happened with the organism metaphor, the aim of these metaphors is to dehumanise immigrants, in this case, by presenting them as animals or underdeveloped human beings. Animal metaphors are typical in our language, for instance, it can be said that someone is a lion to emphasise their courage. However, the animals used to represent immigrants are normally insects, “parasites”, and animals that are considered inferior. Besides, the use of “parasites” and other insects that bear illnesses, such as the mosquitoes, takes us back to the association between immigrants and diseases. O’Brien points out that the use of these metaphors “was reinforced by writings that seemed to demonstrate that new immigrants reflected a less evolved state of civilization than ‘native’” (2003:43).

To summarise the main points of the findings provided by O’Brien, we can say that immigrants are normally presented by metaphors as non-human participants, either objects or animals, and also as a threat for the physical integrity of the country.

Santa Ana points out how portraying immigrants as non-human participants can justify their deprivation of rights, since rights are just granted to people (1999:216). He shows how immigrants are frequently identified with annoying plants such as weeds in metaphors (Santa Ana, 1999: 204). These undesired plants appear without being planted and, therefore, they are difficult to control. Sometimes, negative adjectives which are frequently associated with the weeds (e.g. annoying or out of control) are also applied to immigrants through the use of this metaphor.

Charteris-Black (2006:593) identified another frequent metaphor used in immigration discourse, A COUNTRY IS A CONTAINER. According to this metaphor, the host country is a container that is already holding the native population (Us) while

other groups of people try to get into the container (Them) adding pressure and instability to the container. In fact, terms such as “pressure” or “full up” are commonly found in immigration discourse.

Other metaphors used to conceptualise the country of arrival are A NATION IS A HOUSE and A NATION IS A CASTLE, in which the native population dwells. While the first metaphor can entail positive connotation, for example if our nation/house keeps its doors open to the immigrants, the second one tend to be always used with negative connotations. According to Santa Ana (1999:206) the castle is seen as a fortress that will protect the native population from the immigrants/invaders.

Natural examples of most of the strategies described in this subsection will be provided in the results and discussion section.

4. Method section

4.1. Data description

Taking as a reference the date when the AP’s decision was published, that is, 2nd April 2013, two different corpora were gathered. The first corpus contains fifteen opinion articles from the period that goes from 2005 to the given date. This corpus was named IMMA¹⁷_Before. The second corpus, which contains fifteen opinion articles from the 2nd April 2013 until present day, was called IMMA_After (see Tables 1 and 2 of the Appendix for a more detailed description of each corpus).

The decision of using opinion articles instead of news reports was motivated by the fact that opinion articles are more subjective and, therefore, they are a better source to study how ideology is manifested in media discourse. Initially, this study was intended to analyse the evolution of five different writers before and after the change of

¹⁷ The initials IMMA stand for Immigration in Malta.

terminology. However, this idea was rejected after noticing that virtually any of the columnists had opinion articles published in both periods.

A comparison of how the AP's decision had been implemented in the conservative press and the liberal press of the country was also suggested and rejected because all the Maltese newspapers written in English are labelled as independent by the local population. In the country of Malta, there are newspapers published in English such as *The Times of Malta* or *Malta Today* and other newspapers published in Maltese such as *In-Nazzjon* or *L-Orizzont*. The latter group was never considered as a valid option for our analysis because of the language hindrance. Finally, it was decided to use *The Times of Malta* as the source of the articles because it is one of the most read English newspapers in the island¹⁸.

After a search for key words was carried out, a total number of forty-four opinion articles were collected. Of those forty-four articles, fifteen were selected for each of the corpora. In order to avoid a biased selection, specific criteria were established. The selected articles had to meet the following criteria described below.

- All the articles should be opinion articles dealing with the topic of immigration and/or immigrant's lives in Malta.
- The articles should include any of the following words in their headings as well as in their first two paragraphs: immigrant(s), migrant(s), immigration, or migration.

If, after applying these criteria, the number of articles was still uneven, random selection was applied until obtaining the same number of articles in each corpus. The

¹⁸ Information taken from the tourism webpage <http://www.maltabulb.com/malta-newspapers.html>

following table provides a brief description of each of the corpora analysed in this study.

Corpus	Number of articles	Number of words	Dates
IMMA_Before	15	16,861	09/02/05 – 08/07/12
IMMA_After	15	13,003	20/06/13 – 20/05/15

Table 1. Description of the corpora

4.2. Methodology

In an attempt to provide an analysis as complete as possible, it was decided to carry out both, a quantitative as well as a qualitative analysis of the data. As mentioned before, the articles' collection was based on a search for key words. Since we were just interested in those opinion articles related to immigration in Malta, it was decided to use the words “immigration”, “migration”, “immigrant(s)”, and “migrant(s)” in our search.

The first step of the analysis was a careful reading of each of the selected opinion articles individually in order to get a first impression. Then, a second reading was performed but, this time, the objective was to take notes of the relevant aspects. Special attention was paid to identify lexical components, agency, the use of metaphors or any other mental construction, and the use of discourse strategies. The final step consisted in using a software programme called WordSmith Tools to carry out a quantitative analysis, especially focussed on the lexical components. The decision of using a software programme in the analysis of the opinion articles was motivated by its convenience being a less time-consuming method than doing the task entirely manually and because it allows researchers to compare the number of matches in each corpus, which is relevant to a diachronic type of analysis.

WordSmith Tools is a programme that is specifically designed to work with corpora. It has three tools which are specialised in different types of tasks: Concordance, Wordlist and Keywords. Only the first two tools mentioned, Concordance and Wordlist, were necessary for this research. The use of Concordance was especially relevant in the analysis of the representation of participants and events to identify lexical patterns and collocations. The tool of Wordlist was only used when an analysis of lexical frequency was required.

Finally, the data gathered from the analysis of both corpora were divided into two sections, one devoted to analysing the representation of participants, and another one dealing with the representation of events. Then, these data were analysed and interpreted according to the theories of critical discourse analysis described in the background section of this study.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Semantic representation of participants

As Fowler suggested, newspaper articles do not represent an unbiased image of the real facts, the ideological components are sometimes manifested by several linguistic strategies being semantic choice one of them (1991:4). This section of the analysis will be focussed on the way in which the different participants were represented before and after the AP's suggestion as well as on analysing the ideological implications deriving from the choice of terminology.

5.1.1. Corpus 1

In each of the corpora, two different sets of participants were analysed: the immigrants coming to Malta, mainly from African countries, and the Maltese population as a whole.

As regards how immigrants are represented in the articles of the first corpus, it seems that there is a preference among the columnists for using the word “immigrant(s)”, which appears in all the articles analysed, rather than the term “migrant(s)”, which is only used by four of the writers (see Figure 3).

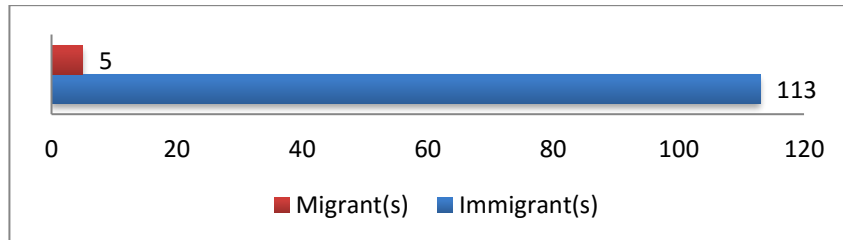


Figure 3. Number of occurrences of “migrant(s)” and “immigrant(s)” in IMMA_Before..

The following graph, shows other frequent terms that are used in this corpus to refer to the immigrants.

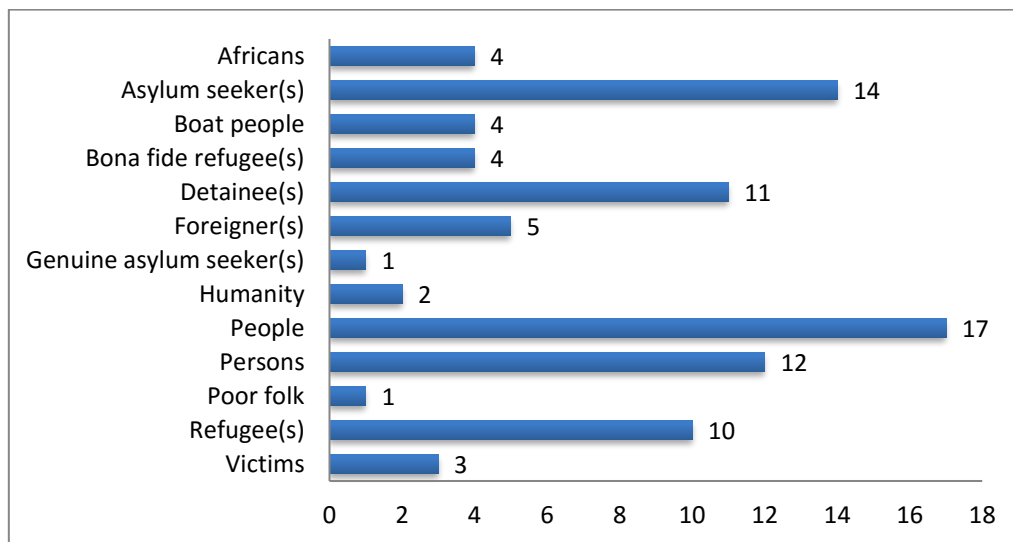


Figure 4. List of words used to name the immigrants in IMMA_Before.

As can be seen in Figure 4, a significant number of the terms chosen by the writers to refer to those arriving without the proper documents are neutral words (e.g. people, persons, etc.). These words frequently appear premodified by adjectives that change

their neutral connotation to either positive or negative as will be seen later. Although some articles regard immigrants as victims (3 occurrences in Figure 4) and, therefore, passive participants of the events, there are more articles that attribute a criminal and delusive attitude to the immigrants as can be inferred from the use of terms such as “detainees” or “bona fide refugees”. Although calling them “detainees” could be seen as semantically correct since they are held in detention centres, there are other semantic choices that could avoid the association between criminals who are hold in prison because they have actually committed a crime and immigrants. In the same way, distinguishing between real refugees and “bona fide refugees” or “genuine asylum seeker” criminalizes the immigrant who is presented, without any proof, as a fraudster of the State.

Bearing in mind that a good amount of the terms used to name the newcomers were neutral, it is necessary to analyse those elements coming before and after these nouns to obtain a clear image of how immigrants are portrayed. The following graph shows the adjectives that are more frequently used to refer to the immigrants.

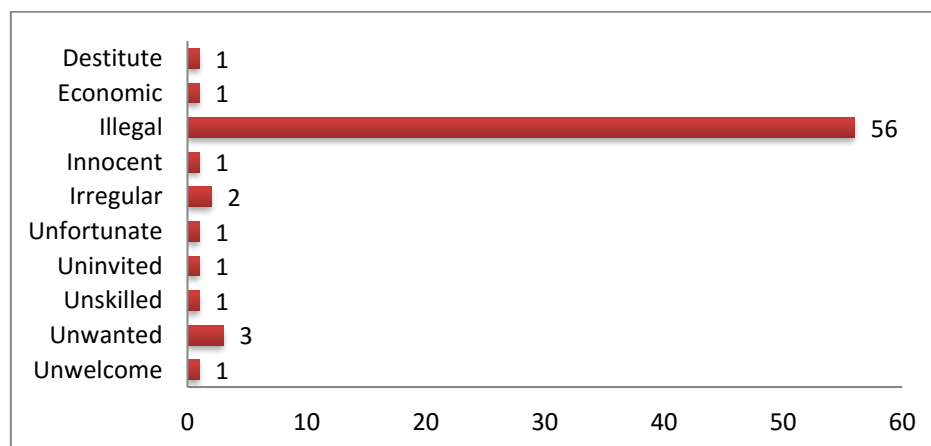


Figure 5. List of adjectives premodifying the immigrants in IMMA_Before.

From these results it may be inferred that immigrants are mostly perceived as perpetrators of illegal activities taking into account how frequently the adjective “illegal” appears qualifying the immigrants. The data shown in figures 4 and 5 support the idea that immigrants are usually seen as unwanted criminals and less frequently seen as innocent victims. This same idea appears in many of the articles in a more implicit or explicit way.

Immigrants are frequently represented as an economic burden for the State and the taxpayers, and as having nothing to offer to the host country.

- (1) “Why should **taxpayers' money** be spent on unwanted and **illegal immigrants?**”[IMMA_Before_02]
- (2) “Normal hard working people have to share **the burden of the cost as taxpayers** and the crime victims of this **illegal human tide.**” [IMMA_Before_14]
- (3) “The paper also calls for more resources to be “invested” in the care of illegal immigrants. My dictionary defines ‘invest’ as “spend money in the expectation of earning a profit”. **What profit do the Maltese expect from money spent on illegal immigrants?**” [IMMA_Before_07]
- (4) “Objectively, **these people have little or nothing to offer**” [IMMA_Before_14]

As Charteris-Black points out, immigrants are not always portrayed as a burden for the State, sometimes, immigration is considered beneficial since it contributes to support the cost of pensions by means of introducing new labourers into the country and increasing birth rates (2006:567). However, some writers in the corpus use the limited size and resources of the island to argue that immigrants would not report any benefit for the country (example 5) or they overtly express their desire to get rid of the immigrants (example 6).

- (5) “A few Western European countries (...) have adopted a welcoming approach due to shortages in their labour force and other demographic troubles owing to the net fall in birth rates. **The**

situation in our islands - where the overpopulation problem led to the mass migration of our countrymen - seems to be the opposite.” [IMMA_Before_01]

- (6) **“UNHCR, (...) is failing in its duty** of helping to repatriate **illegal immigrants** not qualifying for refugee or humanitarian status, or at least **to find them a country where they are welcome.”** [IMMA_Before_06]

In some of the articles, immigrants are seen as being fooling the State and taking advantage of the Maltese solidarity in a selfish way without showing any gratitude (examples 7-10).

- (7) **“(...) most migrants simply assume they would be better off, safer and happier in Europe or North America, utilising networks to the best advantage”** [IMMA_Before_11]
- (8) **“Why should Malta pay the armed forces to rescue immigrants who risk their lives to better their economic situation?”** [IMMA_Before_02]
- (9) **“More recently, some other "refugees" have gladly returned home to Sudan, Ghana and elsewhere under the Dar programme with €5,000 in their pockets”** [IMMA_Before_11]
- (10) **“Why do we in the west have to be mugged by the Third World?”** [IMMA_Before_14]

Nevertheless, the most extended label applied to immigrants is that of criminals. This association can be achieved by several means. First, by referring to them as “detainees” as seen before (see Figure 4), and secondly, by suggesting that they show an antisocial and/or aggressive behaviour (example 11) or that they have or will be involved in criminal activities (examples 12 and 13). This argument contributes to support the necessity of the detention centres as a means of protection.

- (11) **“The Depasquale report informed us that they are often the subject of insults and aggressive behaviour by illegal immigrants, who should be more grateful”** [IMMA_Before_06]
- (12) **“For the most part we don’t know who they are, they don’t speak our language, we don’t know whether they have committed any crimes in Africa (...)”** [IMMA_Before_14]
- (13) **“In these dismal economic times, for Malta and Italy to continue receiving so much humanity without any pushback will spell financial ruin and a crime wave.”** [IMMA_Before_14]

In general, immigrants are perceived as threats in many of the articles analysed. In some cases, they are presented as a physical threat for the health of the society arguing that immigrants could be a source of rare diseases or pests (examples 14-16); and sometimes they are said to represent a threat for the culture of the country emphasizing the religious and cultural differences (example 17), without taking into account possible linking elements like the language¹⁹.

(14) “I fear the introduction of **exotic diseases**” [IMMA_Before_02]

(15) “Should we release illegal immigrants on **the unsuspecting Maltese population** at the risk that five per cent of those coming in contact with them (“a small number”!) **would get infected?**” [IMMA_Before_06]

(16) “**The presence of “rats** and other unwelcoming creatures” referred to by Dr Azzopardi **stems from the surrounding rural environment and the bad personal hygiene practices adopted by some**, not all, of the residents.” [IMMA_Before_13]

(17) “Our popular culture does not have much experience in accommodating **different colours and creeds** and our vague historical traditions in this respect are negative” [IMMA_Before_04]

The use of metaphors is another important strategy to covertly introduce ideology in discourse (see the subsection 2.3.1). As far as immigrants’ and immigration’s representation is concerned, the metaphors that most frequently appear in this corpus are: IMMIGRANTS ARE ORGANISMS (example 18), IMMIGRATION IS A NATURAL DISASTER (example 19, 20 and 22), IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS (example 20), and IMMIGRATION IS AN INVASION and, therefore, immigrants are invaders (example 21 and 22).

(18) “(...) Malta started to receive and **absorb economic migrants** (...)” [IMMA_Before_04]

(19) “For us illegal immigrants are a **creeping natural disaster**.” [IMMA_Before_02]

¹⁹ Between 2003 and 2014 the majority of the immigrants who came to Malta were from Somalia and Eritrea where Italian and English are spoken. Information taken from UNHCR Malta <http://www.unhcr.org.mt/charts/category/12>

(20) “Whereas until 2001, the number of asylum-seekers in Malta, particularly by boat, was negligible - fewer than 60 that year - it suddenly **swarmed up** to several hundred annually in what appears to be a steady, **continuing flow**” [IMMA_Before_05]

(21) “(...) more and more illegal immigrants have been **landing** on our shores after failing in their **quest** to make the European mainland.” [IMMA_Before_01]

(22) “(...) Malta has been **flooded with illegal immigrants** from Sub-Saharan Africa and, given the beautiful weather to come, hundreds or even thousands more could **set sail to our islands** (...)” [IMMA_Before_14]

As can be seen in examples 20 and 22, floods are the most common natural disasters used when referring to immigration in this corpus. Being an island, natural disasters related to water and invasions are phenomena that could easily evoke past moments of distress to the Maltese society. As Charteris-Black pointed out (2006:575), in the metaphors IMMIGRATION IS A NATURAL DISASTER and IMMIGRATION IS AN INVASION, the native population is perceived as the victims of a natural or social phenomenon. Neither of the aforementioned metaphors represents immigrants as human beings, which makes their integration in the host society more difficult.

The use of metaphors is not just restricted to the representation of immigrants or immigration. In some of the articles, Malta is conceptualized as a small container by using the metaphor A COUNTRY IS A CONTAINER. As any container, the country has borders and space limitations. Immigrants represent a force that applies pressure to the walls of the container (examples 23 and 24).

(23) “This could help release some of the **pressure caused by the influx of immigrants** on countries such as Malta” [IMMA_Before_09]

(24) “The heavy influx of immigrants in the last few weeks has placed a **considerable strain on our limited resources**” [IMMA_Before_10]

The powerful combination of representing Malta as a fragile and defenceless container, while immigrants are seen as an unstoppable force threatening its stability, is likely to produce a sense of fear within the native population.

The metaphor A NATION IS A HOUSE is also used in this corpus. In the following example, immigrants are seen as guests waiting at the door while the population is expected to decide whether they open that door and accept immigration or not.

(25) “What has changed now is that **the people knocking on our door** look different.”
[IMMA_Before_04]

As far as the representation of the Maltese population is concerned, the terminology used to refer to them is less diverse than the one used to refer to the immigrants as can be seen in the following graph.

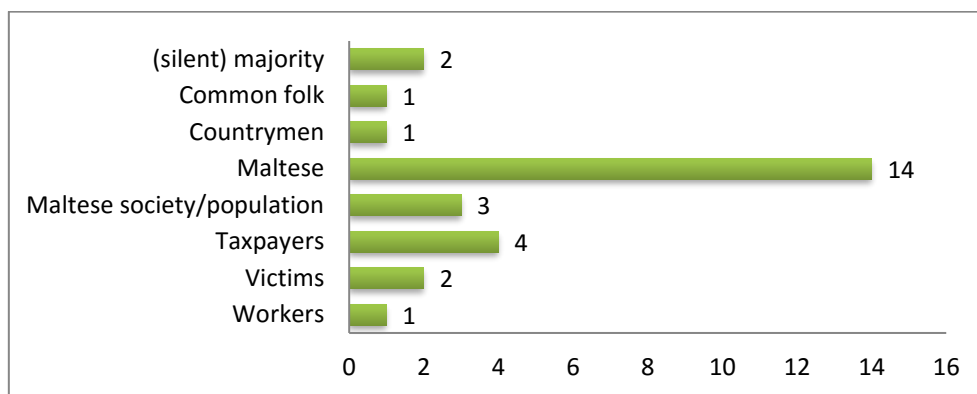


Figure 6. List of words used to name the Maltese.

In Figure 6, it can be observed that nationality is an important characteristic when defining the native population. Probably, that is due to some writers’ desire to emphasize a sense of group identity to reinforce the dichotomy Us vs. Them. Another important aspect is the active role of the Maltese society (e.g. taxpayer, worker) contrary to the “unskilled” immigrant, who represents an economic burden for the state.

Overall, the Maltese population is represented as a victim of immigration, as may be inferred from previous examples (see examples 11-17), but also as a victim of Europe which does not provide the necessary financial and logistic support to the country according to some of the articles.

(26) “A predominant factor in discourse about this topic has been **what the EU should be doing to help out**” [IMMA_Before_05]

(27) “However, when **Malta itself needed help**, only a few member states agreed to relocate immigrants on a voluntary basis” [IMMA_Before_12]

(28) “(...) Malta cannot act as the **lone sentinel** of Europe's borders” [IMMA_Before_08]

Moreover, there are authors that highlight the kind and good-natured character of the Maltese society as well as their Christian values which are not compatible with racism. This is what Van Dijk (2000: 220; 2006:738) calls “National self-glorification”.

(29) “**Subversive ideas like racism are incompatible with the traditional characteristics the Maltese**, who have been frequently **praised for their generosity and friendliness**” [IMMA_Before_01]

(30) “The government has always insisted that a goodwill gesture should be made to **a small and friendly country like Malta** which has stood with Libya through thick and thin in difficult circumstances” [IMMA_Before_08]

Although immigrants are the targeted “other”, some writers also present a dichotomy between two sectors of the Maltese society, the pro- and the anti-immigration. The first sector is normally described as being a minority and is also attacked by the most anti-immigration writers. Following some of the strategies of denial of racism described by Van Dijk (2000, 2006) these writers normally claim to be representing a silent majority within the population, even providing figures to support that argument.

(31) “According to a public opinion survey carried out for The Sunday Times by Professor Mario Vassallo, **only 2.3% of Maltese agreed that everybody should have the right to settle in Malta. Only 20% favoured granting asylum to foreigners escaping from war**, political persecution or hunger (...) **90% were unwilling to accept Africans; 95% were unwilling to accept Arabs.**” [IMMA_Before_07]

In the case of those authors who show a more blatant racist ideology, they either use disclaimers or claim to represent the whole population as mentioned above.

(32) “**Before anyone calls me heartless**, let me tell you that I spent a lot of time as an aid worker in Sierra Leone after the civil war there” [IMMA_Before_14]

(33) “This article illustrates how they have managed **to shout above the murmurs of the silent majority** and hijack the public debate on this issue.” [IMMA_Before_02]

They also try to delegitimise opposite viewpoints by means of accusing those supporting immigration of not defending the national interests and censoring the voice of the majority. Therefore, the dichotomy Us vs. Them is normally a quarrel between the anti-immigration sector of the Maltese society and the pro-immigration sector, including the immigrants.

In conclusion, it seems that the articles in this corpus focus their attention on the figure of the immigrant. The articles in which immigrants are just presented as innocent victims are very few. Normally, they are portrayed as a threat for the economy and security of the country giving the idea that they are criminals. They are also conceptualized as animals or sources of illnesses who would not report almost any benefit to the host society. On the other hand, the Maltese society appears represented as a victim of either immigration or the European policies regarding this phenomenon, but these articles are not very frequent since the focus of attention is not the Maltese population. In general, Maltese people are active and friendly taxpayers.

5.1.2. Corpus 2

The articles included in the second corpus are different from those appearing in the first corpus in more than one way. Simply by having a brief look at the titles it can be noticed that there is a shift in the focus of attention from the figure of the immigrant to the process of immigration in general. This idea is supported by the analysis of lexical frequency, which shows that while in the first corpus the word “immigrants” is the second most frequently used noun after the word “Malta”, it is the sixth in the second corpus. Besides, the word “immigration” appears as the third most frequently used noun in the second corpus followed by “migration”.

The following graph shows the different ways in which immigrants are referred to in this second corpus.

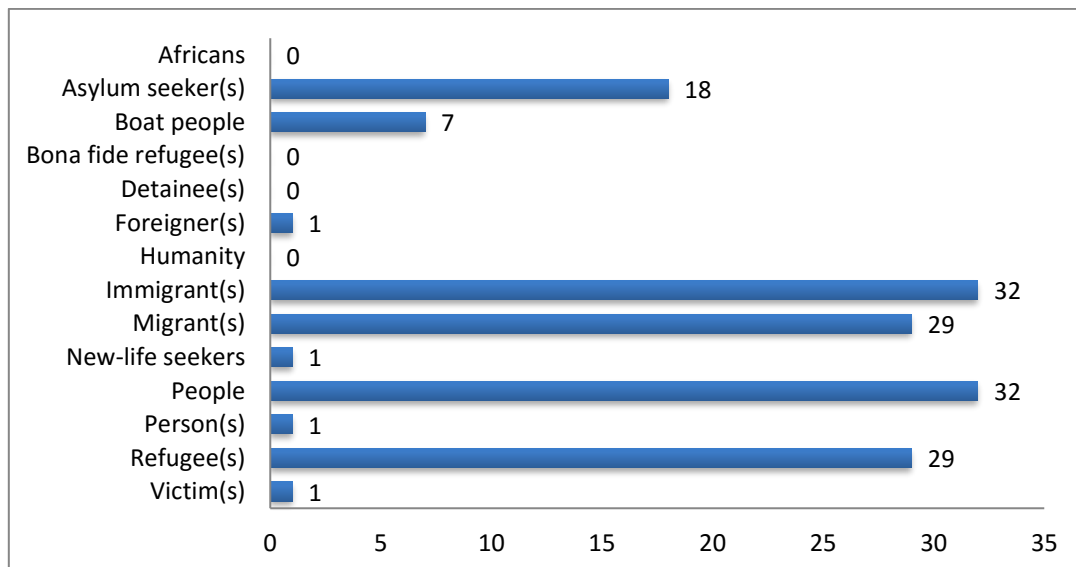


Figure 7. List of words used to name the immigrants in IMMA_After.

As can be observed in the graph, the term “detainee” has been completely omitted despite the fact that immigrants are still held in detention centres. In fact, the detention

centres are barely mentioned, which did not happen in the previous corpus, and they are even referred twice as “accommodation centres” which is rather euphemistic.

In Figure 8 we can find a comparison of the terminology used to refer to the immigrants in both corpora.

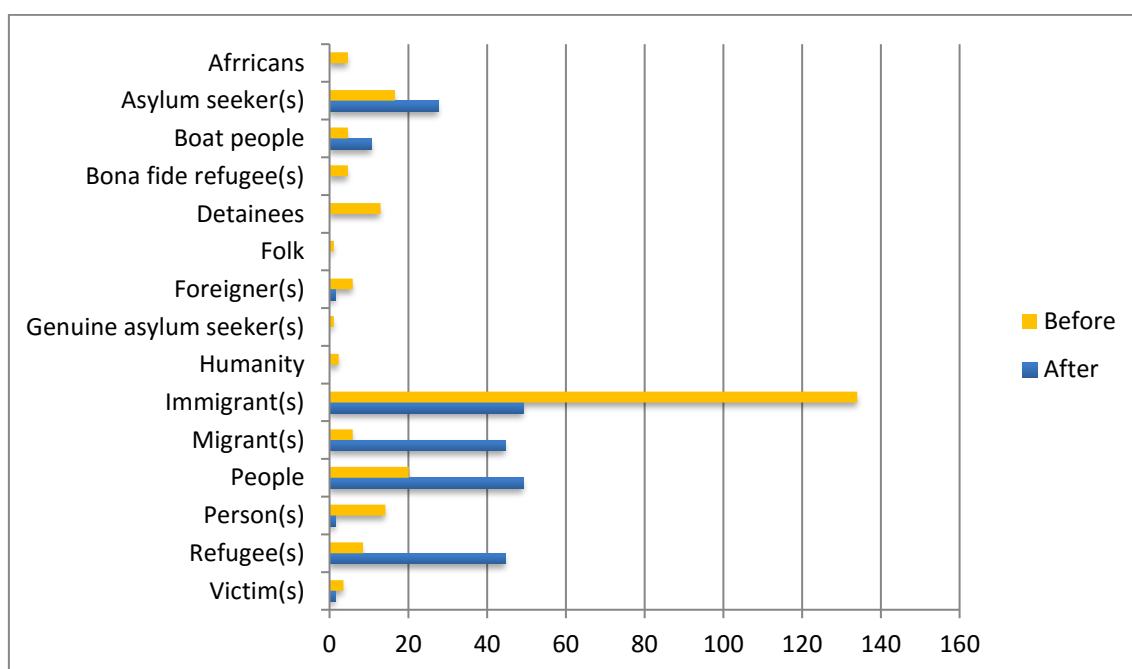


Figure 8. Comparison of both corpora regarding terminology.

When comparing the results of both corpora, it can be observed how the word “migrant” is more used after the AP’s suggestion than it was before. That could be a consequence of avoiding the use of the word “immigrant”, which, after the AP’s suggestion, is seen as having negative connotations. Terms such as “asylum seeker(s)” or “refugee(s)” are also more used after than they were before, which helps to highlight that immigrants are moving from their countries for humanitarian reasons. In relation with this, it can also be observed how terms such as “bona fide refugee” or “genuine asylum seeker”, which questioned the veracity of the immigrants’ claims for support, are no longer included in the articles.

As can be seen in the following graph, the changes above mentioned are also perceived when analysing the adjectives that collocate with “immigrant(s)”, “migrant(s)” or other terms used to refer to those who arrive to the island without the proper documents.

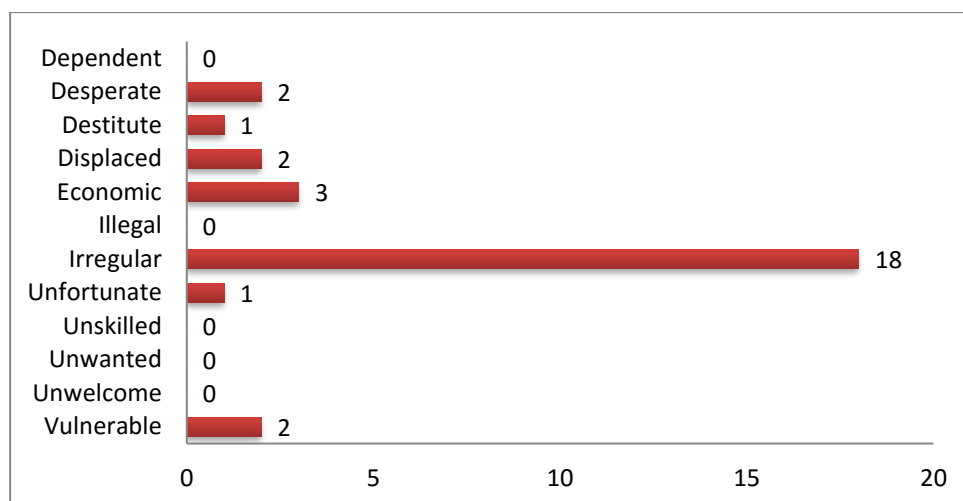


Figure 9. List of adjectives premodifying the immigrants in IMMA_After.

Following the AP’s suggestion, the word “illegal” is not used to refer to immigrants in this corpus, although it is applied to immigration several times. Although it could be argued that the writers have just substituted one word for another with a similar appearance, the truth is that terms such as “unwanted” or “unwelcome” are no longer mentioned in an explicit way, which could indicate a change towards a more positive representation of the immigrants, at least regarding semantic choice. Apparently, it seems that immigrants are perceived more frequently as victims, as the use of adjectives such as “vulnerable” or “desperate” may indicate.

However, negative adjectives such as “illegal” or “unskilled”, although they do no longer refer to the immigrants, they do appear to qualify the process of immigration in one of the articles. This is an example of how by means of using nominalization the participants have been de-emphasized.

Although they are few, there are still articles that present immigrants as an idle burden for the state.

- (34) “The burgeoning presence of **refugees loitering aimlessly** in certain parts of Malta and in some cases, albeit a minority, making news for very often the wrong reasons will sooner or later negate some of the better visual aspects of life in Malta.” [IMMA_After_06]

In general, immigration is still perceived as a matter of security and, therefore, immigrants are a possible threat for the country.

- (35) “The social, economic, demographic, cultural and **security impacts on Malta of irregular immigration** raise inescapable concerns that must be addressed responsibly” [IMMA_After_03]

- (36) “There is a vast difference between the deliberate process of fomenting racial disharmony and xenophobia and putting into practice the obligation and responsibility vested in those charged to govern and **protect the security and well-being of Maltese nationals as well as those privileged to legally live in Malta.**” [IMMA_After_06]

Security, as can be seen in example (35), is frequently a reason to justify acts and policies that could be considered racist or against human rights under other circumstances. It is unquestionable that people are unlikely to show a favourable attitude towards realities that attack their own welfare. That is why, although without explicitly criminalizing the individual immigrants, metaphors such as IMMIGRATION IS A NATURAL DISASTER (37 and 38), IMMIGRATION IS AN ILLNESS (39) or IMMIGRATION IS AN INVASION (40) can still be found in this corpus to justify controversial measures.

- (37) “(...) countries, like Malta, which find themselves **unable to absorb a huge influx** of irregular immigrants.” [IMMA_After_03]

- (38) “Even if the Libyan government were genuinely interested, it will simply not be capable of **stemming the flow.**” [IMMA_After_09]

(39) “The issue of **irregular immigration can very much be likened to homeopathy** in two basic ways. First, in trying to find the root cause of the problem and, then, in targeting the root cause, instead of addressing the problems of its effects.” [IMMA_After_05]

(40) “(...) Prime Minister’s position as the leader responsible for securing Malta’s shores from potentially **an invasion of veritable biblical proportions**.” [IMMA_After_06]

As far as the Maltese population is concerned, there are little changes in the way in which they are represented with respect to the previous corpus. They are no longer referred to as the “taxpayers” and they are regarded as “victims” just once. While in the previous corpus racism was out of the table and almost a taboo topic, it appears as a reality in some of the analysed articles now.

(41) “(...) **while nations have every right to control their borders to secure the common good** and the human dignity of their own people it is not to be regarded as supreme. **This right should be employed with utmost discretion so that selfish reasons like materialism or ideological reasons like racism are eradicated**” [IMMA_After_07]

(42) “A programme of integration will require courageous leadership from the Prime Minister personally and **a concerted campaign of education to expunge the inherent racism and xenophobia** of an island that, unusually in Europe, has never before experienced an influx of immigrants on this scale.” [IMMA_After_03]

However, there are still articles that use euphemisms to refer to racist behaviour as can be seen in the following example (example 43). After all, Malta is still seen as another victim (although not the sole victim) in this story. Nation self-glorification highlighting the friendliness of the Maltese society still appears as well.

(43) “The only certainty is that the scale of the problem will increase and the severity of the issues will be compounded and will produce **extreme attitudes and outcomes which are not synonymous with the welcoming generosity of the Maltese people**.” [IMMA_After_06]

5.2. Representation of events

Once the representation of the main participants has been analysed, it is time to focus our attention on the description of events to see how ideology is manifested. To state it briefly, this section is devoted to analyse which events are described, how they are represented and from which perspective.

5.2.1. Corpus 1

When analysing the way in which a given event is represented by the media, it is crucial to identify the source of information, since different writers are likely to depict the same event in different ways based on their own interests or ideologies. If we pay attention to the names of the writers included in the first corpus, we can observe that there is not a single woman in the list or any participant representing minorities either. The following graph shows the different professional backgrounds of the writers whose articles are included in the first corpus.

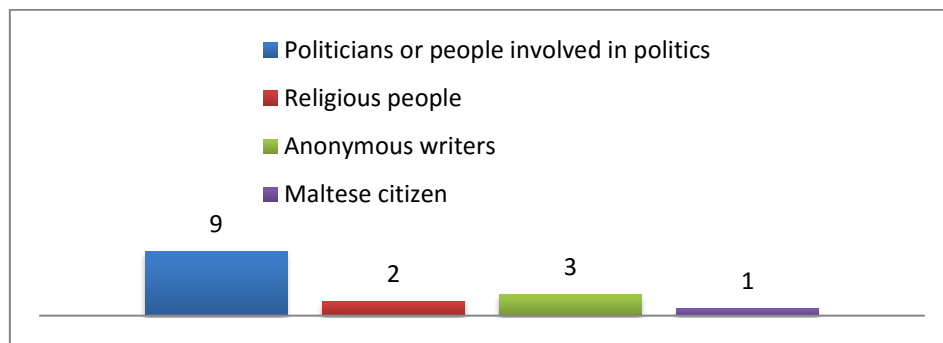


Figure 10.

The graph shows how the majority of the articles were written by political figures or people that were involved in politics (e.g. Martin Scicluna was a government adviser on matters of defence). In general, it was found that these articles were more politically correct regarding terminology than those written by anonymous authors or common

Maltese citizens, who frequently claim to represent the voice of the majority, as we have seen. All columnists, without any exception, are Maltese and, therefore, they are prone to represent the Maltese point of view of the events. Only one of the writers could provide first-hand information about the immigrants' viewpoint based on his work as a member of the Jesuits Refugee Service, which is a religious organization that works for the well-being of those coming to the Maltese shores.

In summary, the articles represent the Maltese point of view of the events while other opinions are neglected. In some of the articles, it can even be found how certain international organizations such as the UNHRC are delegitimised to talk about immigration in the island because they lack the public support not having been elected by the country citizens or they are accused of working against the national interests.

(44) **"No NGO can pretend to rival in authority a government elected** by the whole nation."

[IMMA_Before_02]

(45) **"The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights (...) has no legal powers. He visits countries and writes reports. He does not cost his recommendations, let alone pay for them,** and so he can afford to be magnanimous" [IMMA_Before_07]

In general, the word "immigration" seems to be the favourite term to name the migratory process carried out by the African immigrants arriving to Malta with a total of 38 occurrences in the first corpus (See Figure 11 below). Clearly, the word "migration" is less popular among the columnists since there are 11 occurrences in the whole corpus and neither of them appears in the most overtly anti-immigration articles. This could indicate that the term is perceived as a kind of euphemism or, at least, a more politically correct term.

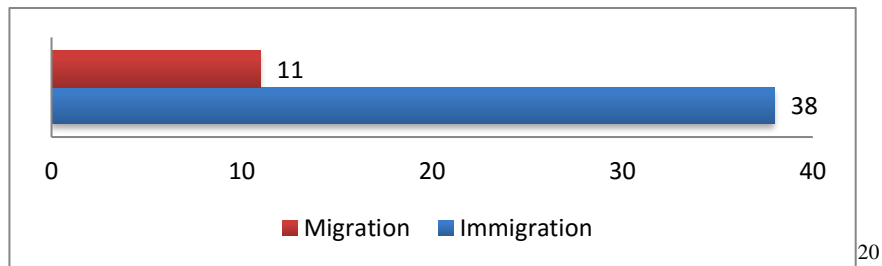


Figure 11. Number of occurrences of the words “migration” and “immigration” in IMMA_Before.

In line with the previous idea, it is interesting to see how, in one of the articles, the writer uses the word “migration” when referring to the Maltese emigration process during the 19th and 20th centuries, but he uses the word “immigration” to refer to the current migration movements from Africa to Malta or other Mediterranean countries.

(46) “Throughout history, there have been human migrations on a large scale often provoked by unemployment, political or religious intolerance. **Many Europeans, including large numbers of Maltese, have gone abroad** to seek freedom, security or a better living. (...). **Migration then, of course, was largely legal. But today we are faced with a different phenomenon: illegal immigration.** [IMMA_Before_01]

The adjectives that are most frequently used to qualify the process of immigration are “illegal” (6 occurrences) and “irregular” (6 occurrences). Other adjectives that collocate with the word “immigration” in this corpus are “uncontrolled” (1 occurrence) or “mass” (3 occurrences), as can be seen in Figure 12. These last two adjectives contribute to reinforce the conceptualization of immigration as an unstoppable force, idea that also appears in the metaphors of invasion and natural disaster.

²⁰ Compounds such as “Immigration Pact” or “international symposium on migration” are not included since they do not represent a writer’s choice.

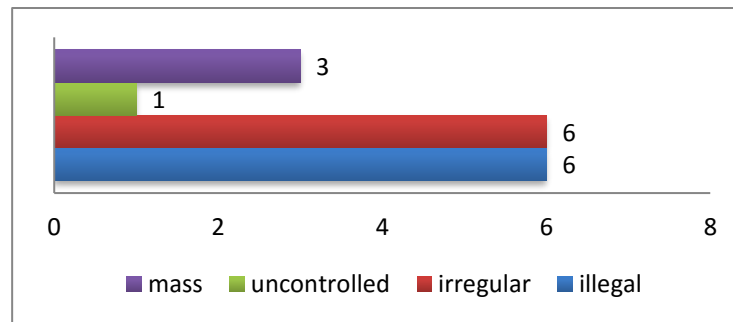


Figure 12. List of adjectives that collocate with “immigration” or “migration” in IMMA_Before.

As mentioned before, although immigration may be perceived as a solution for some countries to cope with tax collecting issues and low birth rates, it is normally seen as a problem, a challenge or even a crisis for the host country in most of the articles of this corpus.

Regarding the discourse of immigration policy, it is very frequent to find the combination that Van Dijk calls “fair but strict”. First, there is a concession recognising the extreme circumstances in which immigration occurs, and then, there is a claim for pragmatism and “common sense” or realism (1999:188).

(47) “**The government, I believe, should continue adopting the middle of the road approach; steer away from xenophobic and racist directions** which have merely demagogic value (...). **At the same time the national interest should be protected and public opinion never ignored.** Fears have to be allayed, but the government must continue defending our interests” [IMMA_Before_10]

(48) “They are victims. So, yes, **treat them with dignity and care but then send them back from whence they came**” [IMMA_Before_14]

In fact, even though some of the articles highlight the negative effect that the detention policy could have on the immigrants who are held there, neither of the writers shows a negative attitude towards that same policy, which has been criticised by

international organizations as mentioned before. Those long periods of imprisonment that were described in previous sections (see subsection 2.2) often provoke quarrels among the immigrants or with the officers. In this first corpus two different incidents were reported. In both, immigrants appear as the agents of the events, whereas the armed forces are passive participants and, when they become involved as active participants, their actions are described as the reaction to previous attacks.

(49) “I would not dare in the meantime to attempt to lay blame either with the protesting detainees or with members of the armed forces. **However**, it is obvious that **the illegal immigrants were tired** of their prolonged detention in uncomfortable conditions **and vented their anger in a protest as they invaded the village sports ground. The army panicked** when they found themselves in that situation **and reacted violently**. As several armchair critics have remarked, **the use of cudgels by the soldiers** was a grave blunder. Surely a less drastic measure, perhaps a jet of water, would have obtained a far better result for all.” [IMMA_Before_01]

In this first example it can be seen how the immigrants are depicted as being aggressive enough to scare the armed forces who reacted to their attack. Although it is true that the writer recognizes that the immigrants’ actions were motivated by the bad conditions lived in the detention centres, his semantic choice (i.e. “protesting detainees” and “illegal immigrants” to refer to the immigrants and “members of the armed forces” to refer to the police officers), his soft condemn towards the use of cudgels and his latter support to the use of other damaging measures such as a jet of water seem to indicate that his position is far from unbiased, contrary to his claim of impartiality at the beginning.

The second incident is described in more dramatic terms. As if they were an organized group of gangsters, the immigrants are described as a “band of men” plotting to damage the tourist business in the island, which is one of the main sources of

financial income. Nevertheless, the target of the writer's criticism is not only the "illegal immigrants", who do not always appear as the actors of the events (example 48), but also the Maltese authorities in charge, which show a soft attitude towards the events according to this writer.

(50) "After a mass breakout of over 100 immigrants from Safi and Hal Far last month, **the more recent "walkabout" by some 80 detainees to the airport and back, together with repeated breakouts and escapes by smaller bands of men, expose our amateurish approach**" [IMMA_Before_06]

(51) "Will they do so in the near future **if a group of illegal but well-advised immigrants targets our most vulnerable spot, that is, the tourist industry?** Let us make no mistake about **these protests**, starting with the one of January 2005. They do not just happen; they **are planned, well planned and follow a pattern.**" [IMMA_Before_06]

The writer also suggests that the armed forces could not do anything in fear of being criticised by the media for attacking the immigrants.

(52) "**The media have not been tender with the forces of law and order.** After the incidents of January 2005, **they savaged the armed forces**, who tried to restore order, without criticising the illegal immigrants who were in breach of the law. (...) Army personnel may not be very keen now to be put under investigation again for showing determination in controlling detainees. **Maybe that is why they put their hands behind their backs and let things take their course**" [IMMA_Before_06]

It seems that what the writer wants the reader to infer from this article is that army personnel should have freedom to do as they please regarding immigration control, otherwise, officers are not going to do their job in fear of further accusations, and immigrants are going to feel free to threaten the country. The semantic choice plays an important role in this article. For instance, the author uses euphemisms such as "showing determination" to refer to what Amnesty International has described as an

“excessive use of force”²¹, while he uses the verb “savage” to describe the behaviour of the media towards the armed forces. In brief, those who support the writer’s ideology are good citizens who just want to do their job whereas those who do not, that is, immigrants and pro-immigration journalists, are a threat for the national security and economy.

5.2.2. Corpus 2

As done with the previous corpus, the first task is to analyse the different points of view represented in the articles that are included in this corpus. From the following graph it may be seen how the background of the different columnists is more diverse than it was in the first corpus.

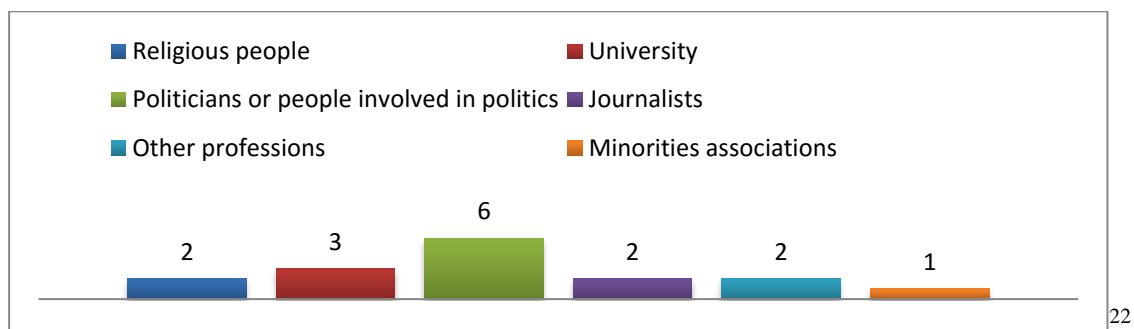


Figure 13.

In this second corpus, unlike in the first one, there are two female journalists. Minorities associations are also represented by the president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, a Muslim organisation in the country. Among the politicians whose articles are included in the second corpus, there is a Maltese representative of the UNHCR with an active online profile defending immigrants’ rights. Within the category of “other professions”,

²¹ Information taken from the website of Amnesty International:
<http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/534/>

²² It was decided to include Jean Gové, writer of the article called “The Church and the immigrant”, in both groups, religious people and university, since he is a student of Theology.

there is a lawyer specialised in human rights. For the very first time, there is a non-Maltese writer in the corpus, the Italian journalist Maria Teresa Sette. It is also the first time in which the testimony of an immigrant is included in one of the articles (IMMA_After_13). In conclusion, the overall picture shows a heterogenic group, which is likely to deliver a more complete description of the events.

Regarding the semantic choice, it can be observed how the term “migration” has acquired more relevance in this corpus than in the previous one (40 occurrences), although the word “immigration” (45 occurrences) continues being the most frequently used term to refer to this social phenomenon.

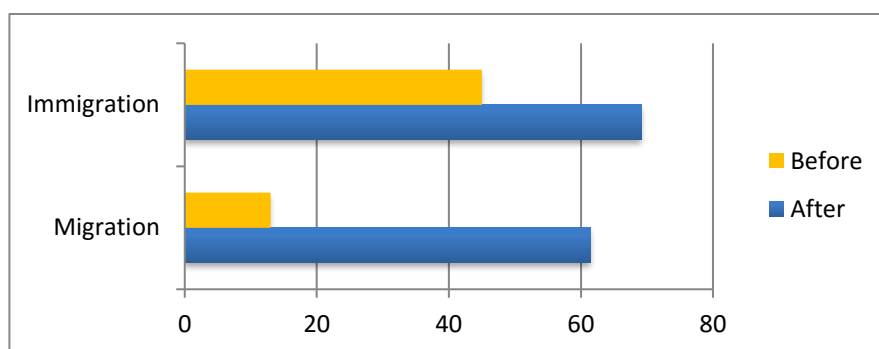


Figure 14. Comparison of the use of “migration” and “immigration” (normed figures)

In the second corpus, when these two terms appear premodified by an adjective, that adjective tends to be “irregular” (16 occurrences). Other possible adjectives that collocate with “migration” or “immigration” are: “illegal” (3 occurrences), “non-legal” (1 occurrence) or “unchecked” (2 occurrences).

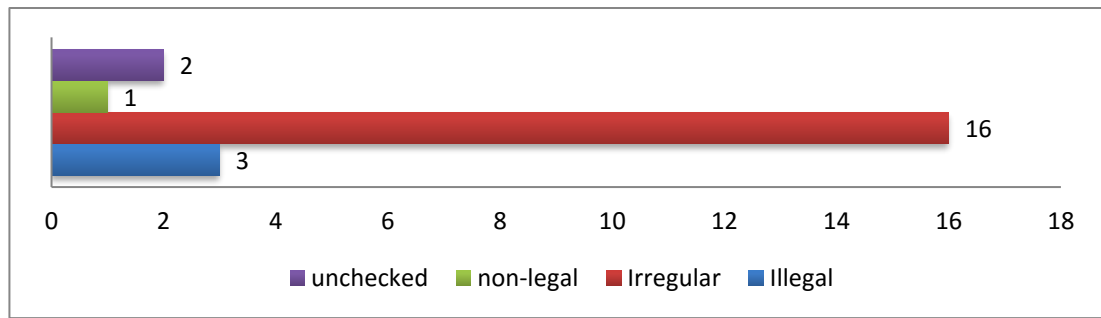


Figure 15. List of adjectives that collocate with “migration” or “immigration” in IMMA_After.

Continuing with the representation of events, there are still more differences with respect to the previous corpus. First of all, it can be observed that, although it is not quantitative relevant, there is a more constant claim for integration. While, in 2005, Bishop Nikol Cauchi suggested that it was the immigrants’ duty to integrate into the Maltese society (example 53), 8 years later, his colleague, Fr Mario Attard, thinks that Church and government must be the champions of that integration (example 54 and 55).

(53) “However, **immigrants**, whether they have crossed a border legally or illegally, **also have duties to their country of adoption. They are obliged to respect the material and spiritual heritage** of that country, to obey laws and to assist in carrying the civic burdens.” [IMMA_Before_01]

(54) “First, migrants are entitled to have opportunities in their countries. Consequently **governments and civil societies have the concomitant obligation to offer such opportunities** together with personal and economic security” [IMMA_After_07]

(55) “Secondly, **the Church can introduce initiatives which aid immigrants to assimilate our culture in a healthy way.**” [IMMA_After_07]

This change of mentality, especially among the men of the Church, could have been influenced by the election of a Jesuit as the new Pope. Secondly, there is also a greater emphasis on describing the reasons behind immigration, sometimes, by giving

voice to immigrants such as Goitom Yosief who inspired a book to teach children about immigration.

- (56) “‘It is based on **my real story**, even though it was not easy for me to share it because every time I have to remember the horrific parts,’ Goitom had told me, calmly, soft-spokenly.”
[IMMA_After_13]

The introduction of testimonies in discourse is used to provide support and emotional impact to the writer’s argumentation (Van Dijk, 2006:737), in the case of this article, in favour of a pro-immigration and anti-racist ideology.

Another significant difference with respect to the previous corpus is the writers’ new attitude towards the Maltese detention policy. The following example shows a very clear criticism to the use of detention centres.

- (57) “**The principle of deterrence by detention and/or other means is immoral**, whether or not it actually works. (Concentration camps served their purpose rather well, I suppose.) It is based on a sick collectivist ideology that overlooks individual suffering for the sake of some grand scheme of social engineering. **It is, quite simply, fascist.**” [IMMA_After_14]

The author questions whether the practice of holding immigrants in detention centres is a matter of national security or just a political manoeuvre to get votes. If in the previous corpus writers considered immigrants’ breakouts as a threat to the national population or the national interests (see examples 49 to 51), this author sees them as something “desirable” as a means of getting media support and, eventually, finishing with what he considers to be an unfair policy. In his description of events, the immigrants are not gangsters or aggressive groups invading a football pitch, far from that, they are compared with the national Maltese heroes that fought the British armed forces on the *Sette Giugno*.

(58) “Why ‘desirable’? Because **there are circumstances in which protest by any means fair or foul is the only chance to make one’s voice heard. I wouldn’t call the Tienanmen or the June 7, 1919, riots undesirable or unwarranted.**” [IMMA_After_14]

But if immigrants go from villains to heroes, the armed forces simply disappear from the picture. Although the use of rubber bullets is mentioned twice in this article, the agent is never present as if they were shot by automatic machines. The writer regards the Maltese government as the only responsible for the breakouts and the attacks and avoids mentioning the police.

(59) “I don’t care much if the rubber bullets came from “warning shots” that were “clearly off-target” (that report again). The point is that **riots are what you get when you proceed to make, in a systematic and institutionalised way, people’s lives as arduous as possible.**” [IMMA_After_14]

In summary, the results presented in this section seem to indicate that there is a slight change towards a more positive and human representation of immigration. This change can be observed in the decriminalization of undocumented immigrants along with the slow introduction of marginal and anti-racist voices into the media discourse.

Whereas in the first corpus, most writers use semantic choice and cognitive construal operations such as metaphors to contribute to create a negative representation of the immigrants in the media, while presenting a neutral or positive image of the native population, in the second corpus, writers are more focussed on discussing immigration rather than immigrants, who are mainly represented as victims.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyse the evolution of immigration discourse in the Maltese press, taking as a point of reference the lexical change suggested by the AP on

2nd April 2013. By focusing on the *Times of Malta*, our purpose was to analyse the possible effects that this suggestion could have had on the representation of events and participants in the Maltese press. As mentioned in the Introduction section, the idea was motivated by the lack of attention paid to Malta as a source for immigration discourse research, bearing in mind the high level of concern among the Maltese population regarding immigration, according to official sources previously quoted.

On balance, the analysis has shown that there has been a change in the opinion articles analysed regarding immigration discourse, although this change has not been equally observed in the way participants and events are represented.

First of all, we needed to analyse if the AP's suggestion has been implemented in the Maltese press. As seen in the results and discussion section, the second corpus does not present any example of "illegal" applied to a person, reason why it can be stated that the decision has been fully implemented. Secondly, we wanted to analyse the effects that this lexical change could have had on the representation of participants and events. It turned out that, in the second corpus, there was a more positive lexical representation of immigrants, who were no longer categorised as criminals or defrauders. The examples provided in the results and discussion section have shown that the representation of the immigrants has evolved from being considered criminals, to victims (or even heroes in one of the examples). Another related change was that, in the second corpus, the use of the term "migrant(s)" was more common among the writers, although the word "immigrant(s)" still remained as the most frequently used term to refer to those who immigrate into a country. This is probably due to the association of the word "immigrant(s)" with its common collocation "illegal", which may have made the term "immigrant(s)" acquire negative connotations.

Up to this point, we have talked about lexical representation. However, if we analyse more subtle ways of enacting discrimination, such as the use of metaphors, we can see that there has not been almost any significant variation in the type of metaphors being used to conceptualise immigrants and immigration. In both corpora, immigrants were portrayed as a threat for the country by the use of natural disaster, invasion and disease metaphors. In the first corpus, it can also be found examples of the animal metaphor that did not appear in the second corpus. Since this metaphor intended to depict immigrants as inferior animals dehumanising them, its absence in the second corpus might be perceived as a small improvement.

As far as the representation of events is concerned, it can be observed how the word “migration” has been more frequently used in the second corpus than in the first one. This can be related to the fact that, as it was the case with “immigrant(s)”, “immigration” is regarded as a less appropriate term because of its common association with the adjective “illegal”. Besides, in the second corpus, the importance of immigrants’ integration is mentioned as a duty of the state, leaving aside the idea that immigrants are unwilling to integrate. In addition, concepts such as racism within the population and the Maltese immigration policy were more overtly discussed and even criticised in the second corpus. It can also be appreciated how writers have moved their focus of attention from reporting about the immigrants to discussing immigration. Charteris-Black supports that this shift represents a step towards a more moderate discourse, being a change from far right to central-right discourse (2006:573).

In conclusion, we can say that there have been changes in the immigration discourse in the Maltese newspaper examined in this dissertation, although these changes have not been drastic but moderate. It can be established that the AP’s suggestion, which responds to a change in the social sensitivity towards immigration,

has had a role in fostering this improvement by means of suggesting a less offensive use of the vocabulary. However, it would be naïve and imprecise to say that the aforementioned changes are just a consequence of that lexical change, without taking into account other concurrent events happening in Europe, such as the election of the new Pope with a more sympathetic discourse, the election of labour parties in Italy and Malta (although we mentioned in the subsection 2.2 that there was little difference between labour and conservative parties regarding immigration policy in Malta), or the increasing number of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea such as the one near Lampedusa in 2013 that has been previously mentioned in this dissertation (see subsection 2.2).

We have seen how a social decision (i.e. the AP's suggestion) has affected the representation of a social phenomenon in discourse, but it is not clear whether this change in discourse has actually have an effect on social practice, taking into account the increasing concern about immigration in the country.

Therefore, it would be interesting to see if the lexical change suggested by the AP, and followed in the Maltese press, has also been experienced in other countries and, whether or not the implementation of this suggestion has also contributed to achieving a more positive representation of immigrants and immigration in discourse. Another interesting line of research may be to see if these changes found in the *Times of Malta* are maintained, implemented or abolished in following years, since this study has only analysed a short period of time after the AP's suggestion. Finally, it could be relevant to extend this study to other Maltese newspapers, especially those written in Maltese, to have the whole picture of the evolution of the immigration discourse in the Maltese press.

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Appendix 1

Code	Heading	Writer	Date	Number of words
IMMA_Before_01	Illegal immigrants and hospitality	Bishop Nikol Cauchi	09/02/2005	836
IMMA_Before_02	No to illegal immigrants	Special Correspondent	09/10/2005	1,672
IMMA_Before_03	Irregular immigration: opportunities beyond the dilemma	Fr Joseph Cassar, SJ	16/10/2005	1,048
IMMA_Before_04	Immigration, xenophobia and democratic debate	Michael Zammit	10/11/2005	1,032
IMMA_Before_05	Malta is changing immigration and asylum discourse	Henry Frendo	29/01/2006	2,601
IMMA_Before_06	The law and illegal immigrants	Special Correspondent	19/03/2006	1,434
IMMA_Before_07	Illegal immigrants, criminals and crusaders	Special Correspondent	23/04/2006	1,428
IMMA_Before_08	Tackling immigration: Heart or mind?	Tonio Borg	29/07/2006	1,026
IMMA_Before_09	Immigrants may move on	Simon Busottil	21/11/2007	771
IMMA_Before_10	Immigration: the facts	Martin Scicluna	07/03/2009	808
IMMA_Before_11	Immigrants statistic and policies	Henry Frendo	18/03/2009	1,163
IMMA_Before_12	Working together on immigration	Edward Zammit-Lewis	05/05/2011	765
IMMA_Before_13	On analyzing immigration	Alex Tortell	30/08/2011	584
IMMA_Before_14	Illegal immigrants and the UE	George Palmer	23/06/2012	831
IMMA_Before_15	The immigrant detention policy	Michael Falzon	08/07/2012	862

Table 1. Detailed description of the first corpus

Author: Mgr Cauchi is Bishop of Gozo

Date: 09/02/2005

Illegal immigrants and hospitality

Throughout history, there have been human migrations on a large scale, often provoked by unemployment, political or religious intolerance. Many Europeans, including large numbers of Maltese, have gone abroad to seek freedom, security or a better living.

The countries that received migrants enacted several laws to restrict immigration. Some provided for the selection of prospective immigrants and the exclusion of unwanted elements, such as convicts, polygamists, prostitutes, people suffering from contagious diseases and those who were subversive or potential offenders.

Migration then, of course, was largely legal. But today we are faced with a different phenomenon: illegal immigration.

A few Western European countries - particularly the larger ones with a capacity to absorb quantities of people - have adopted a welcoming approach due to shortages in their labour force and other demographic troubles owing to the net fall in birth rates.

The situation in our islands - where the overpopulation problem led to the mass migration of our countrymen - seems to be the opposite. And in recent years more and more illegal immigrants have been landing on our shores after failing in their quest to make the European mainland.

Matters came to a head recently during an incident at the Safi Barracks, when a group of detainees staged a noisy but otherwise peaceful protest. What happened needs to be analysed objectively from the right perspective and the inquiry into it will hopefully achieve this.

I would not dare in the meantime to attempt to lay blame either with the protesting detainees or with members of the armed forces. However, it is obvious that the illegal immigrants were tired of their prolonged detention in uncomfortable conditions and vented their anger in a protest as they invaded the village sports ground. The army panicked when they found themselves in that situation and reacted violently. As several armchair critics have remarked, the use of cudgels by the soldiers was a grave blunder. Surely a less drastic measure, perhaps a jet of water, would have obtained a far better result for all.

At any rate, a precious lesson should be learnt from our mistakes. Some further training for the personnel in charge of the illegal immigrants may be advisable. It would also be highly recommendable to have a common policy, adopted by the more prosperous countries of the European Union, to help countries like Malta with know-how and finances to cope with this problem. After all, this is in their own interests since these people may sooner or later find their way into their territory.

Having said that, it is obvious that there cannot be humane treatment of detainees unless a modicum of respect for their dignity is observed. There are some basic requirements which are indispensable, such as access to medical aid, proper food, sanitary conditions, recreational and training facilities, legal aid and other necessities connected with their human and civil rights.

However, immigrants, whether they have crossed a border legally or illegally, also have duties to their country of adoption. They are obliged to respect the material and spiritual heritage of that country, to obey laws and to assist in carrying the civic burdens.

Of course, a democratic country must suppress any symptoms of xenophobia or racism. In this context, I do not have in mind the wild expressions of it resulting from a paranoid or psychotic state, which obsessed dictators like Hitler and Stalin, but rather the milder form, which is the dislike of groups considered as foreigners, or those not sharing the same ways of life.

Racism - which has reared its ugly head on our island in certain quarters recently - is a very dangerous phenomenon and is bound to wreak havoc in society. Very often it leads to hatred and criminal acts against innocent people. The doctrine that one race is superior to all others and has the right to suppress them has been condemned in no uncertain terms by the Church, besides being abhorred by all sane people.

Subversive ideas like racism are incompatible with the traditional characteristics of the Maltese, who have been frequently praised for their generosity and friendliness. It would therefore be a big contradiction if our people, who usually make gigantic efforts to reach out to far away countries in order to alleviate their suffering, now turn a deaf ear to those who are on our threshold, crying out desperately for some sort of assistance. In the current climate there are certain simple and plain points that should not be forgotten: the fundamental equality of races, common natural values and, particularly, the human rights belonging to one and all which must be acknowledged and respected, without any discrimination, in the case of every man and woman, whatever their race, colour or creed.

It would be timely to have an education campaign, even through the media, to liberate our generation from latent prejudices and enable individuals to exercise human virtues, such as altruism, while kindling a desire for truth, justice and freedom for ourselves and for every other human being.

Author: Special Correspondent

Date: 09/10/2005

No to illegal immigrants

There is a wide chasm between public opinion on illegal immigrants and the views projected by newspapers. After monitoring Maltese newspapers between August 20 and September 6, I concluded that the distortion has three sources: 'Christians', journalists and NGOs. This article illustrates how they have managed to shout above the murmurs of the silent majority and hijack the public debate on this issue.

'Christians'

The attitude of Christians can be illustrated by five letters. Ms Lucie Mizzi (The Times, August 24) writing about "the daily dose of racist and unChristian letters", objected that they should "be published in a national newspaper". Ms Danielle Vella (The Times, August 27), wrote a letter "Whither Christian values?" wondering whether the Maltese would send back the Holy Family fleeing Herod's persecution. Mr Robert Bonnici (The Times, August 29), scolded the editor: "Shame on you for adding fuel to the very delicate subject of racial prejudice already undermining some of our true Christian beliefs".

Ms Jacqueline Calleja authored two letters. In The Sunday Times (August 28) she wondered "what they will answer Christ on the Day of Judgment when He will ask whether they gave Him food when He was hungry..." In the second letter, "Christian solidarity" (The Times, September 6), she wrote: "St Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, made it very clear what Christian love is all about... applying this to the present situation one could say that, if Maltese Catholics were to regularly frequent church... but harbour hostile, unChristian attitudes towards people of other cultures and religions arriving in their country, all their efforts are simply vain and utterly futile."

These letters call for some comments. First, some are not far from advocating censorship of opinions opposed to their own. Second, they do not distinguish between what a person, following the dictates of his conscience, ought to do and what the country should do. Those who feel strongly enough about their Christian duties are free to go 70 miles out at sea and rescue illegal immigrants, host a few immigrants in their homes, and even provide illegal immigrants with money for their daily subsistence. However, they do not have the right to impose the dictates of their conscience on us all. Why should Malta pay the armed forces to rescue immigrants who risk their lives to better their economic situation? Why should taxpayers' money be spent on unwanted and illegal immigrants? If the latter cost Lm4 million a year (and the true figure is much higher), then each Maltese contributes Lm10 a year for their upkeep. For some this may be a Christian duty, but I vehemently object to having such an expense imposed on me by uninvited and unwelcome foreigners and their protectors.

Apart from financial considerations, I have certain convictions. After our towns and villages have been cleared of slums, I object to the appearance of African and Chinese ghettos in our midst. I strongly believe we should prevent and pre-empt the racial strife common in countries which have thoughtlessly opened the floodgates to uncontrolled immigration. I object to seeing the wage level of Maltese workers depressed by competition from illegal and unskilled foreigners. I fear the introduction of exotic diseases. Not least, I am opposed to the adulteration of Maltese society and the Maltese race.

Journalists

I have handled newspapers for many years and can tell the difference between news and a campaign led by journalists. A reporter becomes a newsmaker by selecting what to report on; but he should not try to become an opinion-maker, much less twist other people's words to serve his campaign. A journalist should not become a would-be policymaker because he lacks the first prerequisite to make policy, that of having been elected. Some examples can illustrate this point.

On August 20, The Times carried a feature with subsections titled: "Are we racists?" and "Are politicians fanning xenophobia?" In a section titled "Gonzi urges MPs to speak responsibly", it targeted Nationalist MPs Tony Abela and Franco Galea for echoing popular discontent on the matter and tried to drive a wedge between them and the Prime Minister. In In-Nazzjon (September 5), Mr Abela sheepishly complained that "it is not right for certain journalists of certain media to try and throw dark shadows on politicians who are doing their best. Who knows if they do not have hidden agendas?"

Replying to the same feature, the Curia's PRO wrote (The Times, August 23) that he had said: "Our already densely populated very small islands simply are unable to cope with all that it means and requires to cater for so many hundreds of immigrants arriving in such a short time". The feature had summarised this as "feelings of uncertainty in a densely populated island".

On August 30, The Times carried a report over half the back page titled: "Visit of UK immigration minister: Stop complaining and help find a solution, Malta told". It started: "The UK minister for immigration has urged the Maltese to make a concerted effort to find a solution to the problem of illegal immigration instead of just being critical". This information was based on his statement: "those who are good at criticising would do better to come on board and seek a solution".

This report led to two letters (The Times, September 1). The UK minister wrote: "I want to make clear that this comment was not directed at Malta itself". The communications co-ordinator of the Maltese Justice and Home Affairs Ministry, describing the report as misleading, said the UK minister's remarks "were to the effect that it is easy for NGOs

and international organisations to criticise governments, but it is much harder to find solutions on immigration matters".

NGOs

Citizens are right to form associations which are independent of the government. They add expertise and enthusiasm to public life and avoid the monopolisation by the government of information and initiatives. However, NGOs should not dictate policy. Sometimes they are led by one person trying to project his personality or interests. No NGO can pretend to rival in authority a government elected by the whole nation.

Put differently, it is a very weak government that lets its policies be dictated by unrepresentative NGOs. The latter often depend on the number of decibels and gestures they emit. They use the media knowing that newsmakers can turn non-events into news, non-issues into national crises, and ordinary men into national leaders. But when their bluff is called they are quick to climb down.

On August 21, *It-Torca* carried a detailed report on prostitution by some illegal but enterprising immigrants. It added: "On contacting Mgr Philip Calleja of the Emigrants' Commission about black prostitutes in Hal Far, he replied that he did not know about them and asked us to contact the persons in charge of the centre". So there goes a monsignor, otherwise vocal and eloquent on the subject of immigrants, acting like Pontius Pilate.

It-Torca added that it had contacted "Claude Bajada, the representative of Amnesty International in Malta, who said he could not speak without the authorisation of Amnesty International". There goes the representative of an NGO, known for its courage to defy governments and officialdom, suddenly behaving like the humblest and most tongue-tied civil servant.

And let's not forget the Jesuits. On September 3, *The Times* carried a report "Illegal immigration - EU proposed standards far higher than Malta's". It quotes the Jesuit Refugee Service as saying that "the EU Commission's proposals confirmed that it was unjustified to deprive illegal immigrants of their liberty arbitrarily or indefinitely..." The report quotes the JRS seven times, to the extent that it sounds like a voice quoting its own echo.

Of course, the Jesuits could help Africans directly by going to the heart of Africa. Instead they vent their missionary zeal trying to impose on us, unwilling Maltese, the presence of unwanted immigrants and the taxes to maintain them.

Is it not time NGO representatives were asked how many people they represent, how they were elected, and on what they base their claims to attention and influence? We know they think they are cleverer and holier than us; but is that enough?

Politicians

A government or an Opposition can suffer or profit from natural disasters. A hurricane or an earthquake can wreck a government's popularity; but in 2002 German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder snatched an election victory from the jaws of defeat by reacting with dynamism to that summer's floods. For us illegal immigrants are a creeping natural disaster. Malta does not lie in the path of hurricanes or the fault line of seismic regions. It lies on the path of millions of destitute Africans wishing to travel to prosperity in the north.

So far the government has reacted with indecision or worse. True, it has been and is being double-crossed by Libya and Italy. It has been harassed by an alliance of Christians, journalists and NGOs. But its reaction has disappointed the vast majority of Maltese. Opposition Leader Alfred Sant has better grasped the public mood by affirming that the national interest should prevail over other considerations. No doubt he is being opportunistic, as he was in 1996 when he focussed on just two issues - VAT

and hunting - to swing enough voters and win the election. But at least he is showing he understands the message of opinion surveys.

When Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, a former president of Catholic Action, speaks sanctimoniously about Popes and Christian values, he shows that he has not recently been to the squares of Birzebbuga and Safi, and has not had a down-to-earth discussion with the common folk of those villages. Like others in power, he is protected by isolators and shock absorbers which prevent him from feeling the strength of the groundswell of public opinion against illegal immigrants. More of this attitude will keep thousands of Nationalist voters at home in the elections of 2008, or throw them in the arms of some firebrand, and push thousands of floating voters in the wrong direction. Then we can all pray for a change of government.

Author: Fr Joseph Cassar

Date: 16/10/2005

Irregular immigration: opportunities beyond the dilemma

It may disappoint "A Special Correspondent" (The Sunday Times, October 9) who has "handled newspapers for many years and can tell the difference between news and a campaign led by journalists" to find that his presumed analysis in the article "No to illegal immigrants" is in many ways incorrect, simply prejudiced or downright deceptive. Writing behind the mask of anonymity, your correspondent seeks to boost the weight of his arguments by fragmenting in three groups opinions he dislikes.

In the tirade against "Christians", "A Special Correspondent" writes that "those who feel strongly about their Christian duties" are free to go out at sea to bring in immigrants and lodge them in their homes." Surely, a careful reading of what the correspondents being derided have voiced in their letters reveals human rights as their ultimate concern. Search and rescue is an obligation that Malta has undertaken as part of international agreements, irrespective of whether the rescuers are Christians or not, and always in fulfilment of the internationally agreed and binding principle to rescue people in distress unselectively.

The writer takes Christians to task for - as he sees it - "(imposing) the dictates of their conscience on us all". One paragraph later, some of the arguments with which the correspondent seeks to manipulate readers against the presence of "uninvited and unwelcome foreigners" turn out to be little different than subjective and based on intolerance or fear.

Freed from the influence of displaced anger against Christians, journalists and politicians, "A Special Correspondent" may consider that the wage level of Maltese workers may be depressed chiefly by factors in the globalised economy that make Malta's products and services scarcely competitive on the international scene.

"Exotic diseases" - only in rare cases immediately contagious - may also be borne by Maltese nationals returning from far-flung destinations to which they have every right to travel. The existence of a pure and homogenous Maltese race is more myth than fact, with little or no scientific and anthropological basis. Do I hear your "Special Correspondent" argue that his fear or fantasy now qualify as the norm to be followed?

The anonymous correspondent asks why "taxpayers' money (should) be spent on unwanted and illegal immigrants". Haven't the salaries that would be paid in any case to the armed forces been included in the sums quoted, higher or lower?

For the sake of consistency, if he "vehemently object(s)" to having such expenses (the equivalent of one or two mobile-phone top-up cards a year in his estimate) deducted from his pocket, why hasn't a single letter of protest, signed or unsigned, appeared anywhere in the press when Malta has just been the otherwise undeserving beneficiary

of €17 million in the form of a brand-new patrol boat donated by Italy, road upgrading projects to the tune of €16 million again donated by Italy, €1 million received from Norway, and so forth...? Perhaps it is because these freely received gifts which benefit all residents in Malta and Gozo directly or indirectly go by the name of 'financial protocols' or similar terminology, to the extent that we may not even realise that these are funds (money, that is) that Malta has received gratis.

Would we not be left with the 'ghettoes'? Ghettoes are often the by-product of economic or social exclusion and partly result from the fear of being harmed. Where well-to-do expatriates do not mingle with the local population, they form clubs. Nobody in Malta would need to live in fear or segregation if our civil and religious leaders were to call a national convention whereby representatives of all interested parties, including minorities, would bind themselves to work for peace and the common good.

When trying to discredit NGOs, the anonymous writer suggests that "Jesuits could help Africans directly by going to the heart of Africa". It is precisely because we are already there - 1,353 of us in 35 countries on the African continent and Madagascar, across the board from AIDS clinics, to slum parishes, refugee camps and universities - that we continue to speak and write, raise awareness and funds, and accept groups of young people for voluntary work placements in Africa. Of the Maltese Jesuits working in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya, one had been kidnapped years back and made to march 1,500 km in the bush before being released. He still serves in Africa.

Finally, "Special Correspondent" berates the Prime Minister for bringing his Christian values to bear on a humanitarian approach he has advocated in dealing with a situation that is demanding on the country's human, financial and logistical resources. The correspondent may well hold his view but, on an equal footing, I am free to congratulate Dr Gonzi for upholding moral values shared not only by Christians but by world religions as well as by those who profess no belief yet seek an equitable and just distribution of the world's resources and the respect for human rights.

Although the geophysical reality of Malta as an island will not change unless - God protect us - a natural disaster would wipe us all out to sea and have us begging the first patch of dry mainland north or south to take us ashore, the geopolitical concept of Malta as an island is out of date. Malta has moved on. By a democratic expression of the will of the people, Malta belongs to a broader community of countries from which we derive a number of challenging obligations as well as uncounted benefits.

Our islands' location put us in a most favourable position to use our skills in maritime trade and financial services as well as to gain from tourism. Concurrently, we experience some of the drama of a mass migration movement on an unprecedented scale that is not set to abate anywhere in the near future unless the global issues of dehumanising poverty, climate change and peace, among others, are taken seriously by world leaders and their electors.

Emerging from an insular mentality into the global outlook, our country cannot miss the boat. The way forward is for Malta to put its energy into promoting peace, the equitable distribution of wealth and resources, as well as the upholding of human rights, joining in this effort all those of good will of any or of no religious affiliation.

Author: Michael Zammit

Date: 10/11/2005

Immigration, xenophobia and democratic debate

The management of irregular immigration and of popular reaction to it has become an important new area of policy-making in Malta. The government and the opposition - as

well as other sources of social responsibility and leadership - are now obliged to adopt and explain their policy on this set of issues.

While they have the democratic opportunity to compete for public support for their alternative approaches, they also have the democratic duty to ensure that their policies and pronouncements conform to the values that underpin our Constitution and our society. They must be on their guard against the temptation of some to seek electoral advantage through cheap populism.

Those who would wish away the phenomenon of migration defy the tides of history and Malta's place in it. Malta, like the rest of Europe, evolved out of diversity, enriched by waves of immigration over the last millennia, contributing in turn to the diversity of distant lands. The signs of the current phase appeared here a few decades ago, when Malta started to receive and absorb economic migrants from the Balkans and Eastern Europe. What has changed now is that the people knocking on our door look different. Most of them are black.

Our popular culture does not have much experience in accommodating different colours and creeds and our vague historical traditions in this respect are negative. We all know about Ottoman invasions and resistance to them. We pay less attention to the slavery that the Knights carried on here. In general, black is not perceived to be beautiful, while fair is. To those who do not know better, the newcomers stepping off their boats can seem scary. No doubt, the boat people, too, are scared.

It is indeed futile to hope that these human tides will cease to flow, that we can free the movement of capital, goods and services in a global economy while staunching the flow of people, that we can recover a mythical past of Christian peace and harmony that never existed. We must be realistic. We have no choice but to manage the present we have and the future that is likely.

Europe is already ethnically and culturally diverse and will become more so as long as people to the east and south view it as an attractive alternative to poverty and oppression at home. What is more, it is a greying continent, which will need a new influx of active workers and taxpayers if its economic growth and social security are to thrive. Malta has just joined this Europe, not any other. It is too late now to turn our backs on it and retreat into our traditional insularity.

Clearly, irregular immigration is a new test for Malta's political imagination. By all means, let us seek cooperation and support from our partners in the European Union, from Libya and from international organisations. Let us add our political and diplomatic presence to the fight against human trafficking. Results from these efforts are starting to appear. But, in the end, the buck - like the boats - stops with us. The phenomenon will not go away. We must address it systematically, not by ad hoc reactions.

In addition to a coherent and principled policy regarding the way Malta receives and deals with irregular immigrants, we must recognise this new claim on our public resources, human and financial. Investment is needed in military search-and-rescue capacities; humane accommodation, trained guards and carers, effective and just processes for review of asylum claims and arrangements for social integration or repatriation, as the case may be.

The police and the army should not be charged with tasks for which they are not equipped. On the other hand, our law-enforcement services must be on the look-out for hate crimes and other incidents of violence and tension involving immigrants, whether as victims or as perpetrators. Any such outbreaks must be investigated expeditiously and transparently, so as to prevent the spread of rumours and resentment. (The lengthy investigation into January's incidents at Safi, on which we still remain in the dark, is not

the model to be followed in this respect. One hopes that the full report will be published before the anniversary of the incidents.)

Beyond these immediate needs, it is important to educate children and adults - at school, from the pulpit and through the media - about the motivations for migration, the richness of human diversity and the centrality of respect for human dignity as a defining mark of any civilised society. Racism and xenophobia must be recognised as present social evils in our midst and fought by eliminating the ignorance in which they breed.

Finally, looking ahead at the policy level, the crisis of irregular immigration and the fears it has provoked about competition for jobs should stimulate clear thinking about Malta's demography and its future labour requirements. As is the case with the broader Union, a maturing Maltese economy, with an aging population, will need to import labour in specific fields. We should not shy away from considering this prospect.

The issues generated by irregular immigration are profound. They tug at the head, the heart and the gut, challenging our personal professions of morality. They also provide rich material for democratic debate, which may well be passionate but should be rational and, above all, principled. There should be no room in this debate for those whose political programmes would undermine democracy itself, nor for those who spread xenophobic lies and racist pseudo-science. Anonymous opinions should not be dignified with a public platform. The media have a vital responsibility to promote and inform this debate. In doing so, they must not cease to defend the democratic rules and freedoms that allow them to exist.

Nurturing modern societies that are both open and diverse is one of the challenges now faced by Europeans in positions of power and responsibility, in Malta as elsewhere. Bandyng about slogans without solutions does not help them rise to this challenge. Rather, it can play into the hands of the pseudo-Christian, neo-fascist movements that are growing in strength and awakening echoes of the barbarism that nearly destroyed European values in the 20th century.

Author: Henry Frendo

Date: 29/01/2006

Malta's changing immigration and asylum discourse

In an international symposium on migration, asylum and security, convened at The Victoria, Sliema, by Henry Frendo on December 9-10, 2005, speakers discussed and compared border challenges in an enlarged EU, including Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy (Lampedusa), Spain (Ceuta and Melilla), Cyprus and Malta. This is an adapted version of Professor Frendo's paper entitled "Changing Discourse and Increasing Tension: An Analytical Profile of Caseloads, Procedures and Problems in Malta".

Shortly before it joined the European Union in May 2004, Malta enacted a Refugee Act which came into effect in December 2001, when the newly-appointed Refugee Commissioner and chairman of the Refugee Appeals Board took their oaths of office.

Although Malta had been a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, it was not until 2001 that it committed itself to the full implementation of the New York Protocol of 1967, waiving the earlier Europe-bound confines of responsibility and extending them worldwide.

Until 2001, Malta had used the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - operating through the Emigrants Commission in Valletta as a partner - and had been, essentially, a transit station for asylum-seekers or refugees until permanent third country resettlement. Various groups of refugees were helped in this way - from Ugandan Asians after their expulsion by Idi Amin in 1972 to Iraqi Christians following

the Gulf War in 1991, while one or two shiploads of Albanians were later fed, clothed and waved away.

The responsibilities assumed in 2001 respected Malta's sovereignty as well as, presumably, EU expectations. However, apart from being by far the smallest and the most densely populated EU country, it was also, as indeed it had been for centuries, a frontier island state between Europe and Africa.

Historically and culturally self-defined as a legendary onetime bulwark of European Christendom, it was inhabited by an insular ethnically mixed population which, nevertheless, had so far seen and felt itself to be more or less homogeneous in a Christian, Western, European and Mediterranean context.

Whereas until 2001, the number of asylum-seekers in Malta, particularly by boat, was negligible - fewer than 60 that year - it suddenly swarmed up to several hundred annually in what appears to be a steady, continuing flow. Malta was faced by this onrush at the same time that it felt itself compelled to comply with EU directives, regulations and indeed treaties, such as the outrageous Dublin Convention which penalises frontier states, and normative albeit non-mandatory state-of-the art recommendations by UNHCR.

The army started going out on search and rescue missions and trying to cope with makeshift reception or detention centres, while the police force seemed overwhelmed, even in taking action against illegal immigrants turned asylum-seekers who had been rejected at all levels of the adjudication process as manifestly unfounded, from Turks to Nigerians. The press and public trust

The public discourse began to change. A recent survey of newspaper reporting on this topic between 2002 and 2005 (in my journalism and migration class) found that whereas, in 2002, opinion, including any letters to the editor, had tended to be commiserating, even welcoming, on the basis of humanitarian concern and Christian charity, by 2005 not only had the amount of newspaper comment soared greatly, but the balance of opinion had changed and intensified in an opposite direction.

Another growing aspect of this discourse, most evident from content analyses of letters to the editor, has been increasing criticism by readers of what is perceived to be partial editorial or newspaper reporting by a small number of reporters or columnists, which ironically could be inflaming sections of public opinion further about the whole issue, an outcome surely contrary to that intended.

In this process, terms such as "racism" and now "patriotism" started being used loosely, not always caring to balance out freedom and security considerations. Costs, jobs and fears relating to lifestyle, even public health and safety, entered the informal debate, sometimes in a publicly subdued disposition which did not reflect the depth of in-group feeling (for example some disturbing accounts by teenage Maltese girls, including university students).

With a missionary zeal linked understandably and internationally to human rights considerations, on the sublime principle of neighbourly love, some members of Catholic religious orders - Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans - emerged as strident champions of the rights of asylum-seekers, the vast majority of whom were from sub-Saharan Africa.

To an apparently increasing number of others, this approach seemed naïve and self-deceptive, their slogan being that charity begins at home; the Maltese too had acquired rights, customs and laws, in their own country.

Another feature of the discourse became detention policy, and conditions in the reception or open centres, which were under considerable pressure, as were the armed forces and the police corps, partly deviated from their ordinary duties. Tensions, sometimes violent ones, have been simmering, often hidden from public knowledge,

until an unfortunate flare-up such as that at Safi Barracks occurred, about which a judicial inquiry has finally reported.

There was a tendency to call every illegal or irregular immigrant a refugee, without really understanding who or what a bona fide refugee was under the Convention. There was also the assumption, still prevalent, that all these asylum-seekers were escaping to Europe from their own homelands because of persecution or misery, when in fact very few came to Malta directly from their country of origin, if one leaves out those who come by air from Istanbul, Cairo, etc., and stay on with expired visas.

In the meantime, thousands of dollars were being dished out to traffickers for potentially perilous journeys from shore to shore, if not also for securing organised north-bound land routes across the African continent.

Analysis of appellant statistics

In a general way, during the past five years, it can be seen that as many as 1,235 persons appealed against decisions by the Refugee Commissioner. The analytical statistical overview used here is based on appellate cases adjudicated between February and November of 2005 (295 cases). Of these most hailed from Somalia (20%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (12%), the Ivory Coast (11%), Sudan (10%), Palestine (8%) and Turkey (7%).

Most of these arrivals, arriving mainly by sea, said they had departed from Libya (242 out of 295 cases, i.e. 81%). Another less important but still significant country of departure by sea has been Turkey (3%). As many as 12% had arrived by air, hence in their case almost invariably with passports and visas.

Nearly half of these arrivals had been staying in a third country, such as Libya, for over one year; 56% had been there for up to one year, 22% for up to two years, 10% for up to five years, and as many as 12% for more than five years, in some cases for very much longer (such as Palestinians living and working in Libya).

Of those who had been living and working in Libya for over five years, 49% claimed to be from Palestine, 13% from Iraq, 11% each from Somalia and Sudan, and 4% each from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Liberia and Nigeria.

Of the total of appellants during the period surveyed, 84% had entered Malta illegally, mainly by sea from Libya, while 16% had entered the country legally, almost invariably through Malta International Airport.

The majority of those entering Malta and then claiming asylum were under 30 years old - there was only one minor (under 16). A further 33% were aged up to 40, while 7% were over 40, and 4% were teenagers, up to 20 years old.

I have also tried to sort out their educational or professional backgrounds, which could be indicative of their prospects in various spheres (employment, integration, or otherwise, etc). The largest percentage (35%) never went to school and were illiterate.

Those who had an elementary schooling of some kind totalled 33%, whereas 22% had attended some level of secondary school. Those going to high school or college or university amounted in all to 10%. As rightly noted during our discussion by a UNHCR colleague, however, several, although illiterate, may possess skills, such as, primarily, in farming (herding, raising, etc). This is true, although Malta might not offer them much pasture.

In fact, from an analytical statistical breakdown it transpires that a relatively high percentage, 22%, claimed they had never had a job. Of the remainder, 27% had been exposed to some business or trade, 16% to agriculture, 15% to odd jobs, 9% to construction, 3% to catering and another 3% to factory work, while another 3% had some professional qualification. A handful were students; one said he was a footballer.

My final query concerned religion, which obviously can have various social and cultural implications. Of our caseload, the vast majority (67%) were Muslims; 13% were Catholics, 6% Protestants, 4% Orthodox, 3% Hindus, and other mainly Christian denominations and sects.

The bulk have been from the former Italian colonies in East Africa - Eritrea and Somalia - meaning in most cases to proceed to Italy. Others came from countries formerly occupied by other European powers such as France, Belgium and Britain. The statistical breakdowns show peculiar traits, for example, of those who have been staying longest in Libya, most claim to be of Palestinian origin.

Legal aid requests

In coping with this altogether unprecedented influx, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Board, which I chaired since its inception, have worked hard with the minimum of resources to adjudicate applications.

As I noted during the national conference on immigration held at the InterContinental Hotel in February 2005, the Refugee Appeals Board had decided over 70% of cases it could adjudicate, in spite of not having a single full-time employee to assist it. Mainly as a result of the recruitment, after four years, of a full-time secretary to the board, the percentage of cases decided of those which the board could adjudicate currently stands at over 95%. This means that, in spite of misinformed allegations to the contrary, no backlog really exists so far as the board is concerned.

At the time of writing this (January 5) there are no more than 54 pending cases in all which may be adjudicated. Such cases before the board (since March assisted by a second chamber) are mostly very recent ones going back to a few weeks or months at most.

The stumbling block has always been legal aid provision, to which appellants are now entitled under Maltese law, free of charge, at the appeal stage; but this process has improved of late. It is therefore misguided to allege that the board as such has a backlog, or that additional measures should be taken or pretexts resorted to in order to reduce this.

Moreover, as asylum-seekers are being let out of detention and moved to open centres, mainly because of delays caused by the failure of the legal aid system or delaying stratagems by themselves or on their behalf by others, it frequently happens that the Refugee Appeals Board cannot communicate with its appellants because these have moved address or disappeared without informing the authorities.

Equally misguided is the idea that Malta has a problem with refugees. Not so - bona fide refugees, who are relatively few, can be assets to any society, and I personally would be sorry if these start being picked by other countries for resettlement overseas.

During 2005 immigrants whose claim for refugee status had been rejected but who, out of respect for current UNHCR recommendations, had been granted temporary humanitarian status in Malta, started appealing against these decisions. They apparently were being advised to request full refugee status as well, and moreover to request that the state provide them with free legal aid in their appeal submissions, as they were entitled to at law.

This means that appeals would not be decided until such legally assisted submissions could be made, while appellants would continue to benefit from their humanitarian status entitlements (open centres, work permits, etc). About 17% of appellants had already been granted such status by the Commissioner's office, while they were duly informed as to why they did not qualify for refugee status.

For the rest, however, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Board have been at the forefront of dealing with applications and ensuring that

these receive due process, even in the most manifestly unfounded cases or still worse. In January 2005, over 90% of those who applied were granted some form of protection by the Refugee Commissioner's Office while currently the average stands at some 65%, almost certainly the highest in the world. For instance, in Cyprus, where circumstances admittedly are different, the quoted rate has been 3%, including temporary humanitarian cases.

As our Cyprus colleague explained, there are political, circumstantial and geographical reasons why asylum-seeking there differs so much from that here, where there is no land frontier, much less an artificially divided one. During the migration, asylum and security conference our Refugee Commissioner showed that, so far as refugee status figures and percentages are concerned, Malta's compare more or less with those of European states.

The problem arises with temporary humanitarian status, given that many of those landing undocumented on Maltese shores claim the nationality of a country where, according to the UNHCR, there is instability and risk. Such countries include Somalia and, since 2004, Eritrea. Several hundred applicants from such countries have been and continue being granted temporary humanitarian status in Malta.

More recently, as I noted earlier, and however manifestly unfounded their cases may be on Convention grounds, a good percentage of them have even started to appeal against that recommendation, in the hope that they might benefit from refugee status and not simply a temporary humanitarian one in its absence.

In this process non-refugees benefiting from a renewable temporary humanitarian status also request the state's free legal aid to make their appeal submissions, as they are indeed entitled to do by the Refugee Act 2000. Such appeals are frequently facilitated by means of initialled fill-in-the-blank printouts made available to them, and submitted on their behalf, by the Jesuit Refugee Service.

In my assessment, Maltese adjudicating bodies at first and second instance, have acted competently and responsibly - and at the appellate stage always unanimously, I can say, after the necessary collegial deliberations had been exhausted; that in spite of institutional limitations, tokenism and sometimes unfair and uninformed criticism in the media or elsewhere.

A predominant factor in discourse about this topic has been what the EU should be doing to help out. Ministries have attempted various initiatives, although none so far have borne much fruit. A few countries have accepted to take some bona fide refugees, but these are not Malta's problem at all; on the contrary, these could be very welcome assets to it.

There is a European Refugee Fund, but this problem could only be made worse by simply throwing money at it to make residential conditions as spacious, as well-equipped and as attractive as possible, without devising long-term solutions. In small islands like Malta, integration has its limits. Joint repatriations could alleviate costs, but reducing the detention period could be problematic before legal aid provision is further improved and in any emergency, particularly as for the most part such persons are not even documented and sometimes unruly. Once again, clearly, resources and delivery deserve attention.

It is pathetic to continue talking about solidarity in the absence of burden-sharing, while at the same time it is wishful thinking to assume that self-inflicted problems in refugee-producing countries, which may be potentially wealthy, will go away without greater effort by all concerned, including the European Union.

Whether we like it or not, unless this problem is addressed effectively and realistically, humanely but pragmatically, there is every likelihood that it will lead to a potentially

decisive political spill over at the national level, possibly with implications for social cohesion.

It is arguably the most difficult and delicate problem now facing Malta.

Author: Special Correspondent

Date: 19/03/2006

The law and illegal immigrants

It does not take great wisdom to read the writing on the wall. If current trends continue, come the warm season, hundreds of illegal immigrants will break out of the detention centres a few times a week. They will walk to our international airport, accompanied by disarmed members of the armed forces holding their hands behind their backs.

As tourists emerge from the airport, they will see crowds of Africans shouting "We want freedom". That way hundreds of thousands of Maltese liri, spent advertising Malta as a tourist destination, will go up in smoke.

At the same time, other unarmed members of the armed forces will be escorting boatloads of new immigrants into one of the creeks around the island and taking them to the detention centres. There they will organise more breakouts, protest marches and other news events for the ever-ready Maltese media.

At this rate the process will be endless. After all, there are a few million Sub-Saharan Africans in Libya waiting to set sail for Europe.

One conclusion of the report by Judge Franco Depasquale on the illegal immigrants' protest of January 2005 (summarised in The Sunday Times, January 15, 22 and 29) was that the inmates of the detention centres are being advised and guided, and in some cases perhaps even incited, by outside persons, both Maltese and foreign.

In addition, UNHCR, a specialised agency of the United Nations of which Malta is a member state, is failing in its duty of helping to repatriate illegal immigrants not qualifying for refugee or humanitarian status, or at least to find them a country where they are welcome. Instead, it is putting pressure on the Maltese authorities to open up the centres, thus making Malta even more attractive to prospective illegal immigrants.

The recent spate of mass escapes of illegal immigrants from centres of detention, airily described by the media as demonstrations for freedom, should be a matter of concern to Government, Opposition and the Maltese public at large. After a mass breakout of over 100 immigrants from Safi and Hal Far last month, the more recent "walkabout" by some 80 detainees to the airport and back, together with repeated breakouts and escapes by smaller bands of men, expose our amateurish approach. Unfortunately, this attitude now seems to have pervaded even the army and the police.

The "authorities" - a word used as a protective label when referring to the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister - are trying to put a brave face on this repeated mass defiance of Maltese law. The media are helping them by emphasising that these incidents were all the time "under control" and that eventually all immigrants were shepherd back to the compounds. Every time they add semi-apologetically that no one was hurt, as if this were a condition for maintaining law and order.

Maltese law

According to Maltese law, any escape from a place of detention, especially when accompanied by the breaking of doors, gates, fences and so on, is a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment from two to four years (sections 150, 151 and 160 of the Criminal Code). Individual escapees have been condemned for such offences and their conviction in the Magistrates Courts upheld by the Court of Appeal (See most recently The Police vs Mohammed Tensi, Appeal No. 257/05, January 19).

Yet viewers of the national TV station were astonished to hear Lt Col. Brian Gatt, the new head of the detention centres, saying recently that no action was contemplated against the detainees who broke out of the centres as they were only illegal immigrants. Is this official Government policy or just an aberration of Lt Col. Gatt? Do the authorities mean that one person will be judged and sent to prison for breaking the law, but the breach of the same law by an organised group of persons will be condoned? If that is so, it would make more sense for the authorities to amend the law and exempt illegal immigrants from the provisions of the Criminal Code.

The more recent pronouncements of the head of the Armed Forces (The Times, March 7,) were even more alarming. Brigadier Carmel Vassallo admitted that, at the previous day's escape, the few soldiers present could do nothing except accompany the escapees on their "walkabout". But surely if the guards were outnumbered, the other one thousand or so soldiers stationed in Safi, Hal Far and Luqa Barracks could have sprung into action within minutes to halt the walkabout and maintain law and order. What else are they paid for? Can one imagine a situation where all convicts at Corradino decided to break out and were allowed to stage a demonstration in front of the Auberge de Castille?

Brigadier Vassallo went one better in an interview with Malta Today (March 5). He was quoted as saying: "Yesterday they stopped at Luqa. Today, tomorrow, whenever, a group can decide to keep marching on to Valletta. What will we do then when they reach City Gate? Castille? The Palace?"

The obvious answer is that 1,000 members of the armed forces should never allow a group of illegal immigrants to come anywhere near Valletta or the airport or any other sensitive place on the island, if only they are allowed to do their duty and not ordered to keep their hands behind their backs.

A message?

But then Brigadier Vassallo may be trying to send a message. Maybe there is more than meets the eye in the attitude of the armed forces and the police. The Depasquale report informed us that they are often the subject of insults and aggressive behaviour by illegal immigrants, who should be more grateful. Now we discover they run more serious risks. In reply to a parliamentary question by Labour MP Joe Debono Grech (March 7, PQ 17,371), the Prime Minister revealed that "a small number" of soldiers working with illegal immigrants were found to be "strongly positive, that is, they had in some way contracted the microbe of TB mute".

The small number turns out to be 32 out of 680 or about five per cent. TB was eradicated from Malta in the 1950s. Should we release illegal immigrants on the unsuspecting Maltese population at the risk that five per cent of those coming in contact with them ("a small number"!) would get infected? Suppose the small number included you and me and our children?

The media have not been tender with the forces of law and order. After the incidents of January 2005, they savaged the armed forces, who tried to restore order, without criticising the illegal immigrants who were in breach of the law. Indeed, the media vilified Judge Depasquale for writing his report (which in some cases they had not read) without uttering a word of condemnation of the illegal immigrants and their mentors.

The authorities did not act wisely either in subjecting the armed forces to the harrowing experience of a board of enquiry after the incidents of January 2005.

Army personnel may not be very keen now to be put under investigation again for showing determination in controlling detainees. Maybe that is why they put their hands behind their backs and let things take their course.

Will they do so in the near future if a group of illegal but well-advised immigrants targets our most vulnerable spot, that is, the tourist industry? Let us make no mistake about these protests, starting with the one of January 2005. They do not just happen; they are planned, well planned and follow a pattern.

Is it not time the authorities made everybody bear his share of responsibility in the matter? For political reasons, Libya has been allowing large numbers of Sub-Saharan Africans onto its territory, knowing their ultimate destination is Europe. It has also allowed criminal organisations of traffickers in human beings to flourish in the country. Italy has made it a habit of directing the Maltese armed forces towards seacraft in distress within Malta's search and rescue area. In some cases these craft were not in distress and/or not in Malta's area.

In any case, search and rescue obligations apply to craft which are in distress for bona fide reasons. It is doubtful whether a legal obligation arises in the case of craft which have knowingly put themselves in a situation of 'distress' and broke a number of laws, national and international, in so doing.

The rest is internal politics, which should obey the national interest as seen by the thinking, tax-paying and voting public - that is, all of us. Does public opinion support the policies towards illegal immigrants that the authorities have followed in the past three or four years?

Author: Special Correspondent

Date: 23/04/2006

Illegal immigrants, criminals and crusaders

According to a public opinion survey carried out for The Sunday Times by Professor Mario Vassallo, only 2.3% of Maltese agreed that everybody should have the right to settle in Malta. Only 20% favoured granting asylum to foreigners escaping from war, political persecution or hunger. While 95% could accept other Europeans as neighbours, 90% were unwilling to accept Africans; 95% were unwilling to accept Arabs (The Sunday Times, August 14, 2005).

That is as broad a consensus as you can get, but it falls short of unanimity. At one end of the spectrum, the pro-immigrant lobby advances religious or political reasons to favour the settlement in Malta of nationals of North and sub-Saharan African states and their integration into Maltese society. This lobby probably numbers a few hundred, but outnumbers those at the other end of the spectrum, who seem ready to resort to illegal and criminal acts to defend the opposite viewpoint.

One can only condemn criminals, who are beyond the pale of reason; but one can argue with crusaders in the hope of persuading them that their method can be a nuisance and could even be counter-productive.

As militants, the defenders of illegal immigrants try to make their voice sound louder than it is and to convert others to their cause.

They work with like-minded foreign organisations, which they subsequently call as witnesses to the rightness of their cause. The system functions like several interconnected loudspeakers, raising the volume of their viewpoint above its real strength.

It can be easily deciphered and I shall describe some of its elements.

UNHCR

The United Nations' Refugees agency has done sterling work for more than 50 years but in recent years, as it expanded, its standard of professionalism has fallen. Examples abound. In February 2005, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers was forced to resign.

The London Times reported that he had been guilty of "a pattern of sexual harassment" and that "his reputation as a flirt earned him the nickname of 'Lewd Rubbers' among UN staff" (February 21, 2005).

This information is absent from the UNHCR's Website (www.unhcr.org), which still carries a detailed report, mistakes and all, of the incidents in Malta the previous month.

Another example is the role of Michele Manca de Nissa, a Rome-based UNHCR official visiting Malta during the illegal immigrants' protest in January 2005. Judge Franco Depasquale's report quotes Charles Buttigieg, the Maltese government's Refugee Commissioner, as saying: "Dr de Nissa told them more than once that UNHCR did not agree with the detention system... UNHCR had been protesting for a long time with the Maltese authorities about the unacceptable conditions in which they were living. I was surprised that in such a delicate moment Dr de Nissa felt he could make such a speech".

A third example is the misuse of Maltese hospitality by another UNHCR official, Laura Boldrini, at a press conference in January this year, when she criticised the British press. As Malta is a free country, she could have criticised the Maltese press. She can criticise the British press in Britain. But criticising the British press in Malta is as unacceptable as criticising the Maltese press in London. It is a pity that, in their delicate functions, UNHCR officials should be so gaffe-prone.

In the meantime, UNHCR has not repatriated a single illegal immigrant not qualifying for refugee or humanitarian status in Malta. Instead, it has evaded its duty by pressuring Maltese authorities to open up the detention centres and accept illegal immigration, in defiance of the opinion of the majority of Maltese. With the pretext of an 'awareness campaign', its representatives overstep their attributes and, with others, play the role of loudspeakers.

The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights (sorry, but they are all called Commissioner!) has no legal powers. He visits countries and writes reports. He does not cost his recommendations, let alone pay for them, and so he can afford to be magnanimous. Unlike an Opposition party, he cannot be challenged to say which taxes he would raise to pay for his generous proposals. The Commissioner may appear impartial, but can lean whichever way he chooses.

In his first report on Malta (February 2004), he coyly said he met representatives of civil society and NGOs. He gave the game away in footnote 4 by referring to "the study realised in July 2003 by the Maltese Jesuit Refugee Service".

The latter returned the compliment. In its publication "Reception of asylum seekers in Malta" (February 2005), it quotes with approval "a number of reports, published by both local and international organisations". Among them it cites the report by the Council of Europe Commissioner, its own reports, and one of a press conference by UNHCR.

Coincidentally or not, two re-ports were published on the same day (December 22, 2005) criticising the Depasquale report on the January 2005 incidents. The first, by Amnesty International, refers to UNHCR. The second, jointly by the Emigrants' Commission and the Jesuit Refugee Service, again quotes with approval the report by the Council of Europe Commissioner and UNHCR. It says that "various credible human rights organisations and international institutions on more than one occasion" agreed with Maltese NGOs. As Maltese NGOs had made an input to the reports of the international institutions, this is not surprising at all.

The paper also calls for more resources to be "invested" in the care of illegal immigrants. My dictionary defines 'invest' as "spend money in the expectation of earning a profit". What profit do the Maltese expect from money spent on illegal immigrants?

On March 29, the Council of Europe Commissioner published a follow-up report after a two-day visit by two staff members. Some journalists gave it an enthusiastic copy-and-paste welcome. Others obsequiously called it an "international report". The Ombudsman rubbished it. The footnotes to the report say the visitors met "NGOs and the UNHCR consultant in Malta", and refer to the Jesuit Refugee Service and its publications at least four times. At this rate, they can go on citing and complimenting each other for a long time.

Among his recommendations, the Council of Europe Commissioner calls for better psychiatric care for illegal immigrants. Does he know that the only way to make an illegal immigrant happy is to put him on a boat to Sicily or a plane to Germany?

The report abusively states that detention "resembles a prison sentence in all but name", even though an illegal immigrant (unlike a convicted foreigner) can leave Malta any moment, for example, if UNHCR sends him to his own or another country.

The Commissioner criticises Malta's Refugee Appeals Board without having met its members. The report makes recommendations for new laws, better facilities, more social workers, free legal aid and so on.

It does not say what it would cost the Maltese taxpayer to implement these recommendations. Incidentally, it "welcomes the investment and progress made in relieving overcrowding". Investment, again; investment, indeed!

We learn that "many detainees complained of gastric conditions and spread of worm infections" and that four detainees suffered from tuberculosis. We already knew that 5% of soldiers working with illegal immigrants contracted the microbe TB mune. We had also read of a suspected case of meningitis (It-Torca, April 2).

The Council of Europe Commissioner's reports never mention Malta's national interest or Maltese public opinion; neither do the cited reports by UNHCR and the NGOs.

However, the follow-up report makes two oblique references to the odium the Government incurs by its preferential treatment of illegal immigrants. They jump the queue at the hospital emergency service. Their children are provided with free school uniforms and given pocket money.

The report hopes "that the tensions here and there over what is sometimes perceived as preferential treatment for foreign children in the school system can be quickly defused so as to avert any upsurge of racism and xenophobia". The Commissioner knows that preferential treatment leads to more, not less, racism. He hopes it will be defused, but that is not his problem.

All told, the Commissioner is a lucky man. Having penned (but not costed) his recommendations, his duty is done.

He does not have to square the budget circle, or raise taxes to pay for measures opposed by 80 or 90 per cent of the Maltese. He does not have to face the electorate.

He does not have to go knocking on people's doors every five years, begging for that crucial vote that can make a difference. Neither do officials of UNHCR and NGOs, of course, as they operate their system of interconnected loudspeakers. Government ministers do.

Author: Tonio Borg

Date: 29/07/2006

Tackling immigration: Heart or mind?

My experience of being responsible for immigration matters in the past years has confirmed, if ever there was any need, how emotional the problem relating to the influx of immigrants is. The fear of invasion by immigrants in a relatively homogenous, tightly knit community can never be underestimated. There is also the widespread and

obsessive tendency to pin down the cause of this phenomenon to someone or something ; ordinary well-intentioned people tell me, in pubs and in the streets: "Something has to be done about it"... though few suggest what that something is.

It is unfair to state, as some do, that the government has been idle in dealing with this problem. We have maintained, in spite of international and local pressure, an automatic detention policy vis-à-vis immigrants who enter Malta without authorisation, including asylum seekers. For such purpose the government has set up three new detention centres to support such policy.

Repatriations have proceeded in spite of the enormous difficulties encountered; suffice it to say that, had such repatriations not occurred, there would have been roughly about 7,000 boat people residing in Malta today, which is evidently not the case.

We have set up a refugee commissioner's office which has diligently processed thousands of asylum applications to fulfill our international obligations as UN and EU members.

We have opened two large open centres to provide shelter for internationally protected persons; which makes it sound so unfair each time some foreign observer, completely detached from the local scenario, visits our country to paternalistically preach to us about the rights of protected persons. The government appreciates the UNHCR's recent interest in Malta's plight but such interest should be more focused on Malta's needs rather than a never-ending lament about the existence of Malta's detention policy.

Nor is the EU the panacea of Malta's immigration problem; certainly belonging to the Union, in the view of the sudden influx of immigrants in the past four years, is better than languishing outside its doors and facing the problem alone. Michael Frendo and I have, through sheer perseverance and pressure, created a consciousness about the problem among member states. Malta features in all EU declarations and action plans; we are gradually moving towards proper and concrete assistance, including EU sea patrols; which in no way means we shall not keep calling a spade a spade whenever EU funds are not forthcoming as swiftly as one expects in view of the emergency situation.

Some of my political friends and others who may be styled adversaries ask me about the absence of any repatriation agreement, ad hoc or otherwise, in view of the fact that most immigrants arrive in Malta after departing from Libyan ports. This concern is legitimate, and the Foreign Ministry and my own have done whatever is humanly possible to persuade the Libyan authorities that Libya should shoulder, according to its need and capacities, part of the Maltese immigration problem.

I fully understand Libya's predicament; there are daily invasions across her 7,000-kilometre border; a huge chunk of its population is composed of foreigners unlawfully residing in Libya. It does not have the means to control such vast frontiers including a 2,000-kilometre coastal border.

The government has always insisted that a goodwill gesture should be made to a small and friendly country like Malta which has stood with Libya through thick and thin in difficult circumstances. That is why Malta, supported by Italy, was the EU member state which insisted most on the opening of a dialogue between the EU and our neighbouring country - reviving a relationship which had been dormant for years and leading to the drafting of a EU-Libya action plan.

That is why I have also invited my Italian and Libyan counterparts for a trilateral meeting in Malta to discuss the immigration problem in the central Mediterranean - beyond and apart from any dialogue within existing multilateral fora.

Where do we go from here? The government, I believe, should continue adopting the middle of the road approach; steer away from xenophobic and racist directions which have merely demagogic value - if "value" is the right word to use in this context. At the

same time the national interest should be protected and public opinion never ignored. Fears have to be allayed, but the government must continue defending our interests; Malta cannot act as the lone sentinel of Europe's borders.

The recent diplomatic solution brokered by the Maltese government, in spite of international pressure to land in Malta and lump here all immigrants aboard a Spanish trawler, is evident proof that the current administration will not give way an inch whenever it feels the national interest is at stake. In spite of misinformed articles which appeared in the Spanish and British press, that Malta was in breach of some international obligation in refusing entry to immigrants picked up outside our search and rescue zone, we stood firm in our stand and prevailed.

Malta looks forward to burden sharing in the form of free movement of internationally protected persons. It does not want to abdicate its responsibilities regarding its fair share of the burden; if a person lawfully residing in any EU state, even from outside the EU, has a right to move freely within the Union itself, such rights should be extended to internationally protected persons who are residing in Malta in virtue of the protection granted to them by Malta's Refugees Commissioner. The seeds for such right have been sown already and it is right and proper that, subject to normal controls and safeguards, like, say, a minimum period of residence, internationally-protected persons should be allowed without undue formalities to freely move within the European continent.

In the meantime, people in their right senses should stop organising demonstrations against illegal migration; as if anyone in Malta is in favour of illegal migration. If it was possible to solve the immigration issue by holding such public manifestations, I would be happy to organise one myself each day of the year. One should never exploit people's fears and phobia but should approach this problem with an open heart and a sensible mind.

Dr Borg is Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice and Home Affairs.

Author: Simon Busottil

Date: 21/11/2007

Immigrants may move on

If a new EU law goes through, immigrants who benefit from international protection will soon acquire the right to move on to other EU countries. This could help release some of the pressure caused by the influx of immigrants on countries such as Malta.

This proposal is currently being debated in the European Parliament. I was recently put in charge of this law by my group, the EPP-ED group, and I will be responsible for drawing up the group's position on it.

The proposal is the latest in a series of measures put forward by the European Commission over the past several months in order to help build a common and coherent European immigration policy which had hitherto been elusive.

One of the specific difficulties faced by our country is that, being an island, immigrants arriving here cannot freely move on to their destination - mainland Europe - neither physically nor legally.

This is different from the situation in other countries. Immigrants arriving in the Canary Islands, for instance, are soon moved to mainland Spain whereas those arriving in Lampedusa are, within days, taken to mainland Italy from where three in every four are said to move on to other countries further north.

Not so in Malta's case since immigrants arriving here are "stuck" for a number of years, unless they are repatriated to their country of origin or are resettled in another European country.

Repatriation to the country of origin is attempted but it is much easier said than done, especially in the case of countries of origin that suffer from civil strife and have no real governments.

Resettlement to other European countries would be of great benefit to us to help us reduce numbers. Unfortunately, however, the EU has no power to resettle immigrants from one EU country to another because EU countries have not agreed to this. As such, resettlement still depends on the will of individual countries to agree to accept immigrants arriving in other countries.

A few EU countries have already voluntarily accepted the resettlement of immigrants from Malta. But those that did, accepted very few. On its part, the US set an example by agreeing to take a more significant number and on a regular basis.

The absence of an EU law that allows immigrants arriving in Malta to move on to mainland Europe leads to great frustration among those who desperately want to rebuild their lives. Which is understandable. Equally, the situation stretches our country's resources to the limit because of difficulties in coping with the sheer numbers.

This brings me to this new proposal.

Currently EU law gives non-EU nationals who reside legally in an EU country a right to a long-term residence status after a period of five years. In other words, persons from non-EU countries who reside legally in an EU country for more than five years are eligible to a long-term residence permit. This entitles them to reside in that EU country on a permanent basis. This status is granted if certain conditions are fulfilled, such as adequate financial means and sickness insurance.

Crucially, long-term residents also acquire the right to move on and reside in other countries in the EU.

Now ironically, so far, immigrants were excluded from the benefit of these rights. And this is where this new legislative proposal comes in.

The European Commission is proposing that the right to long-term residence status, along with its resultant rights, should be extended to immigrants who benefit from international protection. In other words, to refugees and persons under humanitarian protection.

Beneficiaries of international protection would, as a result of this law, for the first time, be able to acquire a long-term residence status after a period of five years.

And with that, the right to move on to other EU countries.

Since many immigrants in Malta apply and obtain international protection this law would directly affect them in significant numbers. It would give them the right to move on to other EU countries, albeit after a period of five years.

This is precisely what they want. To go to mainland Europe. They will be able to do so with this new law.

This is the first time that immigrants in Malta would be given the legal possibility to move on to other EU countries. It is a small step. But it will help us.

The law is currently being debated in the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee where a first exchange of views has already taken place last month. It must also be approved in the Council of Ministers.

Author: Martin Scicluna

Date: 07/03/2009

Immigration: The facts

In line with every country in the developed world, Malta has been grappling with the challenges of mass migration for the last seven years. It has tackled this by a combination of measures. At the heart of these was the need to ensure that the

paramount national interest was safeguarded through enhanced border control measures and the orderly removal of immigrants ineligible for refugee or protected status.

We need to maintain a sense of perspective about the issue. Although there have been almost 12,500 arrivals in Malta since March 2002, over 7,000 have been repatriated or have otherwise left Malta. Of those that remain today, about 2,235 are in detention awaiting the processing of their case, or their repatriation. A total of 2,137 are in open accommodation centres and about a further 1,000 are living in the community. Very few, if any, of them want to stay in Malta. They land here inadvertently, having had as their destination of choice mainland Europe, not Malta. In the central Mediterranean this is mainly a route which takes them to Lampedusa, Sicily and thence onwards to Italy and northern Europe. In due course, many of the 5,000 or so here today will leave Malta either through our repatriation efforts or through the resettlement programmes the government has actively been pursuing, or simply by removing themselves. Yet, to read some articles, or the fevered comments by some politicians, you would suppose that Malta is facing a crisis.

We are undoubtedly facing new challenges and we are determined to find ways of rising to them in a practical way. The heavy influx of immigrants in the last few weeks has placed a considerable strain on our limited resources. But it would be wrong and irresponsible to paint the picture as a "state of emergency", "out of control", "a problem getting out of hand" or which "is not sustainable".

These phrases simply fan people's understandable concerns but are far from reality. We need to ensure that rhetoric for the sake of short-term political headlines on a subject of such sensitivity does not get in the way of the facts.

Malta is not being swamped by immigrants. As a proportion of our population, today's numbers amount to under 1.5 per cent. Our small size exacerbates the perception of the problem but when compared to other countries in Europe, the number is relatively small.

Can we do more to reduce the problem? One of the more simplistic proposals which surfaces from time to time is that we should just "send these immigrants back". "They should be towed back into international waters in the direction they came from," said one imaginative commentator, with disgraceful support in the blogs from people who are embarrassingly xenophobic and racist.

There seems to be a view, even among some politicians who should know better, that our international obligations under the UN Convention on Refugees and international search and rescue rules and others can be abrogated unilaterally. The proposal these people make is that we should simply tear up international treaties to which we are party and "send them back".

To pander to this approach is to advocate the law of the jungle. International law and international treaties, like our country's laws, are the basis of civilised and humane conduct between nations. The international rule of law is dependent on peoples and nations that have entered voluntarily into binding agreements adhering to them.

It would be fool-hardy and counter-productive to withdraw from fulfilling our international treaty obligations. Quite apart from the international opprobrium which Malta would attract, it is highly unlikely that it would achieve the practical objective of stemming the tide of immigrants.

These people flee their countries of origin - Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and other African countries - in pursuit of a better life. Migration is a worldwide phenomenon whose roots lie in poverty, economic deprivation, persecution and failed states. "Sending them back" - To where? How? What happens when they return as they surely will? - is not constructive or practical, nor in our wider national interest as a country

dependent for our economic growth on foreign direct investment through international trust and civilised behaviour.

Malta belongs to the European Union. Although our friends and allies in the Union have been slower to act on this issue than we wished, the Asylum and Immigration Pact, signed last autumn, offers a range of measures to alleviate some of Malta's problems. We must continue to work unrelentingly for the implementation of those treaty obligations. At the same time, we should acknowledge that there are no quick fixes to this global problem.

We, as a nation, have to confront the challenges together, with Christian charity for those who are worse off than ourselves and with a proper sense of balance, goodwill and perspective about a problem which, though serious, is well within our capacity to manage successfully.

The author is adviser to the government on illegal immigration.

Author: Henry Frendo

Date: 18/03/2009

Immigrants, statistics and policies

In his back page commentary Immigration: The Facts (March 7), Martin Scicluna said that of the almost 12,500 immigrant arrivals since March 2002, over 7,000 have been repatriated or have otherwise left Malta. He held that very few of them, if any, want to stay in Malta, adding further that: "In due course, many of the 5,000 or so here today will leave Malta either through our repatriation efforts or through the resettlement programmes the government has actively been pursuing or simply by removing themselves".

This is all very reassuring. But how correct is it? What are the breakdowns? Does the 7,000 "repatriation or departure" figure refer to asylum-seekers or does it include over 5,000 mainly North African boat people, such as Egyptians, who were sent back no sooner than they had landed? The figures for illegal immigrants/asylum-seekers in detention or in open centres are relatively easy to ascertain, the former more so than the latter; but what empirically substantiates the round figure of 1,000 deemed to be "living in the community"?

In a PBS programme on this subject aired on March 2 it was held that 12,274 illegal immigrants had landed in Malta on 346 boats, already a few hundred short of Mr Scicluna's figure.

A report entitled Fewer Migrants Repatriated (The Times, October 25, 2008) said that in six years the number of "illegals" who were not repatriated had reached 2,123, a substantial chunk of the 11,273 asylum seekers to reach Malta during that time (sic). "In the same period, 5,192 were deported but each year the figure has fallen..." These figures too are equivocal. How many of those "deported" had been asylum-seekers in the first place?

Another section of the press carried a five-column headline on September 3, 2008 saying 4,509 immigrants were living in Malta. This turned out to be simply an addition of those so far housed in open centres and those so far housed in closed centres. (Naturally, those non-EU arrivals coming on pre-arranged work contracts usually with visas are excluded.) A report from Brussels (The Sunday Times, December 16, 2007) had a five-column heading that read EU Patrols Intercept Over 3,000 Immigrants In Two Months. The figure given was 3,173; but what did that mean in practice? "Frontex sources would only say that the boat people are 'redirected' to the place they departed from."

If the proposed EU asylum agency will have researching such matters as one of its objectives, that would be salutary, whether Malta hosts it or not. It could act as an observatory: Who and how many are arriving from where, for how long and with what consequence? As matters stand, it seems to be difficult enough to monitor how many over-stayers on expired visas there are, wherefrom and where, let alone those who are completely undocumented or only partly documented, occasionally disembarking without having been noticed. Asylum applications make identifying the caseload more manageable but still it is no easy task to sort out all this data given the ongoing pressures, even in winter time and in larger numbers now, when human resources are fully stretched or unavailable, and there is no land reclamation in sight.

Malta has been trying to play the EU card in tackling this onrush. A "crisis, what crisis?" attitude is not likely to solve anything, so far as Malta is concerned. A few hundred in all are known to have been resettled in third countries, mainly in the US and some European countries, and initially a couple of hundred had been returned to Eritrea before a shift in UNHCR policy on this. More recently, some other "refugees" have gladly returned home to Sudan, Ghana and elsewhere under the Dar programme with €5,000 in their pockets.

Justice and Home Affairs Minister Carm Mifsud Bonnici has been at pains eloquently to dismiss unfair and downright incorrect allegations and accusations by international bodies, often fed through local sources, as well as to network institutionally with other southern European states.

It is not clear how even the Asylum and Immigration Pact will work in Malta's interest in spite of good wishes and intentions. Fingers crossed. The ground is mined with contradictions. If employers have to pay immigrants' wages equal to those that Maltese would earn, as they should, would that facilitate integration? Perhaps. If, as we are told, none of these people ever wanted to come here or want to stay here at all, which is a generalisation, what sort of integration could there be? On the other hand, if the Dublin Convention prohibits them from moving to other EU member states having first set foot on Malta (or Cyprus, or Lampedusa, or the Canary Islands), where does that leave the EU's peripheral islands to the south?

Let us hope that, as Mr Scicluna assures us, "it is well within our capacity" to manage this serious problem successfully. Honourably and decently.

But we have to watch it. EU money to have more and better reception centres built will not be nearly enough. EU joint repatriation flights never took off; so far as I know we had only one from Germany (embarking 17 Nigerian rejected cases from here). The Italians apparently smashed one human trafficking ring based around the Libyan port of Zuwara a few days ago, but the "travel agents" in Agadez, on route to the Niger-Libya border run an organised business with immunity, often exploiting and deceiving their "clients".

We should also stop generalising indiscriminately and incorrectly about all these arrivals being "refugees" without as much as a passing mention of a fair sprinkling among them who are self-confessed fugitives from justice. Again this is very tricky. As noted at the recent world assembly of the International Association of Refugee Law Judges in Cape Town, countries from Britain to Canada are at their wit's end how to deal specially with certain categories of immigrants who are known to fall into this category without transgressing Western human rights standards.

This is a small percentage; most migrants simply assume they would be better off, safer and happier in Europe or North America, utilising networks to the best advantage. A few have faced persecution or have good reason to fear it if they returned; they are the real refugees.

For the past five years the EU's FP6 Challenge programme, in which I participated, has been seeking to research the facts on the basis of which to tease out policy options that reconcile freedom and security, balancing out the individual's rights with the state's.

Future policy should comprise: (1) a package of modalities for solidarity among member states in practice, while recognising differences; (2) win-win quotas and opportunities for those whose services are required, while ensuring every protection to bona fide refugees and (3) heightened efforts to address root causes, preferably enforcing the principle of conditionality in overseas aid.

Integration should be pursued as a goal wherever conditions and dispositions may lend themselves to it, as opposed to repatriation or resettlement but it should not be forced down people's throats due to draconian restrictions on mobility.

The author has chaired Malta's Refugee Appeals Board since its inception in 2001.

Author: Edward Zammit-Lewis

Date: 05/05/2011

Working together on immigration

The PN strategy for the next general election is to try to depict the Labour Party, in particular its leader Joseph Muscat, as incapable of governing and keeping good relations with the European Union (see Opportunity Cost Of Trusting Labour, by Simon Busuttil, April 20). This politics of discreditation tries to instil the feeling in the electorate that it is better to trust in a PN government no matter how incompetent it may be.

The difference between the two political parties and their leaders is crystal clear in relation to the immigration problem, which is of fundamental importance to our country. The PN is satisfied that many member states have recognised and expressed gratitude to Malta for its role and effective contribution in the Libyan crisis. Needless to say, Malta's role is praiseworthy. However, when Malta itself needed help, only a few member states agreed to relocate immigrants on a voluntary basis. The Minister of Justice and Home Affairs was content that, following the last European Council meeting, some member states offered help and almost half of them agreed with our position. In reality this means nothing because the Council requires a "qualified majority" to adopt a decision.

More than two years ago, when there was an agreement within the Council on the matter of immigration, Dr Muscat stated clearly that a system of solidarity that was not based on an automatic mechanism would not work when a country was faced with severe flows of immigration. In fact, this is precisely what happened. The government, on the other hand, had come out saying it was the best agreement possible under the circumstances and that it was better than nothing.

There is nothing wrong with saying that our national interest should be safeguarded. EU history illustrates many instances of member states and their leaders negotiating intensely to protect their country's interests. The history of the relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union is full of these instances.

While the negotiating strength of our country may not be that of Germany and France, it does not mean that Malta has to take decisions lying down in areas that are fundamentally important to it, only to come out later saying it was better than nothing.

Italy, like Malta, has also suffered from the EU's inaction vis-à-vis the immigration problem. It wasn't just Minister Roberto Maroni, who hails from the Lega Nord, who declared his utter disappointment with how the EU dealt with Italy on the matter. Both Foreign Affairs Minister Franco Frattini and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi also

expressed disgruntlement with EU institutions that had once again proved ineffective when asked to react speedily and show solidarity with member states in need.

I expect the Maltese government to engage in diplomatic efforts with Italy to ease the tension that has arisen between the two countries, which have deep historical, cultural and commercial ties.

Our country cannot afford to distance itself from Italy because we stand to lose as a result. Surely the statement made by Minister of Justice and Home Affairs Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici on April 27, when he severely criticised Italy's policy of issuing temporary visas to immigrants, did not help. Giving such temporary visas is envisaged in both EU law and Italian domestic law. Furthermore, one cannot look at the policy employed by the Italian government without mentioning the agreement between Italy and Tunisia, which states that any future immigrants arriving illegally in Italy from Tunisia will be repatriated.

This is why I believe Dr Mifsud Bonnici's criticism was irresponsible. Our countries have a common interest in tackling the issue of migration and the minister's words do not help in this regard. The government, therefore, needs to show it is doing something concrete and not waste time attacking the Leader of the Opposition.

For one, it should ensure it conveys the message that Italy and Malta will work together on the common problem of immigration. Secondly, it should not attack but work with the Leader of the Opposition because internal differences like these undermine Malta's position when dealing with other countries and with EU institutions. It is to be noted that the online La Repubblica referred to this divergence and called into question Malta's ability to have a strong and unified voice on immigration.

Thirdly, the government should work without let-up to make sure the automatic mechanism of solidarity is put into force.

A common internal policy hammered out between the government and the opposition will make these aims attainable.

Author: Alex Tortell

Date: 30/08/2011

On analysing immigration

In his article Lost Causes And Iron Boxes (July 29), Andrew Azzopardi would have been better equipped to present a comprehensive analysis of the operations of an open centre for illegal immigrants had he contacted our services to see from the inside the reality of the management of irregular immigration or, at least, that part of it that falls within our competence. Over the years, we have met hundreds of visitors, all wishing to see and understand from up close the complex reality unfolding in this part of southern Europe. With many we have debated long and hard, agreeing on some issues and disagreeing on others.

I am in no way attempting to defend our services but I would like to bring the issue within parameters where a discussion can take place.

I am satisfied with the reception standards achieved in some centres while I am aware that there is room for improvement in others. The presence of "rats and other unwelcoming creatures" referred to by Dr Azzopardi stems from the surrounding rural environment and the bad personal hygiene practices adopted by some, not all, of the residents.

Year after year, open centres have been housing immigrants in numbers that exceeded their projected capacity. In fact, there were times when the centres accommodated about 3,000 persons and we are presently getting close to that number once again due to recent arrivals. During periods of overpopulation, the use of mobile homes and tents becomes

inevitable. It should be highlighted that resorting to temporary facilities is the exception and not the norm.

Persons using our services are not Zizek's "lost causes" and we do all we can not to come across that way. This harms the message we are trying to convey to those who seek our services, a message that inspires them to get on with their interrupted lives. On a daily basis we strive to provide access to what is required, that is long-term solutions and immediate care when needed.

We are promoting employment and education for adult immigrants and schooling for their children. Many professionals provide other services as and when required. As a reception network, we link with mainstream services while volunteers and civil society provide the necessary crucial assistance and support.

Dr Azzopardi proposes that "we construct a movement of human solidarity led by our politicians". The "movement of human solidarity", in fact, already exists; this agency is proof of this. However, a lot still remains to be done.

On the other hand, those who express condemnation and portray a doom and gloom image for the situation prevailing in this sector simply lack the ability of seeing the whole picture. It is worth highlighting that, as a result of the government's commitment to provide temporary accommodation to migrants, we do not have people sleeping on pavements, scenes that are, unfortunately, experienced in some other countries on a daily basis.

Valid contributions in this area from the University would definitely be most welcome. In many cases, Malta's structures of solidarity in this field are only a few years old whereas other countries with the accumulated experience of second and third generation immigration are still facing challenges that are similar to ours.

Finally, I would like to invite Dr Azzopardi to go beyond analysing immigration from his car and start communicating with us at the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers with a view to exchange ideas that would lead to the betterment of this complex sector.

The author is director of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers.

Author: George Palmer

Date: 23/06/2012

Illegal immigrants and the EU

I am very mindful of the fact that the following comments will raise the hackles of what I call the politically correct "wooly jumper" brigade and I make no apologies.

Over the past days, Malta has been flooded with illegal immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and, given the beautiful weather to come, hundreds or even thousands more could set sail to our islands or, sadly, drown in the process. They are encouraged to try because of the benefits that await them.

David Casa, the Nationalist member of the European Parliament, takes a typical PC stance. Why shouldn't he? Because the EP is a politically correct organisation and pays his extraordinary salary. Why should he and his woolies rock their lucrative boats? They show no sign of sinking.

None of his comments (May 31) address the concerns of the average Maltese and, indeed, Italians. Of course, I agree that these illegal immigrants should be treated with dignity, well fed, medically treated and placed in custody. Thereafter, Mr Casa and the European Parliament and I have a difference of opinion.

What has been lost in this EP planet Zog world of caring is the fact that these people are by definition illegal immigrants. What has been recognised is that the EP is rich in words but hopeless in action. Taking these people into the arms of an already

overcrowded European Union is described as “burden sharing”. That aptly describes this sea of humanity.

Not surprisingly, there aren’t many EU countries willing to help Malta and I can understand this. Objectively, these people have little or nothing to offer. For the most part we don’t know who they are, they don’t speak our language, we don’t know whether they have committed any crimes in Africa and, if they did, what sort of crimes and they have little hope of gainful employment.

Ninety per cent of the illegal immigrants who stay with us will be a growing burden for the EU. The word illegal is rather important here. If I illegally entered Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia or any number of other Third World countries I would be arrested as an undesirable and, if not immediately kicked out, imprisoned and placed on trial with the key subsequently thrown away.

Why do we in the west have to be mugged by the Third World?

Collectively, the EU countries contribute billions of euros to Africa, yet Mr Casa suggests we give more to stop this human flood entering our borders. We don’t know where these billions of euros go exactly but much of it is likely invested in Mercedes Benz and villas in the south of France.

I doubt the lives of the needy see much change year on year for every extra billion euros contributed.

Before anyone calls me heartless, let me tell you that I spent a lot of time as an aid worker in Sierra Leone after the civil war there. What I saw and experienced churned my stomach. The government corruption, theft and waste stunned me and, after two missions, I was defeated and returned home, never to go back.

I now hold the belief that it is not Europe’s responsibility to take on this migrant flood. It should be our responsibility to stop it – and now. I can’t moralise about what is happening in Africa any more but it is a different world from ours and these countries should sort themselves out. These unfortunate people are the victims of people traffickers, a point Mr Casa and his EP cronies fail to comment on. They are victims.

So, yes, treat them with dignity and care but then send them back from whence they came. That would send the message to the traffickers that there is no business for them and the poor folk who seek the European streets “paved with gold” that there is no point in trying to reach our shores, which are not paved with gold.

In these dismal economic times, for Malta and Italy to continue receiving so much humanity without any pushback will spell financial ruin and a crime wave. The Human Rights Act is an abomination that serves only the politicians and the legislature. The people who operate within this law have become enriched by it. Normal hard working people have to share the burden of the cost as taxpayers and the crime victims of this illegal human tide.

I would ask that I am not regarded as being extreme or right wing for I am not. I am middle of the road. I just speak with the voice of common sense. That is something that the EP could well start doing. And sooner rather than later, for their lack of assistance to Malta and Italy shows their total lack of belief in their own woolly rhetoric. It is all political correctness gone completely mad at the expense of the EU taxpayer and the victims of crime.

Author: Michael Falzon

Date: 08/07/2011

The immigrant detention policy

For critics of the government's detention policy concerning all illegal immigrants landing on our shores, the violent death of a Malian immigrant last week was a tragedy waiting to happen.

Armed Forces personnel should be filtered to ensure that those who have an inherent racist bias are given other duties

- Michael Falzon

I have gone on record saying I agree with this policy as I feel that in our small society it does not make sense for government to abdicate from its duty to monitor what is going on in our country and using the detention period to enable the authorities to discern the different situations of the different immigrants makes sense.

Some immigrants could possibly be sent safely back to their country of origin, some are genuine asylum seekers as a result of the troubled political situations in their countries, and others are just trying to seek new economic pastures. A period of time for these different situations to become clearer before the immigrants are allowed to roam freely in our society seems to be a reasonable approach.

Yet this is all poppycock for the few dedicated volunteers who come in touch with the reality of our detention system. Many insist that the way this system works (or does not work) is so shameful that it can never be justified.

Serious studies have shown, for example, the existence of high levels of mental health problems in detainees including anxiety, depression and other psychological disorders such as self-harm and suicidal tendencies. Moreover, the length of the time in detention seems to have an effect on the severity of distress with the negative impact persisting even after the detention is over.

In other words, the detention system jeopardises the mental health of the detainees. This does not just apply to Malta's system, of course. Studies in other European countries and in Australia have also confirmed this trend. Indeed, while there is now an 18 month maximum period for detention of illegal immigrants in Malta, Australia detains asylum seekers indefinitely.

In practice, the length of the detention period in Malta depends on many factors, including an assessment of the ease with which people from different ethnic backgrounds and different language skills can be assimilated in Maltese society. Yet it is now becoming more obvious this is not enough.

First and foremost, it does seem that the Armed Forces personnel and other state employees whose duties put them in direct contact with detained immigrants are not being prepared properly for their tasks.

These personnel should also be filtered to ensure that those who have an inherent racist bias are given other duties. There are established psychological tests that can help filter out those whose mental set-up is so warped from a racist perspective that it would be better if they are given tasks that exclude direct contact with African immigrants.

Those who are not so excluded should be trained on how to deal with distressed people. Detention provokes a reaction against the system and this reaction is often expressed by hostility against those who are perceived to represent the system.

Those dealing with these situations must be trained to understand that a certain amount of resentment is a natural consequence of the state of affairs and consider it as such, rather than as some personal affront. In other words, they have to be trained to avoid becoming emotionally involved in the emotions exhibited by the detainees.

Unfortunately, as far as I can understand, the authorities are doing nothing of the sort.

There will be, of course, those who will say that the country should not spend money on this problem, the result of a mentality that refuses to accept that our respect for humanity itself, let alone human rights, cannot be restricted to fellow Maltese or

Europeans. This is nothing but racial prejudice that shames all those who embrace it – not just in Malta but all over the world.

In this scenario, the attitude of our political and religious leaders is very important. The Prime Minister – with all his problems, self-wrought or otherwise – has always assumed the moral high ground on this issue. Unfortunately, his positive attitude has not filtered down all the state structures to ensure that the authorities take the necessary measures, some of which I have outlined.

It is a pity that in this issue, the chances of a bipartisan policy is not as good as one would wish, since the Labour Party sometimes tends to speak in a manner blatantly meant to lure the vote of the racially prejudiced.

As socialist ideology abhors such stances, I tend to suspect that this is just a shameful vote-catching ploy: one that keeps Joseph Muscat from being clear and unambiguous in his condemnation of racism.

And it had to be this recent death that provoked our Church leaders to say something about this issue. Previously they seemed to be more interested on what people do in the bedroom than in how the faithful respect and love their ‘brothers in Christ’ who happen to have a different coloured skin and who were born in unfortunate circumstances.

Appendix 3

Code	Heading	Writer	Date	Number of words
IMMA_After_01	Refugee rights and migration management	Jon Holsaeter	20/06/2013	800
IMMA_After_02	Getting real on immigration	Lino Spiteri	14/07/2013	969
IMMA_After_03	A moral immigration policy	Martin Scicluna	18/07/2013	970
IMMA_After_04	Immigration scenarios	Ranier Fsadni	18/07/2013	935
IMMA_After_05	Cause of irregular migration	Laiq Ahmed Atif	01/08/2013	675
IMMA_After_06	Migration: What's at stake	Anthony Trevisan	07/08/2013	1,012
IMMA_After_07	Catholic view of migration	Fr Mario Attard	28/08/2013	728
IMMA_After_08	The Church and the immigrant	Jean Govè	02/09/2013	552
IMMA_After_09	New norms to tackle migration	John Pace	17/10/2013	594
IMMA_After_10	Stamping on irregular immigration	Lino Spiteri	28/10/2013	758
IMMA_After_11	Migration on EU's agenda	Joseph Vella Bonnici	05/11/2013	887
IMMA_After_12	Change the migration story	Maria Teresa Sette	12/12/2013	899
IMMA_After_13	The man who made kids understand the story behind the migrant's journey	Kristina Chetcuti	09/02/2014	846
IMMA_After_14	Let there be migrants' riots	Mark Anthony Falzon	16/03/2014	1,132
IMMA_After_15	EU agenda on migration	Martin Scicluna	20/05/2015	1,248

Table 2. Detailed description of the second corpus

Author: Jon Holsaeter

Date: 20/03/2013

Refugee rights and migration management

This spring, the Maltese people voted for change and the pressure is on for the new Government to deliver on its promise. Asylum and migration policies have so far not made it to the top of the Government's to-do list – relatively few asylum seekers have arrived so far this year.

It is essential to distinguish between asylum and migration

But in view of recent reports from Libya, the slump in boat arrivals may have more to do with sirocco winds rather than a change in the situation. With summer arriving, we are seeing further desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean.

Asylum and migration issues may soon rise prominently on the agenda in Malta's new political landscape.

And there is plenty to discuss, although, judging by the Labour Party's electoral programme, there will not be a sharp turn in policy direction regarding asylum in Malta. To be fair, there have been new developments. The Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, Helena Dalli, has taken on a portfolio that includes integration for people granted international protection. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees welcomes this approach. The important integration issue needs a clearly defined 'home'.

Malta has made important progress in recent years. Still, the new Government will be faced with old challenges: rescue at sea, further developing the national asylum system and the pursuit of long-term solutions, both for those who qualify for protection and those who do not.

Like all other member states, Malta will need to adjust its asylum system, not least as regards detention, to implement revised EU directives.

The UNHCR does not hold all the answers but our aim is to contribute to constructive dialogue around these important topics.

In our view, it is essential to distinguish between asylum and migration. This is not always easy because refugees often travel along migration routes. States have broad discretion in managing migration but much less scope to deviate from core asylum obligations regulated by international and EU law.

Any discussion that does not distinguish between asylum rights and migration control is bound to be ineffectual and confusing. The fact remains that it is a human right to seek asylum. The challenge at hand is to implement the corresponding State responsibilities in a way that is both principled and effective.

In relative terms, Malta has received (and rescued) a high number of asylum seekers in recent years, although the proportion of foreigners in this country remains lower than the EU average. After a decade of intense media coverage, people in Malta and Italy may feel that the EU has left them alone to deal with the 'gateway' to Europe. But take a close look at the statistics and you can see that the perspective from Brussels and elsewhere can be somewhat different.

For example, last year, Malta received about 0.6 per cent of all asylum applications in Europe. This means that the central Mediterranean route from Libya is, in fact, not at the moment the main entry point to the EU, even taking into consideration those arriving in Italy.

With Syria erupting in violence, all eyes are on the situation of more than 1.5 million refugees outside the EU's closed borders.

Further away, in Somalia, there is progress that gives hope for stability and eventual returns but the Horn of Africa still hosts more than one million displaced Somalis, with many living in precarious conditions. Only a fraction of them have left with a hope to reach Europe.

This is not to say that Malta, the EU's smallest state, should be left alone to deal with its very real challenges. The question is what support can and should be made available.

So far, more than 700 people who were granted protection in Malta have been relocated to various European countries under voluntary arrangements. Meanwhile, the US continues to provide Malta with significant support that is equally unique in the EU context.

According to the European Commission, Malta has, during a five-year period, benefited from about €44 million, made available through EU solidarity funds. The Maltese taxpayer is not footing the whole bill.

Of course, Malta is right to push for further solidarity, which should be a fundamental aspect of the emerging Common European Asylum System. In the UNHCR's view, calls for additional support are more likely to succeed on the basis of a clear definition of Malta's own capacity and planned contribution for the coming years.

'Malta is too small' is not likely to go very far as a stand-alone argument.

Today is World Refugee Day. It is an occasion to reflect on the plight and resilience of more than 45 million forcibly displaced people around the world.

Jon Hoisaeter is the UNHCR representative in Malta.

Author: Lino Spiteri

Date: 14/07/2013

Getting real on immigration

Irregular immigration is on everybody's lips, with main sentiments felt and words uttered out of context. These include a move by a government MP – a proposal to set up an immigration committee – couched in a tone which triggered forlorn hope that the Government would have its first rebel MP.

That is nonsense. No group can be completely homogenous and it is normal for some individual MPs to sail away from the main course on some issue or another. In fact, I believe it is healthy and it should be so.

MPs, particularly backbench MPs, should not become an opera choir. That is not democracy, nor is it what voters elected them for.

The question is at what point in time should there be a pause to see whether the debate is going the right way. In this case, the right way is composed of several factors. There are humane and ethical considerations. These should always be the start. Then there is the national way. This should always be the end of political debate.

The humane and ethical way has now been settled. However, the Prime Minister meant his stand about considering pushing back to be taken, the decision was taken out of his hands. Coincidentally there was a court decision on the issue – a no-no – which the Prime Minister immediately accepted.

That notwithstanding the baying for his blood by some opponents continued. Some of it was manifestly hypocritical, specifically that coming from the Nationalist side. A Nationalist government had at least twice pushed back irregular immigrants, putting them on a flight back to their country.

In addition to that, when Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi talked tough about pushing back immigrants to Libya, there was no outright condemnation in Malta.

Instead there were some sympathetic gurgles even from Nationalist government quarters.

That is not to say pushing back is good. It is not. I am one of those who feel strongly against it. But hypocrisy is not good, either.

The Leader of the Opposition cannot expect to be taken seriously when he brushes his own and the Nationalist past away in the light of the recent court decision. What made push-back wrong was not a court decision but the deed in itself.

Now it is – or should be – off the burner. To continue to concentrate the debate on it is to demonstrate further hypocrisy and to reveal that partisan politics are at the heart of the position of Nationalists who continue to perorate on the issue.

And far as push-back went, many stood up to be counted, though, let it be said, many also stood up in its favour, including Nationalists openly so on the social media.

What about a temporary tax to raise funds for the Government to deal with the irregular immigrants' problem?

But now all that should be past. Now the real issue remains – which is that boat people are arriving and being taken in Malta in much greater numbers than the island can afford, and that the EU is doing nothing to help us. To listen to the Nationalist leader one would think we should be thanking the EU.

We should not. We should be pointing out that solidarity is not restricted to any subject. The immigration problem requires solidarity. The EU has decided not to extend it.

The Maltese people should now show as a whole that we expect more from the EU. We did not join merely for the company, or for the cash involved. That is the metaphor of the prostitute.

We are not prostitutes, which is why Parliament once united on a break with Britain resolution, which is why we achieved formal independence, which is why we wound down the British military base and told Nato to go fish somewhere else.

We joined the EU for much more than cash, security and togetherness being the main reason. We are not getting that from the EU. That is what we should be debating – how to ensure proper attention rather than ill-hidden disdain that this little member should dare stand up for its rights.

We should be making our national feeling clear. We are ethical, but we are also pressed and in need of burden sharing.

We should also be discussing how to deal with irregular immigrants while they are in Malta, and about the implications of an immigrant community growing over the years.

Armchair criticism and futile flourishes like that of the 69 lawyers who combined to demonstrate their concern over the pushback issue are not enough.

What we should be saying is what we expect the Government to do. The people of the Harbour area, Hal Far and Birżebbuġa, for instance, are concerned that irregular immigrants are concentrated among them. Are articulate residents of posher areas ready to back them and discuss geographical ethics?

There is the question of insufficient space. Are owners of vacant buildings prepared to offer temporary accommodation?

The bishops spoke best on the issue – no to pushing back, but yes to dialogue and just burden sharing. But can the Church do more?

A priest contacted me after my Monday Talking Point in Times of Malta on the matter and suggested I ask the bishops whether they are prepared to offer empty monasteries and convents to house irregular immigrants. Well, are they? Is anybody else prepared to offer to take on one or two immigrants, even say, children, on temporary keep?

What about a temporary tax to raise funds for the Government to deal with the irregular immigrants' problem?

How about getting real now and relegate push-back to history but anticipate the historical socio-economic-political effect of the reality of the growing number of irregular immigrants among us, projected forward even five to 10 years?

Author: Martin Scicluna

Date: 18/07/2013

A moral immigration policy

The Prime Minister's grandstanding as this year's influx of refugees arrived has led to consequences which a modicum of prior thought and planning might have avoided.

This is not a new problem for Malta. It is one which has been evolving for the past 11 years.

The Prime Minister and his advisers have had time to consider the issue in depth. Instead, he has behaved like a bull in a china shop.

A generous interpretation would put this down to inexperience and a small island mentality that thinks the world revolves around Malta.

In one fell swoop, the Prime Minister has reversed an undoubtedly flawed, but essentially ethical, policy for dealing with the intractable problems of irregular immigration of the past 10 years by one that is wrong on humanitarian grounds, illegal, diplomatically unsound and unlikely to advance Malta's plea for mutual support from other EU countries.

I would hazard a guess that, following the US Ambassador's pointed speech extolling the benefits of immigration at the recent July 4 Independence Day celebrations, even the generous support of the United States (it has taken 200 refugees a year from Malta for resettlement) may have been placed in jeopardy. What should a moral immigration policy for Malta consist of? Four key principles should guide it.

The first is that Malta should offer fair, just and humane treatment of irregular immigrants in line with its international obligations.

It is a long-standing signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and has signed a number of other international agreements.

It is honour-bound to respect them. It cannot pick and choose which it may follow.

That is why the decision to push back asylum seekers in the face of a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights was so crass.

The Prime Minister's stubborn insistence that "all options are still on the table" (including push-back) is morally unacceptable and undermines Malta's plea for European support.

The second principle is that there should be well-ordered procedures and practices for dealing with asylum seekers.

Malta's structures have taken a long time to build. They are still below the desired standard.

While, on balance, the policy on detention is the right one for Malta, the accommodation centres in which asylum seekers are held are woefully inadequate.

They are invariably overcrowded. They lack sufficient room for exercise or leisure facilities.

Worse, while the concept of introducing a civilian Detention Service was the right one, the army and the police still fill the majority of posts of responsibility and all members of the force without exception are inadequately trained.

Consequently, the treatment of asylum seekers falls far below the standards of humane treatment that should apply.

The open accommodation centres also require expansion and an injection of funding to offer acceptable levels of care.

Maltese machismo impresses nobody outside these shores

The third principle is that Malta should actively encourage the integration of asylum seekers who are eligible for humanitarian protection. The wave of racism the Prime Minister's populist action has unleashed has made this objective harder to accomplish. Nevertheless, there is a need, which the previous Administration ducked, to introduce a comprehensive and far-reaching programme of integration.

At any one time, Malta is host to about 5,000 black African immigrants. They use the medical and social services and their children go to local schools.

Many are employed and have an economic stake in Malta, which should be encouraged. A programme of integration will require courageous leadership from the Prime Minister personally and a concerted campaign of education to expunge the inherent racism and xenophobia of an island that, unusually in Europe, has never before experienced an influx of immigrants on this scale.

The fourth principle is the orderly removal of those ineligible for humanitarian protection or those who can be relocated to other European countries.

This is the most difficult issue confronting Malta. It is what triggered a lilliputian stamping of feet by the Prime Minister last week, with limited, possibly counter-productive, results.

Maltese machismo impresses nobody outside these shores. This is the area where diplomacy might work but threats are surely hollow.

The Prime Minister is right to rail against the EU's lack of willingness to contemplate a fairer system of burden-sharing for countries, like Malta, which find themselves unable to absorb a huge influx of irregular immigrants.

But he is wrong to suppose that by precipitating an international humanitarian incident he will receive the support he desires.

Every country in Europe is suffering a backlash against immigration and, in some cases, this is exacerbated by the extremist reactions of far-right parties.

To persuade the other 27 countries of the EU that Malta's needs are unique (they are), he should avoid insulting the European commissioner responsible for immigration and, rather than seeking the help of a largely impotent EU Council President, he should embark on a diplomatic offensive to build a network of like-minded leaders willing to confront the undoubted inequity of the current situation.

Malta should itself come up with specific proposals for amending the iniquitous Dublin II agreement and to start a debate based on possible solutions, rather than empty threats of using the country's veto in the European Council on matters unrelated to migration.

It is rarely wise to use the nuclear option until all other options have been exhausted.

The social, economic, demographic, cultural and security impacts on Malta of irregular immigration raise inescapable concerns that must be addressed responsibly. But Malta also has international and moral responsibilities to provide humanitarian protection to those that land on its shores.

The Prime Minister has a huge responsibility to ensure that he adopts a measured, balanced and, above all, moral approach to this most sensitive of matters.

Martin Scicluna is a former government adviser on defence matters.

Author: Ranier Fsadni

Date: 18/07/2013

Immigration scenarios

Historically, democracies don't have a good record of avoiding crises. Democracies are rather better, however, at getting out of them. Let's hope the rule will be proved again

with respect to the crisis that arose last week – a crisis that concerned values and principles as well as immigration.

Of course, we'll have to do more than hope. We have to find a new way of conducting both the national conversation as well as the strategic one with our European partners. The latter requires a fundamental shift from the way it's been conducted so far, both by the present government and its predecessor. Weak European solidarity is usually identified as the spoiler of the conversation. But even if the solidarity were there, the conversation would still suffer from three weaknesses.

First, there's the selective quotation of individual statistics, which leaves everyone thinking that their case has not been answered and that the rest are missing the point.

It's a real conversation stopper even if you get your numbers right. Unfortunately, over the past week, Joseph Muscat has been briefed wrong. He's been reported as saying that, in population terms, our annual intake of immigrants is the equivalent of a million arriving in Germany or Spain and 800,000 arriving in the UK.

But Spain's population is just over half that of Germany's, so their proportions cannot be the same. And the equivalent of our arrivals in Germany would be 400,000, 315,000 in the UK and 235,000 in Spain. Germany would, no doubt, point out that, in fact, it had 440,000 applications for asylum in 1992, as a result of the Yugoslav wars. They have already faced our numbers – alone.

Such errors, potentially, create problems for our case. But even getting individual numbers right won't be enough.

Second, the conversation is also spoilt by the narrow time horizon. The argument currently turns on whether we're at crisis point now or not. It's clear, however, that with a Union of 28 members, any new fundamental policy – and that is what obligatory burden sharing would involve – needs a passage of time to be formulated, negotiated and approved.

All European directives need this. The French and German governments, for instance, usually require 18 months to see a European proposal pass into national law – after scrutiny by civil servants in various ministries and debate by national parliamentarians. And that's assuming they're not trying to strangle the proposal at birth.

Just look at the handling of the financial crisis. More immediate, widespread and tangible a crisis you could not have. But, years after the crisis broke, the necessary elements to address it in the long term have still not all been put in place.

So, any discussion of solidarity on immigration and crisis levels needs to factor years of negotiation over a long-term solution. A broader time horizon will change the terms of the discussion – from whether Malta has an emergency now (which is doubtful) to whether, if present trends continue, it will be in a real emergency in, say, five years from now.

Arguing over possible shared futures is the way in which a community of destiny is affirmed

To admit that would be to admit that serious policy discussion must begin now if the future emergency is to be addressed responsibly.

The third weakness of the conversation is that it generally assumes current trends. For a region like ours, with Egypt and Tunisia at risk of turning for the worse, not the better, excluding everything except business-as-usual is reckless.

One can understand, of course, why politicians are wary of broaching the possibility of things becoming even worse. They'll be accused of pandering to the hysterics of right-wing extremists. Besides, if one admits worst-case scenarios, one should also admit best-case scenarios.

And there lies the clue to the shape we should be giving the conversation. To avoid the three weaknesses of extreme statistical selectivity, narrow time horizons and static trends, we should frame our concerns in terms of several scenarios: business-as-usual, best case and worst case.

Scenario analysis is already conducted by the European Commission and certain ministries of the largest member states. By adopting it, we would be able to have a more focused conversation. ('If you don't think we'll be facing a real emergency in three years, when do you think, on those trends, will we face one? Never? In six years rather than three? In that case, shouldn't we still begin to address it now?')

We couldn't be accused of being alarmist because we'd also be considering best scenarios – and their probability. Since scenarios include multiple factors, we could include factors like costs for education, health and welfare, as well as potential boosts for the economy. We would be able to show that our thinking was based on concrete measures to integrate immigrants and not on xenophobic prejudice against them.

Making an intellectually disciplined, holistic case binds our European partners to making rational objections or else have their irresponsibility exposed. Of course, we have to be bound by reason too – even if scenario analysis does not yield the results we expected.

From scenario analysis we would be better able to insist on scenario planning, on pan-European measures designed to address, as much as possible, each eventuality. No doubt, other member states will have their say on the scenarios facing them.

Such arguments, unlike the present ones, need not be divisive. Arguing over possible shared futures is the way in which a community of destiny is affirmed.

Author: Laiq Ahmed Atif

Date: 01/08/2013

Cause of irregular migration

Homeopathy is a system of medicine that works according to the specific symptoms of a patient. A homeopath prescribes the medicine according to the symptoms and targets the root cause of the disease. Once the root cause of the disease is found and a prescription is issued accordingly, even a little dose of the prescribed medicine would start having a positive effect on the patient.

The issue of irregular immigration can very much be likened to homeopathy in two basic ways. First, in trying to find the root cause of the problem and, then, in targeting the root cause, instead of addressing the problems of its effects. Once the root cause is found and given due attention, I am sure the problem can be solved, if not completely but at least to a satisfactory level.

One should bear in mind that it is not an easy option for immigrants to leave their home, family and dear ones in search of a better life in another country.

So, then, why are so many people leaving all their belongings and put their life in danger to go to another country?

The simple answer is that the perilous political, religious, social and economic situation in their countries leaves them with no other option except migration in the hope of finding a safe haven.

If we analyse the irregular immigration issue, we find that the ratio of migration is very high in those countries where there is no or very little rule of law, where there is no peace and security and where persecution, tribal conflicts, political turmoil and social and economic problems are very pronounced.

In reality, these destitute and vulnerable people who migrate are the victims and not the culprits. They are not the real problem but rather the ones who are deprived of all their

fundamental and basic human rights. Thus, when they find shelter in any country, they should be given their due respect and human dignity should not be compromised.

To successfully address this issue of irregular immigration, which is increasing very rapidly, we have to find concrete, sustainable and long-term solutions. Financial support is not the long-term solution.

European Union President Herman Van Rompuy stressed this point and rightly said during his latest visit to Malta that “money alone could not solve the problem” and that “we have to address the root of migration”.

Another very important factor is the increasing problem of human trafficking, where agents receive handsome payments from these vulnerable people in their search of a better life. This issue needs to be solved as well and this cannot be done without the cooperation of those countries whose borders are close to Europe or developed countries.

The ratio of migration is very high in those countries where there is no or very little rule of law

To my understanding, if we want to solve this problem, consultation with all stakeholders is essential to draw a road map to combat this huge problem. It is really very crucial for the world powers to help in the establishment of peace and security in the affected countries and, instead of providing them with weapons and armaments, they should be offered better education facilities and business and work opportunities so they can stand on their own feet.

Many of these countries are rich in natural resources and they may not be in need of financial help. However, due to mismanagement and corruption in their institutions they cannot fully utilise such resources to provide a better life for their people.

A sincere and sympathetic approach of training personnel and strengthening their institutions can also be a very valid proposal.

Access to international markets can help them overcome their many problems at home and strengthen their economy.

Once this issue has been given due attention by the world powers, I am sure there will be positive results that will favour the entire world.

Solving this issue and helping the needy and the destitute would be a great service to mankind.

Laiq Ahmed Atif is president of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Malta.

Author: Anthony Trevisan

Date: 07/08/2013

Migration: what's at stake

There is a vast difference between the deliberate process of fomenting racial disharmony and xenophobia and putting into practice the obligation and responsibility vested in those charged to govern and protect the security and well-being of Maltese nationals as well as those privileged to legally live in Malta.

Prime Minister Joseph Muscat's recent utterances on the issue of immigration affecting Malta, while controversial by their very nature, should be viewed by reasonably minded people as balanced and highly responsible, with no hint of xenophobia.

Anything less would represent an abdication of the Prime Minister's position as the leader responsible for securing Malta's shores from potentially an invasion of veritable biblical proportions.

Some might argue this sounds unduly alarmist, so let's examine the facts and make some comparisons with other countries. A recent article in London's Daily Telegraph suggested that illegal immigration on the same scale in Britain would amount to some

additional 2.5 million people or the equivalent of two Birminghams. By relative comparison, just this last year's intake of refugees by Malta would be the equivalent of an incremental increase of a million people in Spain or Germany. Malta's size and population puts it in the worst possible position to have an open door policy on immigration and most particularly dependent unskilled refugee immigration. Health and social services, security forces and indeed the economy are being subjected to unreasonable external pressures which may become unsustainable over a short period. Malta's European culture, including its religion, are under increasing pressure and grave risk.

We sit on the very doorstep of hundreds of millions of people with vastly different cultures, values and faiths, ostensibly fleeing from dysfunctional governments of their own creation who for varied reasons desire to take that first step into Europe to what they consider a better future. One of the main problems is the fact that the much larger members of the EU have conspired to ensure that Malta becomes a permanent buffer zone between the source of the refugee problem and their own backyards.

This is a global issue growing exponentially in numbers and in political unease among governments of host nations. In Australia, the chosen home of many different races of people from all over the world and roughly the size of North America with just some 22 million people, the issue of illegal immigration has toppled different heads of government and moulded policy in accord with the flow and ebb of public opinion.

As government policy eased with subsequent change of governments, refugee numbers increased from the mere trickle to some 17,000 in 2012, still relatively very small and insignificant by comparison to Malta, but enough to topple Prime Minister Julia Gillard and bring in Kevin Rudd who was a leading Labour Party front bencher and a vocal critic of Howard's policies at the time of the Tampa affair.

Within days of returning to the helm of the current Australian government Prime Minister Rudd completed his total reversal of his previous position on illegal immigration and shut the entry gate to Australia by rerouting all refugees to Papua New Guinea with the agreement of the PNG government backed by incentives of additional foreign aid.

Malta is too vulnerable to adverse economic and social changes for the current unbridled situation to continue

Rudd has also put a price on the head of people smugglers and committed to pursue their prosecution wherever they may be. A classic case of political pragmatism in the face of electoral annihilation particularly in certain parts of NSW where many refugees were being settled. Simon Busuttil take note and ignore the political imperative at your own and your party's risk.

Malta's main economic activity is tourism. The burgeoning presence of refugees loitering aimlessly in certain parts of Malta and in some cases, albeit a minority, making news for very often the wrong reasons will sooner or later negate some of the better visual aspects of life in Malta. Malta is too small and crowded, too culturally homogeneous and different from invading cultures and too vulnerable to adverse economic and social changes for the current unbridled situation to continue.

It's all very well for the idealist dwellers of that most centralist ivory tower in Strasbourg to flex their regulatory muscles against the smallest of nations in the Union and assuage rightly placed Maltese concern and indignation with a few additional million euro, hoping the problem will go away for a while. It would be interesting to see the same pressure and policy being applied to, for example, Germany as it pursues policies anathema to unchecked immigration; or to Britain as it insists that those claiming refugee status and engage in the vocal support of terrorism are sent to those

countries demanding their extradition even when long-term imprisonment and possibly worse could be awaiting their return; or to France with its growing opposition to unchecked immigration from some of its former African colonies.

The giants of the Union like Germany, France and others have demonstrated no compunction in sending back to Malta refugees who have managed to make their way to mainland Europe from Malta but eventually run into the clutches of their enforcers. Central European policy on refugee immigration has been duplicitous to say the least, grossly favouring the northern influential states and ignoring the pleas for help of the smaller states such as Malta.

Problems associated with the immigration issue in Malta will continue to grow and fester and the government should not be tempted to turn a blind eye to the growing social and economic issues at the whiff of some token monetary compensation from Europe. The social issues are too significant for Malta, the costs hidden and clearly apparent are too serious, the future too uncertain.

The only certainty is that the scale of the problem will increase and the severity of the issues will be compounded and will produce extreme attitudes and outcomes which are not synonymous with the welcoming generosity of the Maltese people.

Author: Fr Mario Attard

Date: 28/08/2013

Catholic view on migration

The recent comment made by Auxiliary Bishop Mgr Charles Scicluna regarding irregular immigrants, that “the Church has to have a profound pastoral strategy that aims for true evangelisation”, is certainly most welcome.

Equally important is what Gozo Bishop Mgr Mario Grech proposed, primarily that hostile attitudes against asylum seekers should be addressed by a long process of education.

The following reflections try to humbly respond to the latter claim so that in due course some concrete pastoral initiatives may crop up to handle this issue with the required Christian sensitivity it surely demands.

The Catholic social teaching tackles immigration. In his 2009 social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI described the current migration and immigration crisis as “a social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions that requires bold, forward-looking policies of international cooperation if it is to be handled effectively.” (§62)

The essence of that pivotal paragraph states that “every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance”.

The theological basis for such a stance is to be found in the Bible and in the Church’s traditional teaching.

In paragraph 1931 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read: “Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbour (without any exception) as ‘another self,’ above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.’ No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behaviour will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a ‘neighbour,’ a brother.”

Moreover, in paragraph 1932 the Catechism teaches that “the duty of making oneself a neighbour to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Matt 25:40).’”

Destructive attitudes like cultural superiority, indifference, hostility and racism are to be opposed by speeches favouring hospitality, communion and integration

There are five foundational principles that can be extracted from the social teachings of the Popes and bishops concerning immigration.

First, migrants are entitled to have opportunities in their countries. Consequently governments and civil societies have the concomitant obligation to offer such opportunities together with personal and economic security. Richer nations should never avoid their responsibility to assist poorer nations.

Second, it is a “natural right” that people can migrate to sustain themselves and their families. In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America* Blessed John Paul II said: “The Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another.” (§ 65)

Third, while nations have every right to control their borders to secure the common good and the human dignity of their own people it is not to be regarded as supreme. This right should be employed with utmost discretion so that selfish reasons like materialism or ideological reasons like racism are eradicated. Fourth, refugees and asylum seekers should be given protection.

Lastly, the human dignity and rights of immigrants must be always respected. In *Ecclesia in America* Blessed John Paul II said that “attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration.” (§ 65)

The interventions of both Mgr Scicluna and Mgr Grech poignantly reveal that the Church is morally responsible to respond pastorally to the irregular immigrants’ plight. The basic pastoral response is that of instilling conversion.

The Church must seize every opportunity, including her liturgy, to propagate the message of conversion of heart. Catholic faithful should be helped to see Jesus Christ in the stranger. Destructive attitudes like cultural superiority, indifference, hostility and racism are to be opposed by speeches favouring hospitality, communion and integration. Secondly, the Church can introduce initiatives which aid immigrants to assimilate our culture in a healthy way. Finally, the Church is to provide pastoral care for all immigrants. It is my prayer that the foregoing reflections help us focus on our common humanity rather than on our differences.

Author: Jean Govè

Date: 02/09/2013

The Church and the immigrant

A few weeks ago I began volunteering at the Malta Emigrants’ Commission. This was to be my head-long dive into the stark reality that is irregular immigration – a charged environment to say the least, on so many different levels.

The Commission is the archdiocese’s arm operating in this field. One may explain what it does but I have come to realise that the particular services it offers to immigrants vary somewhat as the reality shifts; a dynamic response to a dynamic, ever-changing situation.

In a nutshell, however, the Malta Emigrants’ Commission helps immigrants on myriad different levels, from providing the basic necessities of food, medicine and shelter to other complex affairs such as aiding migrants in obtaining work permits and travelling documents and advocating for justice when maltreatment or any form of injustice has taken place.

Yet rather than ‘what’ the Commission does, I was more preoccupied with the question of ‘why’. Why does the Church in Malta assist irregular immigrants?

The cases the Commission deals with are numerous, complicated, unique, time and resource-consuming and, most importantly, ignored and swept aside by the majority in our society.

The Church is fighting for a cause that is not of its own and in which the vast majority of the people it helps are not even Christian! If anything, deciding to aid and assist immigrants is bound to draw more insults than admiration from the public at large.

If Jesus talked with the lepers and prostitutes – the outcasts of the society He lived in – should the Church not imitate Him today with the outcasts of our society?

So again I asked why? Other NGOs, unrelated to the Church, do work in this field and in some ways are arguably better equipped to handle certain situations than the Commission due to their greater access to resources. Once again then, why should the Church take the trouble when the other NGOs are already operating?

The words of Pope Francis ring out: “The Church is not a mere NGO!” What is it then? What makes the Church and the Malta Emigrants’ Commission different from any other NGO?

The answer, I feel, is that further to the human values that are common between all men of goodwill and which move other NGOs to do what they do, the Church is motivated by a higher call made over two millennia ago: “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me.”

If Jesus talked with the lepers and prostitutes – the outcasts of the society He lived in – should the Church not imitate Him today with the outcasts of our society?

In the anonymous suffering and tribulations of these men and women, the Christian is invited to see the suffering of Christ. The Malta Emigrants’ Commission is, therefore, not a simple organisation which ‘helps’, but in this light it is transformed into an agency which ‘gives itself’ to the other.

Mother Teresa used to say: “Love until it hurts.” Working with the Commission has taught me this. Through it, the Church is loving until it hurts its pocket, loving until it hurts its social standing, loving until it hurts its resources – loving until it hurts.

I now know the answer to the question ‘why?’

To love the unloved.

Jean Govè is reading for a Bachelor’s degree in Sacred Theology.

Author: John Pace

Date: 17/10/2013

New norms to tackle migration

Allow me to congratulate the Prime Minister on his stand with regard to the problem of people flows triggered by the multiple tragedies in recent days in our waters.

His description of the Mediterranean turning in to a cemetery has certainly caught the attention of the media and his trip to Libya shows his desire to take practical measures to address the phenomenon.

But, as I warned the then Home Affairs Minister in 2001, this is not going to stop. It is only going to get worse.

This is a problem of international proportions and it will continue to get worse unless meaningful international action is taken. There is no domestic or regional solution. Each country – Malta included – is alone in trying to manage the quota of people who make it to its shores.

Except that, whereas other countries have more flexibility in absorption, in Malta’s case – as the Prime Minister has rightly pointed out – it is a matter of national security, given

our size and numbers. Nowhere is the anguish between respecting the obligation to assist others in misery and safeguarding one's own people more poignant.

The avowed intention to strengthen Frontex cannot be taken seriously. European Commissioner Cecilia Malmström's statement that she will be presenting a 'plan' to the Commission is simply too little, too late even if more boats were added to the current impossible few.

Even if the Libyan government were genuinely interested, it will simply not be capable of stemming the flow.

It is time for Malta to again take to the international stage. Its initiatives between the 1960s and 1980s made it possible to address issues of international dimension, in the law of the sea, the provision for the ageing and climate change.

Malta has done it before; it can do it again

All three are now firmly on the UN agenda and issues in the three areas are the subject of serious reflection and action. The UN does not have an international agency that deals with migration. The UNHCR does the best it can to protect refugees under a virtually extinct convention (the 1951 convention designed for refugee flows totally different from the people flows that are coming to our shores). The High Commissioner for Human Rights has not seriously engaged with the issue, neither has the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

This problem is international. It has woven itself into the Australian domestic political scene, bringing out the worst in Australian politicians. In spite of these shameful political stances, people continue to drown in scores in the seas between Indonesia and Australia and the number of asylum seekers keeps growing.

The eastern borders of Europe are not spared, with South Asians and others arriving in large numbers.

We all know about the problems of France and Britain and 'illegal migration' across the channel. The US has spent fortunes building fences and taking other measures to stem the flow of people from crossing into its territory from Mexico.

The solution cannot but be international, not only because of the physical dimensions but also because of its substantive complexity, conveniently labelled as conflict and poverty but much deeper.

The solution requires focused and serious action consistent with established international norms and new norms that are clearly essential.

Malta has done it before; it can do it again. The international community needs it, if anything to help the people who are losing their dignity and their lives so needlessly.

John Pace is an international human rights and humanitarian law expert with over 40 years experience.

Author: Lino Spiteri

Date: 28/10/2013

Stamping on irregular immigration

The way irregular migration is being debated in Malta is symptomatic of the prevailing low level of our political discussion. What seems to count most is not the causes, effects and future of the phenomenon. It is whether Joseph Muscat has managed to shift Euro opinion about what needs to be done. The Nationalist Opposition say he has not.

They seem to expect Malta to dominate proceedings and to be the centre of attraction at a meeting of 28 leaders.

Predictably, the meeting was, to a considerable extent, hijacked by the fact that the American security bosses had been eavesdropping on Angela Merkel for a decade, even

before she became Chancellor of Germany. And, along with her, thousands of other Germans, French and who knows who else.

The meeting did discuss irregular immigration and the flow of new-life seekers attempting to cross the Mediterranean from North Africa. And they did shift their position somewhat. They did so under pressure from Italy, Greece and Malta, yes. But more so under the shadow of collective deaths of hundreds of would-be immigrants simultaneously swallowed up by the cruel sea just off the coast of Lampedusa and, a couple of days later, of Malta too.

The Nationalists' main concern was that the Prime Minister had not stamped his feet loudly enough. He had not got his way. In fact, he left the meeting without Malta being mentioned even once in the communiqué afterwards.

These are childish arguments wasting everybody's time and avoiding the issue completely. Since the Prime Minister said Malta would stamp its feet until it was listened to, he has ran up a close understanding with the prime ministers of Italy and Greece. More than that, he has probably angered many of the rest of the Euro leaders.

The Nationalists see that as bad. In doing so, they renounce one of the main arguments used in favour of Malta being a member of the European Union, an argument which Simon Busuttill presumably remembers well. It was that, through membership, Malta would have a seat at the negotiating table equal to that of the biggest EU member; that Malta's vote was equivalent to that of the rest of the EU, despite its minuscule size.

Joseph Muscat is realist enough to understand that stamping alone is not enough

They also forget precedent. Margaret Thatcher got her way in the EU in favour of Britain not through easy-cosy diplomacy. Her diplomacy remains symbolised to this day by the stubborn and symbolically threatening waving of her handbag. The lady who was not for turning in her party grimly demonstrated she was not for turning in the EU.

That is history. But, in the present-day reality, the British government wants changes in the EU in favour of Britain and to get them is prepared to risk the British people voting to leave the EU in a referendum.

Stamping one's feet is a metaphor. On the other hand, Muscat is realist enough to understand that stamping alone is not enough. That is why he built bridges with other leaders. Beyond that there is the extreme position that signals Malta cannot be taken for granted on other matters of relevance to the EU if its concerns about irregular immigration are not given due attention.

As with all those in the same boat, Malta is concerned about the dangers to which sad boat people put themselves as they flee across the waters to escape from tyranny or to seek a better way of living. Malta shares in the proposals to try to make the Mediterranean Sea safer for boat people. But the story, sad as that chapter is, does not begin or end there.

The story is about working to help Libya control its borders to minimise the flow of boat people. It is about the unfairness of Greece, Italy and Malta having to house irregular immigrants who are trying to enter the wider Europe, not necessarily those countries themselves. It is about the principle of burden sharing, which should be practised by a European Union if it truly believed in solidarity.

And, finally, it is about the cost of housing boat people who make it to shore and doing so temporarily and not so temporarily. If there was one issue that should unite our politicians, it is irregular immigration.

But the Nationalists seek to make a political football out of it, instead of backing the Government in its endeavours for the good of Malta.

Sad, sad Malta.

Author: Joseph Vella Bonnici

Date: 05/11/2013

Migration on EU's agenda

In an ideal world, migration would be a matter of choice not of survival. It is not a modern phenomenon; throughout the ages, humans took great risks in search of greener pastures or to escape from the injustices of despotic rulers.

As we patiently await the 'end of history', where we will all live in a globalised, democratic village, there are still hundreds of thousands of people leaving their homes, crossing desert and sea, in the hope of settling in the Promised Land.

Many of these are considered to be irregular migrants as when setting out on their journey they lack the necessary documentation which would assure them of reaching their destination. Indeed, many fail to get there. It is estimated that only one in every five irregular African migrants makes it to Europe. Another one in 10 dies along the way. The rich countries have sophisticated control systems at their borders to keep these migrants out.

And yet the EU claims that, given its ageing population, it needs an inflow of about 1.5 million migrants annually over the next 50 years. But rather than opening their channels for regular migration, European states seem to prefer to depend on irregular immigrants seeping through their systems. Unfortunately, this policy has a very high human cost, as evidenced by the two recent tragedies between Lampedusa and Malta in which almost 600 people lost their lives.

It seems that European authorities condone the human trafficking that is taking place. Irregular immigration is big business managed by well-organised criminal networks. Is it so difficult to identify the ring-leaders behind these networks? Why is the EU so reluctant to take a more proactive stand? Will it give due consideration to Malta's proposal to set up centres in North Africa to receive applications from asylum seekers? Intervention is needed on land not on the open seas.

In a recent article, Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, pointed out that increasing asylum pressure is not solely a problem of Mediterranean countries. She said that in 2012, the EU had 330,000 asylum requests and these were filed with Germany (75,000), France (60,000), Sweden (44,000), Belgium (28,000) and UK (28,000).

Italy received 'only' 15,700 and Malta 2,000 requests. What Malmström failed to mention is that many of the Mediterranean countries already face severe financial and social difficulties. Neither did she say which other migratory channel resulted in the dead of over 20,000 people in the last decade.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees the number of boat-people crossing from North Africa to Italy has more than doubled to 32,000. This is partly due to the civil war in Syria but also to quasi-failed states in North and Central Africa. Irregular immigration is a complex subject, but Europe cannot continue to drag its feet. More decisive action is necessary which goes beyond throwing more money at the problem.

It is surprising that Jose Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, insists there are no magical solutions. Where was he in the last 10 years? How right is Nicolas Beger, director of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office, in stating that "Europe's priority clearly is not to save lives or to protect people along the borders. Instead it is to prevent people from arriving in Europe at all costs, even if those people are in need of safety and protection"? (October 25).

There is now hope that the EU will change its stand. Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament and the likely successor of Barroso, agrees that the EU needs a

new, coherent migration policy. At their last summit EU leaders agreed to set up a task force to draft a short-term plan of action “for a more efficient use of European policies and tools”. This plan will be considered during the December summit, with longer-term measures being discussed in June 2014. Hermann Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, tried to set the context for future EU action; it will be guided by the principles of prevention, protection and solidarity with a migrant relocation programme being crucial for an equitable sharing of the burden.

Intervention is needed on land not on the open seas

For Malta it is critical that the EU comes up with the right measures on irregular immigration. Our small size and stage of economic development limits our capacity to help these unfortunate people.

Only by protecting the national (public) interest can Malta ensure it carries a fair share of the burden. Our leaders have to be firm to be kind. The irony is that while we Maltese see ourselves as victims of obsolete EU policies, others accuse us of insensitivity in the way we treat asylum seekers.

The International Commission of Jurists decreed that Malta was guilty of violating the human rights of irregular immigrants.

The sad thing is that we have not seen the finale of this tragic saga. If the EU fails to come up with effective measures the boat people will keep coming. It is said that hope is the last to die. We should be proud that Malta has played a leading role in putting irregular migration on the EU agenda. It is now up to Greece and Italy, which will successively hold the EU presidency in 2014, to ensure that it stays there for as long as is necessary.

Author: Maria Teresa Sette

Date: 12/12/2013

Change the migration story

People who have chosen to put themselves through a perilous journey deserve their dignity back.

The public and political debate around migration in most European countries has taken on the tone of mass hysteria. The rancid rhetoric of immigrants who are invading our countries, threatening our national security, capsizing our economy and welfare system and imposing their barbaric cultural and religious habits on our civilised society is echoing throughout Europe, supported by the same mix of unfounded arguments, cheap prejudices and irrational fear of the unknown.

Visiting Malta last week, where I was invited to address this topic in a public talk, I was therefore not surprised to hear that immigration is the high-voltage issue everywhere. Along with Italy, Greece and Spain, Malta has been at the epicentre of Europe’s immigration crises in the last few years.

The anti-immigrant tension in the island is tangible.

The general perception among Maltese citizens that they have been abandoned by the European institutions is understandable if seen in the light of the lack of a coherent migration and asylum policy at EU level. As equally understandable is the frustration of a small country that was caught unprepared to deal with a relatively new phenomenon which is inevitably posing new challenges and reshaping the island’s society, economy and culture.

What is hardly defensible, however, is the groundless belief that the changes caused by the inflow of people who are fleeing wars, human rights abuses and poverty in search for a better life in Europe necessarily represent a threat. And disturbing it is to hear that – fuelled by this false perception – sentiments of hostility, especially targeting African

migrants, are becoming more popular in the public chit-chat and degenerating into hate speech on online forums and social media.

This is happening in Malta as anywhere else in Europe.

Migration is a global and human rights issue, being driven by a basic human instinct to survive and to break away from poor life conditions

Extremist nationalist ideologies are gaining support in many EU member states and xenophobic discourse is resurfacing in the public arena. With the upcoming European Parliament elections next year, many observers fear that these trends could lead to the most anti-European Parliament in history, which may ultimately have devastating impacts on our democracies as well as on the very existence of the EU.

Yet, politicians don't seem to be particularly attentive as they are too focused on pandering to easy populism and feeding voters' concerns. Do we really have to wait and see the effects of this hatred before we take action? If we don't, then, it is the time to end this toxic immigration debate and try and put it in the right perspective.

We need a whole new narrative for migration and asylum. We need to immediately rethink the storytelling. This must start from the media, which so often have fallen into the trap of exacerbating ugly stereotypes and, sometimes without realising, of inciting misinformation and intolerance.

It's up to us journalists to start telling a different story. The media can and must take the lead in shifting the public perceptions and eventually oblige our governments to lift their collective heads out of the sand.

Telling a different story about migration means first of all getting rid of all the misleading arguments that are poisoning the climate. It means challenging the dominant myths, getting the numbers and facts right.

When, early this year, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development found that the fiscal impact of immigration on the most advanced economies among the 34 OECD member countries has been slightly positive in terms of GDP, very little space and relevance was given to this news. Neither did this finding stop politicians from feeding misunderstandings in the public opinion.

In fact, it seems like despite the growing body of evidence contradicting the common views on immigration, the gap between public perception and the actual facts grows wider and wider.

Telling a different story means, most importantly, recognising once and for all that migration is a global and human rights issue, being driven by a basic human instinct to survive and to break away from poor life conditions.

It will require an act of intellectual honesty and the lowest dose of cynicism from politicians to admit that there is no Frontex that could ever stop that.

People, with or without papers, who have chosen to put themselves through a perilous journey, aware of facing death, in order to escape conflicts, any kind of persecutions, economic misery, deserve, first and foremost, their dignity back.

We journalists shouldn't be too cautious to give these stories the importance they deserve, let the migrants get involved in the debate and let them speak for themselves. And, as citizens of a civilized society, before embarking on myopic discussions over border controls or deportation policies, we should first be able to empathise with the experiences of these people on a human level.

As long as our biased debate keeps focusing instead on the 'illegal immigrants' narrative, we will not be able to discuss human beings and their rights for protection. Instead, we will keep missing the point, gripped as we are by a collective paranoia around a dehumanized and abstract entity serving only as a scapegoat for political opportunism and for our most irrational fears.

Maria Teresa Sette is an Italian freelance journalist.

Author: Kristina Chetcuti

Date: 09/02/2014

The man who made kids understand the story behind the migrants' journey

The book tells the story of Kidane, a young student in Eritrea, who at 23 took the decision to flee his country.

This column is about Goitom Yosief. He lived in Malta for eight years, after fleeing Eritrea. Last Wednesday, he left our island for repatriation in the US.

I first met Goitom two years ago, when I had interviewed him about a children's book, Kidane – A Story of Hope, published by the Jesuit Refugee Service.

The book tells the story of Kidane, a young student in Eritrea, who at 23 took the decision to flee his country. It illustrates the perils of the trip, the sadness at not seeing his family and his wish to be a geography teacher.

"It is based on my real story, even though it was not easy for me to share it because every time I have to remember the horrific parts," Goitom had told me, calmly, softly-spokenly.

"But the more schools I visit and the more children I speak to, the more convinced I am that more people need to share their stories and speak out."

Goitom had one overarching hope for the book: that it would help children understand that there are stories, individuals and aspirations behind asylum seekers who come to Malta.

The book's aim is not to help refugees but to help Maltese children understand the causes of migration in general: "It is important for children to know about other cultures and why people move."

From first-hand experience, I could see that it was brilliant: my daughter and her friends, then aged five, loved the book and its illustrations, and it was the perfect platform for us to talk about why some people are forced to run away from their country and how hard the journey is.

While working for the Jesuit Refugee Service, Goitom ran the school outreach programme, organising ethnic activities like drumming or hair plaiting. Refugees then shared their story of why they had to come to Malta. A lot of misconceptions were cleared away through this interaction between children and refugees.

I attended a few of the workshops he did with children: they were given a copy of the book and shown maps of the journey so they can understand better the atrocious distances.

Each time, at the end, when Goitom told them he was 'Kidane', the children bombarded him with questions: "How did you get past the soldiers?"; "Do you have anywhere to live now?"; "Are you working as a geography teacher?"

He answered the questions clearly but simply. The children's main worries were that he had to leave his family behind: "Did you tell your parents that you were going to leave?"; "Have you called your family since you came here?"

And they were anxious that he might be lonely here: "Do you have any family in Malta?"; "Are you happy in Malta now?"; "Will you see your family again?"

It is based on my real story, even though it was not easy for me to share it because every time I have to remember the horrific parts

It was all clear testimony to how much easier it is to advocate human rights and work on cultural diversity with younger children than with adults. In a single workshop, several myths were being busted. Children learnt how refugees did not live off the taxpayer, but worked and paid tax and national insurance.

In simple terms children were made to understand the asylum protection process: how strict the procedure is and how some asylum seekers deserved protection but didn't get it because they didn't have proof that they had run away from their country, so they had to have their visa renewed every few months.

That was two years ago. We bumped into each other again on Tuesday, the day before he left for the States. We were joking how before he came to Malta, he had learnt English through Hollywood movies and spoke with an American drawl.

"But after eight years here, I'll go to America speaking English with a Maltese accent."

Leaving Malta was a bitter-sweet decision for him. He loved Malta and found his work rewarding but was not granted refugee status.

"I'd like a bit of stability now." In the US, after a number of years, he'll be able to get his citizenship. While I am very happy for him, I think it is a sad loss to our society. Goitom worked tirelessly for diversity integration for our future generations. It's only thanks to his work and that of others that we can stave off horrific incidents such as the court case we saw last week of two Detention Service officers accused of the involuntary murder of a Nigerian migrant three years ago.

It makes you think how much more healthy our society would be if we gave citizenships to people who gave their soul to the country rather than their money.

Best of luck Goitom.

Author: Mark Anthony Falzon

Date: 16/03/2014

Let there be migrants' riots

There are many reasons why Friday's report on the disturbance at Lyster Detention Centre earlier this year doesn't impress me much. For one, I didn't find the disturbances at all disturbing. I rather thought of them as the predictable and desirable result of a policy that insists on locking up migrants for up to 18 months and denying them all access to the staples of a democratic society – things like the media and so on.

Why 'desirable'? Because there are circumstances in which protest by any means fair or foul is the only chance to make one's voice heard. I wouldn't call the Tienanmen or the June 7, 1919, riots undesirable or unwarranted. The first were the only means of representation possible in an oppressive state, the second the result of widespread poverty and injustice at the hands of the British and their menagerie of fat toadies.

The clue is in the timing. The riots at Lyster took place on the day of a visit by a parliamentary delegation (a rather passive one, apparently). It's obvious that the riot was one of representation. And, since I think representation is desirable, it follows that I should deem the riots necessary. Ugly, as in the best part riots are, but desirable nonetheless. The real mystery is why the riots don't happen more often. I suppose rubber bullets and batons provide useful clues.

There's also a bit of a question as to why there was only one riot rather than two: the first inside the centre and the second outside, by a crowd of journalists demanding access and information. Then again, the Eurovision song contest and the litany of stories of big-hearted Maltese ('il-qalb kbira tal-Maltin') must be seen to.

The second reason why I wasn't exactly flummoxed by the report is in the following lines: "Over the years, stakeholders in the sector, particularly NGOs, have argued against detention, which may cause frustration among irregular migrants. It is however to be recalled that those in need of international protection are granted such protection, along with attendant rights ...".

I love the "may cause frustration" bit. It reminds me of the Burns inquiry of 2000 which concluded, among other things, that foxhunting "may compromise the welfare of the

fox". What can I say? If 18 months of detention may cause frustration, migrants must be a right edgy bunch.

But there's a more serious side to this. It's obvious that the authors of the report believe detention is acceptable. They even say there is "a need to retain a detention policy on the basis of security considerations", among other things. It follows that they should read the riot as a disturbance of the rightful order.

It wasn't that. Detention has consistently been shown to play dirty tricks on inmates' state of mind and to have long-lasting effects on their psychological and social welfare. The arguments for are, frankly speaking, ridiculous. Take that from 'security'. The idea apparently is that it is necessary to detain migrants in order to be able to weed out any terrorists. Nonsense, for three reasons.

First, it flies in the face of all the recent evidence which shows that terrorists are usually well-organised and well-equipped enough not to have to travel half-naked in wobbly boats. The Mumbai attacks of 2008 came from the sea alright, but the terrorists used high-speed inflatables and carried an arsenal of weapons and equipment.

Second, if the possibility of budding Bin Ladens were real, detention would be a recipe for disaster. I can't think of a better recruiting ground for terrorists than a prison full of disaffected and desperate young men.

Third, the notion that we are surrounded by a hidden enemy, and that anyone who is a bit dark is likely to spend their spare time plotting and fiddling with fuses, is a pig-headed legacy of the George W. Bush days. That paranoia poisoned our lives and made a nightmare of the simple act of packing a hand-luggage. The sooner we leave it behind, the better.

Which leaves us with a question. If the official arguments are obviously baseless, what are the real reasons behind the detention policy?

It is clear to me that the policy is based on two principles. The first is that of deterrence. Detention sends a message to prospective migrants, the logic goes. That message is that life in Malta for asylum seekers is nasty, brutish, and best avoided.

The real mystery is why the riots don't happen more often

The principle of deterrence was spelled out in a public meeting held at Safi in 2005. The exact words were that the best solution to the problem of migration is to make the lives of migrants "as arduous as possible". The speaker at that event was Imperium Europa leader Norman Lowell. That doesn't necessarily mean that the logic is flawed, but it does give us some idea of its ideological and moral bearings.

Which is the whole point really. The principle of deterrence by detention and/or other means is immoral, whether or not it actually works. (Concentration camps served their purpose rather well, I suppose.) It is based on a sick collectivist ideology that overlooks individual suffering for the sake of some grand scheme of social engineering. It is, quite simply, fascist.

The second principle on which the detention policy is based is that of sectioning and its political dividends. The bogeyman in question is black and comes to us by the boatload. There are millions of bogeymen in North Africa waiting to do just that. It's a national emergency (never mind that boats have been rather thin on the water of late) which calls for decisive action by our elected champions.

Only they can't do very much about it. That's where Plan B comes in. If you can't keep the bogeyman out of the island, you can at least keep him out of general circulation – or appear to be doing so.

If this were a scholarly piece I would at this stage lapse into 'techniques of marginalisation' jargon and such. I would also probably mention the numerous examples of such techniques that have been described by migration scholars. But since

it isn't I'll just say it's all a matter of political expediency really, paid for once again by the suffering of migrants in detention.

I don't care much if the rubber bullets came from "warning shots" that were "clearly off-target" (that report again). The point is that riots are what you get when you proceed to make, in a systematic and institutionalised way, people's lives as arduous as possible.

Author: Martin Scicluna

Date: 20/05/2014

EU agenda on migration

Migrants disembark from the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (Moas) ship MV Phoenix in the Sicilian harbour of Messina last Saturday. Photo: Antonio Parrinello/Reuters

Compared with what is happening in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, the plan announced recently by the European Union in the wake of the EU leaders' emergency summit convened a fortnight earlier is a model of compassion. Contrast what is happening in the Bay of Bengal with the Mediterranean Sea. It is the difference between saving lives and perpetuating the tide of human misery of desperate people escaping persecution, abject poverty or broken states.

As Europe's near neighbours, Libya and Syria are our major problems. After four years of civil war in Syria, there are four million refugees. Tens of thousands have headed to North Africa seeking passage to Europe, joining migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Nigeria, Niger, the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Mali in a desperate scramble from Africa and the Middle East.

The EU plan launched on May 13 – the 'Agenda on Migration' – is a mixture of the old and the new. Some of the recommendations were expected. The budget for maritime patrols will treble. The EU's macho proposals to confront people-traffickers by force. The need for EU countries to speed up the process of separating refugees from economic migrants.

Specialised technical teams from the EU agencies will support front line member states that face sudden influxes, the intention being to select the economic migrants that countries deem they need and deport those they do not want. Experience in Malta shows this is easier said than done. Indeed, throughout the EU the return rate of failed asylum seekers has been a dismal 40 per cent.

Over the long term, the plan makes provisions for financial assistance to countries of origin, including overdue changes to trade policies which stifle growth in developing countries. The problem with this is that – vitally helpful for economic growth though it will be – overseas aid will take time to bear fruit. Development assistance of a few hundred million euros will not prevent economic migrants setting out on their perilous journeys for richer rewards in Europe.

Moreover, too little aid is going to the countries – Lebanon, Turkey, Palestine and Jordan – that host the vast majority of Syria's refugees. The plan recommends the EU takes a total of 20,000 refugees who are still in these countries when it is estimated that there are millions of Syrian refugees languishing in camps. The United Nations Refugee Commissioner says the EU should take in 20,000 each year, a considerable increase on what the EU is offering. The scale of the EU effort is clearly unequal to the task.

The more controversial element of the plan concerns the call for mandatory relocation of most asylum-seekers who reach the EU based on a quota mechanism so that the burden of processing them may be more equally shared instead of, as now, falling mainly on front line states like Malta and Italy. A legislative proposal for the

introduction of a permanent system of ‘responsibility-sharing’ among member states will be tabled by the end of the year.

It will be a mark of strength if the EU were able to share responsibility and act equitably and decisively in a common cause

The country quotas – based on a distribution key formula made up of population size, economic strength, unemployment and refugees already present – are linked to a proposal for the resettlement within the EU of 20,000 asylum-seekers over a period of two years. However, the total of 20,000 to be resettled in this way is a drop in the ocean compared to the 170,000 who attempted the Mediterranean crossing last year.

Eastern European countries with no experience of housing and integrating refugees may well object to the small sums of money on offer to help introduce the quota scheme. Hungary’s right-wing government has already complained. Only four countries – France, Germany, Italy and Spain – have been asked to take more than 1,000 refugees while the UK, Ireland and Denmark will not form part of these measures due to earlier opt-outs from the relevant EU treaty.

It is an achievement that big countries like France, Germany and Italy support the plan but the bar may well be lowered when EU leaders meet again in June to debate the proposals. Frans Timmerman, the powerful Dutch vice president of the European Commission – one of the very few commissioners worth his political salt – has overseen much of this work. He hopes the idea will restore public trust in a broken and inequitable system. It might even open the way to more ambitious plans in the future.

In parallel, the migration plan envisages the deployment of warships off the coast of Libya to target people-smugglers and to “disrupt their business model”.

The UK and France will be seeking a UN mandate from the Security Council on behalf of the EU for a naval operation inside Libyan waters.

Libyan cooperation to dismantle the criminal networks will be vital. I doubt both the military practicability of this proposal and its political feasibility. A Russian veto is highly likely.

The only practical way to keep migrants out of the Mediterranean Sea is to set up transit camps in North African countries for those intercepted on their way to Europe. These can be designed to take people rescued at sea or as arrival points for those carrying out the long trek across Africa to reach the North African coast.

Their asylum applications can then be considered in the transit camps, thus enabling the EU to exercise some control over the whole process without exposing the migrants to the hazardous sea journey or imposing on front line countries the administrative, financial and social burdens of handling the applications of thousands rescued at sea. Talks between the EU and Tunisia are already under way and it is thought Morocco, Niger and Nigeria may also take part in the scheme.

Getting the scheme right will be hard and may take time. Clear incentives in the form of generous financial aid to the host countries and human expertise to process asylum applications in conjunction with the UNHCR will be crucial. Assessing eligibility for asylum in Africa, rather than Europe, will make it easier to control migrants’ movements and attack at source the notorious human-trafficking market.

The European Commission, which has ducked and weaved around the problems of immigration for at least the last 10 years, is to be commended for finally making a manful attempt at designing a comprehensive plan of action. It is still riddled with gaps and weaknesses. Some of the proposals – such as the imaginative plan to set up transit camps in Africa – will take time to implement. Others – such as the military action to disrupt the people-traffickers in Libya – may fall foul of UN diplomatic infighting and prove wholly impracticable in any case.

But, at least, the Commission has faced up to the scale of the problem and put forward an agenda to tackle it collectively.

The proposals must be approved by EU leaders in June. They will bring to the table the usual squabbles. Countries will seek to wriggle out of their responsibilities. But the auguries for a constructive agenda for EU migration seem more hopeful than they have been for more than a decade.

In such a crisis, it will be a mark of strength if the EU were able to share responsibility and act equitably and decisively in a common cause.