

Globalization Processes

an introductory selection of Omertaa Articles

by Kim Tondeur, editor

ARTICLES

Mall as a Measure of Society

by Brian Rosenblatt

Maltese Bread, a Changing Symbol of the island's identity

by Greta Kliewer

Bottles in Suitcases, jugs on floors. Wine, tourism, the European Union, and Cultural identity on Gozo, Malta

by Ian Tangert

Changing tides, Women, lace, and economy in Modern-day Gozo

by Marlaina Martin

Eating in the real Gozo, Sound, authenticity, and identity in Gozitan restaurants

by Bryce Peake

VOLUME INFO

Keywords
identity, globalization, agency, post-colonialism

How to refer to this article

Tondeur K, ed., Globalization Processes, an introductory selection of Omertaa Articles, 2014, Omertaa, Journal of applied anthropology, <http://www.omertaa.org/archive/omertaa0074.pdf>

As a young anthropologist living in Malta since two months, it often happens to me to hear tourists or young expatriate workers telling me that Maltese people don't have any cultural identity. "Look at their history", one would say while referring to the colonial past of the island, "they are just a big mix of everything!". Strangely enough, it is also common for foreigners to look down on Malta saying that Maltese people can not adapt themselves to Europe and modernity, neither enter our globalized world. "They look like Europe did thirty years ago!", "they are stuck in their traditions!". Others also stand that "Maltese government policies are moving too fast to please European laws and style", thus exposing the genuine and resilient Maltese culture to a certain upcoming crisis. What is more, on a national scale, one would not be surprised to hear a Maltese looking down on Gozo using the exact same kind of narratives.

Those types of narrative can be used either to victimize or Blame. Indeed, as other countries from the "Global South", Malta is also often described as the "victim of global processes imposed by external [...] forces (colonialism, neo-liberalism and globalization)" or as the black sheep unable "to conform [itself] to an idea of modernity of neo-liberal imprint" (Locatelli and Nugent 2009: 3). As it has been noticed by other scholars in other contexts, "both interpretations underestimate people's variety of ways to negotiate, resist, mediate global processes" (Locatelli and Nugent 2009: 3). It also gives evidence that our understanding of current situations is altered by "cognitive schemata" (Boltanski and Bourdieu 2008) inherited from or colonial past, such as dichotomies opposing the North to the South, globalities to localities, modernity to tradition, and many more; framing what Edward Saïd once denounced as the cultural hegemonic domination of northeast societies (Saïd 1980).

Stuck between Europe and Africa, colonized many times by societies from the both, living mostly on tourism and recently entered in the European Union, Malta features

the main characteristics and dynamics of a postcolonial state, calling social scientists to study it with the suitable focal and methodological tools. In order to break down essentializing narratives like ones above and restore Maltese's historicity and specificity, one thus need to take on a longitudinal and multilayered approach (i.e. combining local, national and international scales). It is in this path that the authors presented below engaged themselves in the field, aiming to best navigate maltese's agency and cultural hybridity. This way only, "giving equal attention to the localization of the global and the globalization of the local" (Escobar 2001: 156) in a specific context and period of time, it is possible for anthropologists to move beyond colonialist cognitive schemata as to avoid the pitfalls of "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989).

Agency, bricolage, hibridity, are all terms that carried with them a lot of enthusiasm among scholars, politicians and agents of development policies and organizations, some looking at agency as a real solution d'avenir. Others may also have consider it in a more pessimistic or cynic way as a "naïve 'art of survival'" (Locatelli and Nugent 2009: 4). Whatever by choice or imposed to them on the Maltese context of an omnipresent touristic industry, we therefore find it relevant and valuable that all the authors of this selection draw more or less directly on topics related to economical issues carried by global processes. This should contribute to build Maltese agency in its social and material conditions of emergence. It is indeed important to remind us that cultural bricolage is often more something of a constraint resource resulting of a structural imbalance than a simple form of salutary expression : "Homo Ludens" (Mbembe 1992) tricks to survive.

In his study of Gozitan business, Brian Rosenblatt (Mall as a measure of society) shows the existence of two contrasting commercial strategies lying at the opposite poles of a "business sentiments" spectrum. Comparing small local shops and two shopping malls of Victoria (Tigrija Palazz and Arcadia), he finds that one sales strategy relies on the use of a specific Gozitan culture to attract tourists while the other, targeting Gozitan's youth as Arcadia does, is more internationally oriented. While one would quickly oppose the two malls, Rosenblatt explains that a deeper look into people's interactions reveals the cultural hybridity of the two. In Tigrija Palazz, if the hours of sies-ta, the physical aspect of the premises and the relations among employes reminds the atmosphere of "authentic" Gozitan neighborhood stores, its tourist office and Asian restaurant show up the tourist oriented business

strategy of the place. Similarly, while everything in Arcadia suggests the globalized nature of the place, the author shows how groups of young Gozitan invest the McCafé of the mall to turn it into a more typical Gozitan bar soo important in locals' everyday-life. At the same time, the location of the McCafé in Arcadia also permits young generations to distinguish themselves of their forefathers through the inclusion of female members in their cafe-oriented activity. With this paper, Brian Rosenblatt brilliantly demonstrates how the injunction to autochtony imposed to Gozo through the touristic push on authenticity, as the external forces impulsed by globalization's processes can be turned by locals into their own advantage.

In a similar attempt to tap into dynamics of Gozitan economy and life, Marlaina Martin in her article 'Changing Tides' shows interest in the history of lace on the island in its relation to women's identities and social role. According to the author, following the changing status of lace and lace making in history allows one to consider the shifts in women's societal position and dispositions. As other crafted treasures of the island exposed to external forces (see, for example, the work of Adam Thomson (2006) on agricultural walls in Gozo), lace making lost its economical value through industrialization as it became acknowledge at the same time by external observers as a symbol of Gozitan 'authenticity', thus changing the meanings of lace making. Nowadays, women themselves look at lace making as a way to connect with their past, whereas they appear to be very aware of their capitalist identity and business power, changing their practices to meet tourists' expectations or trying to market the nostalgic image they carry by asking tourists to pay them for taking pictures of their work. For Martin, the study of lace, lace making and women historicity eventually allow us to move beyond a persistent and fantasy idea of dominated women around the Mediterranean as to interrogate the dialectical relation between capitalist and traditional economies.

Greta Kliever interrogates economical, social and cultural aspects of the Maltese bread "hobz tal-Malti", a true symbol of identity on the island. Diving into memories of the taste shown by members of the older Maltese generation, she shows particular interest in how tradition of bread making evolved in relation to tourism industry and flux of globalization. In past times, she says, bakeries were central spaces for social fabric as members of villages' communities came there to bake their own bread. Nowadays,

most people try to spare both time and money and bake the bread at home for some, while most of them order it to the delivery service of the bakery or buy it in other stores and supermarkets. At the same time, bakeries try to diversify their activity and some of them even turn into touristic restaurants. Nevertheless, bread remains a firmly rooted item of national pride, and many among locals and touristic institutions deplore the change of its taste. In her analysis, Kliewer discusses the complexity of such shifts in bread's taste. On the one hand, some explain it as a conscious and deliberate strategy of the bakers to adapt their products to new touristic markets by catering to "outsiders' tastes" (Kliewer 2008: 216). On the other hand, others also point out more constrained economical reasons for bakers to transform their breads' recipe: some bread, as french bread, are cheaper than others, and also less time-consuming, which allow bakery's owners to produce bread more quickly, at a reduced cost and in larger quantities, and eventually compete with other stores and supermarkets.

The explanation of taste's changing through bakers' business strategies finds resonance with a world wild "celebration of Mediterranean food" and its "healthy virtues" which push Maltese to adapt their diet in order to meet tourists' expectations (Billiard 2006: 117). As Ian Tangert (Bottles in suitcases, jugs on floors) explains, this tendency has also affected wine production and consumption patterns on the island. Such as bread, homemade wine is a key product of Gozitan culture, acting as a social glue across generations through its family-run production process, and between members of the community through goods' exchange and interdependence networks. Yet, with the growth of cultural tourism on the archipelago, European policies have turned Gozitan wine economy upside down as they triggered the rise of a dual system of wine production and consumption. The 'Gozo wine', labeled and subsidized by Europe to follow European expectations in smell, color and taste, now compete with the 'homemade wine', henceforth hard to find in bars and restaurants because of the inconsistency of its quality. In this context, tourists go home with bottles of 'Gozo wine' they think 'authentic' whereas, according to the author, Gozitan themselves come to interrogate the quality of their homemade wine as they used to prepare it for ages. If locals' capacities to deal with the influence of external institutions and policies is real, the analysis of Jan Tangert remind us the economical but also cultural imbalance in which Maltese and Gozitan are in front of Europe and the West. As Billiard (2006: 123) wrote,

"Mediterranean societies have remained under-develop in the eyes of Western people" and "become the 'other within' the Western world".

Bryce Peake (Eating in the real Gozo) analyses soundscapes and sound consumption patterns as media for cultural expression among Maltese and Gozitan. Using a typology of three different soundscapes, the 'ambient', the contemporary and the non-contemporary, he brilliantly explains how sounds receive different meanings from various groups and individuals, such as how they can be used in relations of power and resistance among those same groups. With the entry in Europe and the distinction between maltese-ness and gozitan-ness as a background, he shows for example how Gozitan give meaning to sounds in a way to distinguish themselves from Malta and Europe and fight the double act of marginalization they now have to face. While tourists and Maltese describe Gozitan authentic soundscape as silent and almost sacred, enclosing them in a pastoral romance, Gozitan make use of authentic sounds as a concept of the contemporary now, made of autos' sounds and folk western musics heard in the streets. More than that, he also points out the interesting behavior of elderly who refuse to listen something else than American rock; a way for them to contest the pervasiveness of European songs entering Maltese and Gozitan culture.

This selection and the authors of the articles furnish empirical data for a better understanding of globalization processes and Maltese's cultural dynamics. Of course, additional interrogations rise after reading. To begin with, is it even possible to speak of a "Maltese's culture" or "agency"? Further niceties could be added to the analysis indeed. Among others: is Maltese's agency the same of Gozitan's agency? Are Gozitan's system of dispositions the same in capital and secondary cities? And between the most developed tourist places and the more rural areas? And what about the difference between local actors dealing with seaside tourism and those working in the cultural tourism industry? Those are questions that should give us a refined understanding of globalization processes as they exist in Malta and Gozo, and locals' initiatives and reactions to it. That is, not only a comprehension of institutions and policies that contribute to social, economical and cultural globalization, but also an understanding of our globalist dispositions. As Hilgers (2013) stands about neoliberalism, we need insights in how agents truly embody globalization. To do so, we need to ask ourselves how globalization processes permeate our everyday-life

and shape our understanding of the world but also of the self, that is, the way institutions and policies of the global need to take roots in local systems of actions and beliefs and how they get transformed in the process of doing so.

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