Chapter 1: Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Society

Internationalisation and **Multiculturalism** in Maltese Society

Dr Khalid Arar

Migration is an ancient phenomenon; however, the extent, duration, and consequences of present–day international migration seem far more complex and challenging than in the past. In the 21st century, various factors generate migration, ranging from civil and international wars to political and economic crises (for example, Venezuela) and to simply the search for a better life (Arar, Orucu and Waite 2020). Over the last three decades, many wars have displaced enormous populations – including the first and second Gulf Wars, the Gaza War, the Somalian Civil War, the Bosnian War, the Arab Spring conflicts in the Middle East, the Colombian Civil War, the Iraq War, the Afghanistan War (Banks 2017; Waite 2016). Regime change and political conflict have also engendered vast population moves as seen in the Arab Spring followed by the Syrian and Yemenite civil wars, (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019; Banks 2017; Dryden–Peterson 2016; Hatton 2017; UNHCR 2001–2020; Waite 2016). Moreover, developments in transportation and communication around the globe have facilitated a constant flow of people from one country to another through either conventional or illegal, sometimes fatal paths (Arar, Kondakci and Streitwieser 2020). The number of migrants constantly increased from 174 million in 1995 towards 272 million in 2019, meaning that approximately 3.5% of the total global population was on the move in 2019 (IOM 2020). These movements are also intertwined with technological developments:

> *Migration is intertwined with technology and innovation and there exists a large body of analysis that has assessed how international migration acts to support (and sometimes limit) the transfer of technology and knowledge, often working in tandem with investment and trade flows along historical, geographic and geopolitical connections between countries and communities (IOM 2020: 8).*

Because people search for security, employment and education, they inevitably move from unstable states with failing economies to more successful states where they have the possibility of a better life (Arar 2020). Yet, displaced people form a distinct group within the total number of international

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migrants. According to the IOM (2020), approximately 40 million migrants were classified as "displaced persons" in 2019, while according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2001–2020) the current number of those recognised as registered refugees exceeds 25.4 million. There is little hope expressed by futuristic estimates for a decrease in international immigrants and the number of displaced persons is not expected to fall (Arar et al. 2020). This means that effective policies are urgently needed that can help manage international migration and provide for the acute needs of different types of migrants (IOM 2020).

Various economic and social benefits derive from migration for both countries of origin and destination countries (IOM 2020). According to Bauman (2011), globalization enables wealthy nations to entice and solicit people from poor nations. Mass marketing nurtures sometimes artificial needs, tempting people in less developed nations to improve their material welfare by migrating to work in wealthier nations. Migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia fall prey to exploitative smugglers and human traffickers to transport them by sea to Europe and Australia on voyages that sometimes end in their deaths. Other luckier migrants are accepted and absorbed by the target states and are able to become contributing members of the host society:

> *Countries of destination benefit significantly from migration as migrants often fill critical labour gaps, create jobs as entrepreneurs, and pay taxes and social security contributions. Some migrants are among the most dynamic members of the host society contributing to the development of science and technology and enriching their host communities by providing cultural diversity. (United Nations 2018: 1).*

However, many governments are unwilling to recognise or invest the necessary resources to develop these benefits (Arar 2020). Populist politicians magnify and exploit xenophobic perceptions through mass media (Waite 2016). Cultivating support of populations suffering from economic or social difficulties, they argue that immigrants threaten the host country's national security, erroneously claiming that forced

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immigrants cannot possibly have the necessary skills to integrate within the host country's socio–economic structures and inhibit their assimilation (IOM 2020). Applying these tendentious perceptions, host country education systems may, for example, refuse to recognise the educational credentials of immigrants or refuse to admit them to vocational training, which then marginalises this population and may eliminate any potential contributions they could be making to their given host society (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019).

War generates a humanitarian crisis, not just for warring nations: civilians caught in the crossfires are forced to migrate to escape suffering and even death (Dryden–Peterson 2016). The initial target countries for persons displaced by war and political crises are neighbouring countries, creating new hardships for other nations and their governments (Arar, Orucu and Waite 2020; Banks 2017). Nations recently affected include Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Malta, Italy and Greece, each recently overwhelmed by waves of displaced persons and forced to cope with these war–torn, traumatised populations seeking safety, shelter and new lives. The estimated number and proportion of international migrants already surpasses some projections made for the year 2050, which were in the order of 230 million (2.6% of world population) (IMO 2020).

While some displaced persons hope to distance themselves as far as possible from the traumas of their homeland, others cherish hopes of repatriation once the situation in their homeland improves. Those who fear to return often pass through the initial countries of sanctuary hoping to reach more distant, wealthier countries, but these countries may be less willing to accept them or to give them shelter (Loo, Bernhard and Jeong 2018). According to recent reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, of the 70.8 million displaced persons worldwide who were forced to leave their homes, half are under 18; and most were denied access to basic rights such as education, health services, employment and freedom of movement (UNHCR 2001–2020).

Destitute migrants have little chance of travelling beyond their initial port of sanctuary. In this context, distinctions are drawn between migrants who voluntarily seek better living

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conditions, and forced migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, forcibly displaced from their homeland (Arar 2020). Many of the latter category will never be officially recognised as refugees and may remain stuck in displaced persons camps, waiting for years to complete the process of recognition as asylum seekers or remain as stateless persons (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019; Dryden–Peterson 2016). An Oxfam Media Briefing (2016) notes that the six wealthiest countries in the world: US, UK, France, China, Germany and Japan, which make up more than half the global economy, accept less than 9% of the world's refugees (see Burnett 2017). As a consequence, ten Middle Eastern and African countries host 86 % of the world's displaced population, and 60% of the world's recognised refugees — Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR 2016).

In declarative terms, the world's sovereign nations pay service to the ideal that all nations should contribute for the care and reintegration of the displaced victims of war and socio–economic disturbances (Arar 2020). International conferences have noted the difficulties involved in meeting the needs of peoples moving between different countries for various humanitarian and economic reasons (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017; UNHCR 2017a) and there has been ongoing debate as to the degree with which this responsibility should be shared equitably among the developed nations. Since 2017, the world has witnessed historic change at the global level with United Nations Member States coming together to finalise two global compacts on migration and displacement (IOM 2020). However, the US President, speaking at the United Nations on the 25 September 2019, firmly disagrees with this humanitarian view, urging nations to protect their sovereignty and borders, and to restrict immigration by refugees and other migrants.

Different countries' response to this humanitarian crisis range from 'acceptance' and 'containment', to 'forced and temporary acceptance' and controlled and selective acceptance, to the closure of borders and the application of sanctions, accompanied by hostile nationalist discourse. Migrant and refugee coping policies can range from proactive welcoming policies, as in Germany and Canada, to active rejection.

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Indeed, Trump's rejection of migrants has been followed by states such as Hungary, which has reinforced its exclusionary borders, and Poland, which, despite labour shortages, has refused Middle Eastern refugees (Santora 2019).

In essence, the issue of dealing with immigration stemming from the refugee crisis raises moral questions and public–political discourse challenging the host society's resilience and the extent of its willingness to welcome and absorb those seen as "others", and tested by constant open questions. The host country's reception policy shapes how official and community social systems respond to the migrant phenomenon, including the policy outlines of educational and social institutions and the procedures they will operate and resources that will assist them to meet the challenge of absorbing immigrants or refugees. (Arar, Brooks and Bogotch 2019).

This involves multiple challenges and specific tasks. For example: the majority of refugee youth have missed years of schooling and feel a sense of cultural isolation, especially since it may take time for them to master the language of the host state (Arar et al. 2020). Socially, they usually endure poverty and deprivation. This situation engenders a state of alienation and marginality and there may be clashes with the absorbing state's population and narratives (Arar, Örücü and Ak Kücükcayir 2019; Norberg and Gross 2018; Waite 2016). Yet, national education systems are the factor that has the potential to rehabilitate and rebuild the lives of young migrants by offering them care and new education opportunities (Arar, 2020).

This complex reality is also reflected in educational research, although little research has been devoted to the influence of large migration flows on host states' education systems (Arar et al. 2020; Banks 2017; Dryden–Peterson 2016; Thondhlana 2017; Norberg and Cross 2018; Waite 2016). Nevertheless, a number of studies in this field indicate a strong interrelation between discrimination and ineffective state policies for the integration of refugees (Banks 2017; Norberg 2017; Waite 2016). Educational leaders obviously have the means required to leverage education services and to produce inclusive processes based on justice and corrective assistance that can

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shape positive educational experiences for migrant children and their families (Arar 2020). However, the necessary support and assistance for migrants has not yet been sufficiently understood or brought to public awareness, and there is limited relevant information for educational policy–makers, researchers and field workers coping with this issue when they seek guidance, information and strategies to produce and implement suitable policies (Arar et al. 2020; Bogotch and Kervin 2019). Therefore, this chapter attempts to examine how the phenomenon of immigration has affected Maltese society. And there are two main sub–questions: How does the education system in Malta deal with the absorption of immigrants? And how can policy–makers and educational leaders apply inclusive education for immigrants, engendering social cohesion and multicultural discourse to facilitate the integration of these newcomers?

An article by **Fenech** and **Seguna** draws an interesting map of the major changes that have taken place in the internationalization process in Maltese society, while attempting to characterise the push factors that have brought migrants to sanctuary in Malta and the factors that attracted these migrants particularly to this country. The article sketches the profiles of the migrants, relating to the timeline of their stay, their sense of belonging and language and the way in which education and social systems in Malta responded to the multifaceted challenge of absorbing this foreign population. The scholarly analysis emerging from the article characterises the personal and communal integration of immigrant students into the education system and shows how Maltese society is affected by this diversity. Important policy conclusions are derived from the findings of this paper which, if adopted, can help the authorities to better address this complex challenge. The macro–conceptualization that this article provides includes linking the transformations of internationalization in Maltese society with similar transformation over the globe.

Chircop's article dives into the changes that have taken place in the Maltese society and which have shaped it as a pluralistic society moving towards multiculturalism grounded in legalization and socio–cultural discourse. These processes have, among other things, weakened the ethnocentrism

that characterised Maltese society in earlier generations. Discourse on diversity and multiculturalism has become the heart of Maltese education leadership's policies and practices. In this article, this discourse is represented through the in–depth interview narratives of 19 public and church education teachers on issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to analyse the gathered data. The educators' constructions of Maltese society and the social diversity within it reflects their location as citizens of an island nation, with some of the participants seeking to preserve their visions and traditions of an imagined traditional community while others look outwards and embrace change as something positive. They provide multiple conceptualizations of Maltese society and its social diversity, reflecting the geopolitics, history, religion and size of the island.

The two articles together paint a complete picture, with the first providing a scholarly framework for consideration of the phenomenon of internationalization, while the second article thickens this picture, presenting the discourse that is interwoven within the educational system on multiculturalism, and intercultural issues as defined by James Banks (2017) and Will Kymlicka (2017).

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