Toleration of Religious Diversity in a Small Island State*

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Abstract

This article explores individual and institutional discursive regimes of toleration in Malta, a small new 'host' EU member state with a Roman Catholic ethnic religion. With new immigrant populations, Maltese schools have become reluctant sites of multiculture. The state is currently under pressure to move from toleration to accommodation and formal equality. However, Maltese Catholic nationals respond to religious 'Others' with different classes of tolerance, sometimes even with intolerance. This lack of acceptance by Catholic nationals raises specific political dilemmas for institutional actors, which will be discussed in relation to the provision of religious education in schools. Given this context, the article asks, what processes could lead to participative equality in reluctant sites of multiculture? Taking a pragmatic approach, sensitive to context and temporality with regard to discourses of toleration, this article argues that tolerance, especially democratic institutional pluralism that supports respectful engagement with and participation of religious 'Others' in public institutions, creates spaces for social relationships and social bonds to flourish between majority and minority citizens. These bonds are required to achieve 'deep equality'.

Keywords: toleration, religious recognition, democratic institutional pluralism, ethnicity, Malta

Introduction

This article explores the classes of toleration expressed to the religious 'Other' on the Mediterranean island of Malta, the EU's smallest new 'host' member state. Malta's Roman Catholicism presents as an ethnic religion with a strong, though increasingly challenged, monoculturalism. With new immigrant populations, Maltese schools have become reluctant sites of multiculture that have not, to date, achieved the toleration and accommodation of multiculturalism, understood as a political project of formal equality and acceptance of multiple differences (Modood and Dobbernack 2013). The state is under pressure from different interest groups to move from toleration to accommodation, respect, recognition and formal equality; yet Maltese majority-religion nationals respond to religious 'Others' with minimalist tolerance or even with intolerance. This lack of acceptance by the majority-religion nationals raises specific political dilemmas for institutional actors, which will be discussed in relation to the provision of religious education in schools. The article reviews recent work on tolerance that argues that in specific contexts, toleration may better achieve respect, recognition and accommodation as well as participative equal-

ity for religious minorities than formal equality. Institutional actors act within contexts of competing discourses and claims made by groups, as well as by individual actors of the majority-religion. Discourses of toleration are explored through in-depth interviews. The regimes of toleration (Forst 2009; McKinnon 2009) and classes of acceptance (Dobbernack and Modood 2013) that Malta's institutional and individual actors adopt regarding the religious 'Other' will be studied in response to these actors' own interest in moving to institutional pluralism and accommodation of religious and non-believing minorities or, conversely, in retaining the status quo in religious education. The present 'settlement' offers an 'Ethics Education' [hereafter EE] curriculum to those who, under the Constitution 'conscience and freedom of religion' clause[1], 'opt out' of Catholic Religious Education [hereafter CRE]. The Minister for Education and Employment subcontracted the drafting of the new EE Programme curriculum to a small group composed of philosophers of education from the University of Malta as well as specialized teachers[2]. Recently, the Imam[3] and a representative of the Humanist Association of Malta were invited to contribute to a seminar on the proposed syllabus[4]. This is the first, crucial phase of planning for cultural pluralism in schools which indicates, however, that the opportunity to engage religious and non-believing Others on a participative equality basis has been lost. This article asks whether this

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[1]   Article 40, Sub-article 2 of The Constitution of Malta. **http://www.constitution.org/cons/malta/chapt0. pdf**
[2]   The scholars are from the field of Philosophy of Education and include a respected self-identifying Humanist. The process started in 2013; the first classes were phased in as of 2014.
[3]   There is currently only one Imam in Malta. He has diplomatic status. He is regarded as the 'natural' leader of Muslims in Malta, although other Muslim groups are active which are not under his religious leadership.
[4]   'Introducing Ethics Education in Schools.' Seminar jointly organised by the Ministry for Education and Employment, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and the Faculty of Education, 25th January 2014. Blata l-Bajda, Malta. **http://www. um.edu.mt/educ/educstudies/ethics_education**

minimalist tolerance (Dobbernack and Modood 2012), though currently inhibitive of democratic institutional pluralism (Bader 2003), may, given the religious majority's attitudes of in/toleration, secure more stable forms of cultural pluralism and participative equality in the near future. The article adopts a case-specific, problem-oriented approach (Lægaard 2013) to contextualised theories of morality (Bader 2003: 132), which emphasizes that 'the context in which the question of toleration between citizens arises is a context of justice' (Forst 2009: 76).

The Malta context

In Malta, as with other new 'host' countries bordering the Mediterranean (Triandafyllidou 2013), the attachment to an ethno-religious national identity is pervasive though not monolithic. Research based on successive European Values Survey [EVS] studies (Siegers 2010: 18) has consistently placed Malta high on both the 'religious belonging' index and on 'religious believing'; however, 'a shift towards a stronger emphasis of religious individualism' is noted. The fourth wave EVS reports that 97.6% of the population state they are Catholic, such that Malta's Secretariat for Catechesis (2008: 14) holds 'one can hardly speak of religious pluralism'. Malta's ethno-religious identity has been challenged by forms of state secularism (Darmanin 1978) and the secularisation of society with a decline in religiosity, but not belief (Abela 1993). The 2005[5] Sunday Mass Census (Discern 2006) found that 52% of the Maltese Catholics attend mass (compared to 63.4% in 1995, 75.1% in 1982). The passing of the 'yes' vote with a 53% majority in the Divorce Referendum of 2012[6] is one indication of this change. Non-belief, religious indifference and secularism are all threats to a unitary ethno-religious identity. A strong attachment to this identity is a response to secularism as much as it is to influx of new immigrant religious Others. In comparing it to Europe, Martin (2011: 93) calls

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[5]   To date no other Sunday Mass Attendance Census has been commissioned.
[6]   Act XIV of 2011

Malta 'a resistant niche' to secularisation. The attachment to the Catholic faith is matched by an attachment to the family, marked by a 'religious familism' (Edgell 2006).

The religious Other has, in successive periods, included Muslims and Jews (Wettinger 1985, 1986), British and local Protestants as well as the supposed anti-clericalists of the early 1920s (Frendo[7] 1979) and of the 1950s, in which the political movement militating for the separation of church and State was construed as anti-Catholic rather than anti-clerical (Darmanin 1978). The effects of the politico-religious *debacle* in the 1960s and 1970s produced 'a dismantled church – a religious people' (Koster 1984: 244). The process of 'dismantling' the Church occurred not least because of the internal differentiation within it, with the growth of Pentecostal groups such as Charismatic Renewal (Theuma 2001); a fragmentation which still provokes a fear of Others such as Jehovah's Witnesses, who are seen to contribute further to this 'dismantling'. Faced with 'unchurching' (Casanova 1994) and with conversions to Islam (Woolner 2002), both forms of defection, religiously-inclined Maltese Catholics have responded to these signs of modernity through 'pervasive nostalgia, or sensitivity to the historical' which have not only characterised 'the nineties' as Mitchell (2002: 6) argues, but which are prevalent in the present response to immigrant religious Others.

The Roman Catholic religion is constitutionally established as the religion of Malta, which, together with specific agreements with the Holy See and the local Episcopal Conference, obliges the state to provide Catholic RE in all schools where Catholic pupils attend (Darmanin 2013a). Moreover, the ethos of the state as well as of the government-dependent Catholic Church and most independent schools is predominantly Roman Catholic (Darmanin 2013b). This may be seen as denying non-Catholic pupils and their parents the right of freedom of conscience, despite supposed provisions for 'opting-out' of

CRE. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of children 'opting out' of CRE in the last twenty years or so. In 1991, 0.8% of pupils opted out of CRE in state schools (Vella 1992); in 2009[8], 2.4% (or 876) did not follow CRE, whilst in 2013 this increased to 1,017[9] or 3.7% of pupils in the state sector. There are no available statistics for 'opt out' in the government-dependent Church or in the Independent sector[10]. The current situation perpetuates a context of institutional monism and acts as an obstacle to cultural pluralism. The current National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family 2011) continues to accord curricular privilege to a Catholic Religious Education.

Minority religion leaders have themselves until recently been loath to articulate public demands for formal equality. Leaders of the Muslim community such as the Imam, as well as the leader of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, discursively articulate deference to the Catholic majority culture. For example, whilst conceding that online blogs are replete with Islamophobic comments, especially since the recent beheadings of non-Muslims by ISIS, the Imam downplayed these slurs against Muslims as penned 'by uneducated people'. He calls the Maltese 'a tolerant and peaceful people'[11]. The president of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jammat calls[12] on Muslims in Malta to

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[7] Frendo (1979: 74) dates the 'politics of religion' to a political meeting held in 1893.

[8] Parliamentary Question 11995 of 2009, House of Representatives, Valletta, Malta
[9] Reported in Maltatoday, 12th May 2013, 56
[10] In 2007 (National Statistics Office 2011), the mandatory age pupil sector share of the three schools sectors was 62% in State schools, 26% in Church schools and 12% in Independent schools. At the same time the State school sector received 46.5%, the Church school sector 8% and the Independent Schools sector 45% of all immigrant children in school. In 2011-2012 the sector share of all pupils was 57.6% for the State sector, 31.2% for the Church and 11% for the Independent sector (National Statistics Office 2014c). There are no official data on religious belonging across the three school sectors.
[11] As reported in the Times of Malta, 29th August, 2014. "Lack of Education Fuels Sense of Islamophobia".
[12] Reported in the Sunday Times of Malta, 21st September 2014 (Independence Day). "Muslims in Malta Have a Religious Duty to Love Island".

express their 'religious duty to love the island'; he reiterates the discourse of Malta as, ethnically, ' a Catholic country'. This religious minority is trying to avoid the 'backlash' of the supposed 'principled intolerance' (Dobbernack and Modood 2013: 2) or European Islamophobia of our times by downplaying demands for formal equality. The Imam has taken a position that supports religious segregation through faith-based schools, and he has worked to secure state aid[13] for the Muslim school attached to the Mosque he leads. Despite the aid, many parents of Muslim children cannot afford the fees for this independent faith-school. More recently, the Imam commented that if parents of Muslim children become unhappy with the EE programme, a claim in favour of an Islamic Studies programme in state schools would be made. The demand for an Islamic Studies curriculum in state schools was raised in the seminar[14] that introduced the new EE programme as well as during an Interfaith Forum meeting[15]. Both of these were closed meetings, reported through press releases; however, one meeting was held under the auspices of the office of the Ministry for Education and Employment and the other under the auspices of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. They were both reported in the press[16]. The question of the imposition of CRE and of the lack of a faith education for children of minority faiths has, to date, been raised exclusively by leaders of the Muslim community[17], which is also the largest minor-

ity religion group. NGOs working in the field of human rights and of immigration have repeatedly and vociferously drawn attention to this lack of formal equality of Muslims in Malta (Camilleri and Falzon 2014; Aditus 2014).

The old and new 'Others'

Currently, and despite its long 'human history' (Abulafia 2011), the Mediterranean is seeing an unprecedented movement of persons, the majority of whom are, by virtue of their legal status, of religious or ethnic and/or visible difference, presenting as 'Other' to the 'new' 'host' receiving countries (Jordan, Stråth and Triandafyllidou 2003). Although Malta has developed demographically and culturally through successive waves of immigration, its Europeanisation during in the medieval period (Wettinger 1993), its 'repudiation' of its Islamic past (Borg and Mayo 2006:154) and its struggle to refuse the *Protestant* British colonising domination prior to becoming independent in 1964, have contributed to its adoption of Roman Catholicism as an ethno-religion of a collectivistic type (Jakelić 2010). During key moments in Malta's recent past, such as its accession to the EU, Roman Catholicism has been politically instrumentalised (Baldacchino 2009). On the one hand, arguments in favour of accession constructed the Maltese as quintessentially European by virtue of their Christianity and their perceived 'visible difference', in particular to North African Muslims (Baldacchino 2009). On the other hand, concerns regarding the secularisation of Europe transformed religiously fervent Maltese into 'ambivalent Europeans' (Mitchell 2002). Baldacchino (2009: 153) contentiously argues that *not* having 'championed' anti-colonialism nor resisted previous occupations (except the Napoleonic) nor developed a cohesive national

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[13] During the Libyan 'crisis' a loan of €400,000 was given; a promise to clear this debt was made by both Government and Opposition during the 2013 general election campaign. Upon election, the new Labour government agreed to fund the school to the tune of €300,000 annually (Ministry for Finance, 2013). It is now becoming as populated by Third Country Nationals such as wealthier Muslims from Libya and Syria as by Maltese Muslims.

[14] See footnote 5.

[15] The Interfaith Forum of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, consultation meeting with the Muslim community, 9th October 1914.

[16] **http://ahmadiyyamalta.org/2015/02/06/president-presided-over-interfaith-forum/**

[17] The Interfaith Forum of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, under the chair of Profes-

sor M. Zammit, has held consultation meetings with the Jewish; the Anglican; the Georgian, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian Orthodox; the African Orthodox; the Coptic Orthodox; the Unification Movement; the Redeemed Christian Church of God communities as well as the Malta Humanist Association.

identity, Malta may be considered a 'nationless state' in which the Roman Catholic Church 'takes on symbolic powers of national representation'.

At the same time that Malta's 2004 accession to the EU opened its borders to mobile Europeans, it became, and still is, the centre of the human tragedy of mass (undocumented) immigration in the Mediterranean. The Maltese expressed anxieties related to new competition in its small labour market, as well as to unsustainable demographic and social welfare pressures in the pre-accession period (Mitchell 2002; Baldacchino 2009). With the new waves of undocumented immigration, arrivals make Malta's responsibility share relative to size, including costs relative to its GDP, the highest in the EU (Thielemann, Williams and Boswell 2010). Objective factors such as 'fixed' and 'economic' size combine with 'perceptual size' (Thorhallsson 2006) to make 'smallness' Malta's dominant trope both in its policy responses and in individual attitudes to immigrant Others (Darmanin 2013a). A number of studies report persistent intolerance and racism (National Commission for the Promotion of Equality 2011; European Network Against Racism 2013).

Demographic statistics show that 94.1% of Malta's population of 425,384 is composed of Maltese persons (National Statistic Office 2014a)[18]. According to the Imam's estimate[19] in 2009, 1.2% of the population were Muslim, whilst in 2013 this rose to 1.44% of the population (6,000 persons) (Zammit 2009, 2014). This excludes the recent influx of refugees from Libya and Syria. Of the 6% non-Maltese residents, the absolute number of EU national immigrants (3,143) is roughly equal to that of Third Country Nationals (3,418)[20]. Compared to the immigrant

[18] Asylum seekers who have been granted refugee, subsidiary or humanitarian protection are included in this total population; however, those living in Open Centres or in Detention are not.
[19] None of the national Censuses of Population to date have recorded data on religious affiliation.
[20] Some of whom may be asylum seekers and refugees whilst others are from the US, Canada, the Philippines and 'Third countries'.

populations of other EU countries, this proportion is small but subjectively perceived as large (Darmanin 2013a). To this immigrant population we should add the undocumented immigrants who move in and out of Malta with some frequency. In 2013 (National Statistics Office 2014b) a 6.2% increase in arrivals of undocumented immigrants was recorded. That so many objections to the 'Otherness' of this small but visibly and culturally different minority are raised would suggest, *contra* Baldacchino (2009), that Malta does indeed have a national identity which it jealously protects, and which, in its (oft-times racist) intolerance or minimalist toleration, serves as an obstacle to multiculturalism as a political project of both formal and substantive 'deep' equality (Beaman 2011).

A theoretical framework

Recent discussions of how states respond to the global movement of persons, especially of those immigrants who are seen as religious 'Others' or whose 'cultural difference' raises 'new anxieties' (Dobbernack and Modood 2013:1), has led to a more positive assessment of the concept of tolerance than critical theorists would admit. While Brown's (2008: 5) monumental critique of liberalism's tolerance discourses and their 'governmental and regulatory functions' is incontrovertible, if we do not engage with the productive elements of what Lægaard (2010: 29) calls 'positive tolerance', we are left without political and personal responses to religious Others, given that formal equality is also suspect (and rarely forthcoming). Notwithstanding Brown's (2008: 46) insight into how tolerance discourses 'convert the effects of inequality' into cases of 'different patterns and beliefs', this article argues that insights from pragmatic, 'intellectualist' and sensorial orientations to tolerance provide a political, not depoliticized, path to participate equality, a condition necessary for substantive 'deep' equality to be achieved.

Although Europe denies that it exercises a racism based on visible difference, cultural racism allows even political or academic elites to

intolerantly reject multiculturalism and cultural pluralism from a position of 'muscular liberalism' (Dobbernack and Modood 2013: 3). Dobbernack and Modood (2013: 9), among others, argue that 'there is a practical concern to safeguard a prudent minimalism against an illiberal or extra-liberal perfectionism' which is often camouflaged in some versions of the politics of recognition. Lægaard (2010: 29) defines 'positive toleration' as a 'positive engagement with difference' that may prevail even if the attitude of the subject toward the object may be negative (toleration). The aim of multicultural recognition would be to reveal the 'non-neutral character of the norms and expectations that structure society' (Lægaard 2010: 32). Such a revelation challenges the legitimacy of the majority and its capture of the public sphere. Moreover, it insists that members of minority groups participate fully in the public sphere as proper partners and citizens with equal status. This form of equality, according to Modood (1997: 19), encompasses 'public ethnicity'; it requires respect and 'public attitudes and arrangements' that do not demand assimilation. The focus on fairness and equality in the public sphere, and the right to participate in it, is of concern. Moreover, the question of how to reconcile the religious majority's 'desire to preserve its identity' in the face of new identities, some of which may include 'controversial minority practices' (Parekh 1994: 289), coupled with minority claims also poses specific challenges. A number of typologies describing and explaining toleration in culturally pluralistic societies have been developed which are amenable to empirical investigation. These are in a continuum ranging from less to more demanding forms of acceptance.

These typologies allow for questions to be raised as to which 'class of acceptance' is most appropriate to the situation' (Dobbernack and Modood 2013: 6). Forst (2009) distinguishes between toleration as a political practice (based on moral norms or reasoned justifications) from tolerance as an attitude (based on individual ethical values). Though Tønder (2013: 7 *passim*)

finds the separation of ethics from morality an intellectualist privileging of reason, this heuristic device allows for a way into the 'active tolerance' of the 'sensorial reasoning' he proposes, by showing how, where and when, political actors may encourage the 'expansive connections' of social bonds between tolerators and tolerated, which, albeit wrought by 'the endurance of pain', is a necessary component of 'empowerment and pluralisation'. McKinnon (2009: 56) identifies four types of toleration as 'a political principle': repression, official discouragement, toleration and political inclusion. In the sphere of personal toleration, McKinnon (2009: 57 *passim*) distinguishes between repression, toleration, engagement and appreciation. Similarly, in his review of conceptions of toleration, Forst (2009: 73) identifies four 'regimes of toleration' (see Table 1): the 'permission' regime, the 'co-existence conception' or '*modus vivendi*' model, the 'respect' conception with formal equality 'as moral-political equals' wherein religion is relegated to the private sphere, and the 'qualitative equality' model of respect. This respect is derived not simply from a value attached to political equality, but more demandingly from an appreciation of what these ethical and cultural values mean to individuals. The ethical values held by Others 'provide good reasons for certain exceptions or change to social structures in order to promote material and not just formal equality' (Forst 2009: 74). Finally, Forst (2009: 74) names the 'esteem' conception as a 'fuller, more demanding recognition between citizens'. Here, esteem is held both for the person of the Other as well as for his or her beliefs as 'ethically valuable conceptions' which, different though they may be to one's own, are understood to be 'in some way ethically attractive and held for good reason' (Forst 2009: 75). Different 'contexts of justification' will suggest which of these 'regimes of toleration' may most achieve justice and equality. For Forst (2009: 71 *passim*) toleration 'is a virtue of justice' since it asks for public justifications for in/equality, and a 'demand of reason' since justifiable reasons, agreed in the public sphere with the full par-

Table 1. Typologies of Toleration

Author/s	Sphere	Typology				
Dobbernack and Modood (2013) 'Classes of acceptance'	Both political/public and personal sphere.	**Non-toleration and non-acceptance** Toleration sought is not granted (intolerance).		**Accept I** Toleration subject to discretionary power of tolerators. Minimalist tolerance may achieve valid forms of acceptance.		**Accept II** Recognition, respect and admission as equals (accommodation).
Laegard (2010)	Mainly political/public sphere.	**[Intolerance]**		**Toleration** Positive toleration (engaging) and negative (disapproving) toleration.		**Recognition** Status recognition and factual recognition.
McKinnon (2009)	Political principles	**Repression** To achieve assimilation or submission	**Official discouragement** Obstacles to the preferred way of life	**Toleration** Refrains from repression, limits participation	**Political Inclusion** In major social institutions	
	Personal attitude	**Repression** Prejudice /hatred or 'conversion'		**Toleration** Refusal to interfere, but also disapproving or 'persuasive'	**Engagement** Whilst 'disapproving' is open to positive interaction with Other on a more equal footing	**Appreciation** Self's ethical values not an obstacle to appreciation of ethical values and preferences of Other
Forst (2009) 'Four conceptions/regimes of toleration'	Political sphere	**Permission** Denies equality. Difference to be expressed solely in private sphere.		**Co-existence/modus Vivendi** Pragmatic, stable, mutual accommodation and interaction within limits.	**Respect** As 'formal equality' and 'qualitative equality'. Reason and justice.	**Esteem** Respect and recognition for both person of Other and his or her ethical beliefs, as equal and valuable.

ticipation of all parties (the generality principle), will be made from 'validity criteria different from the ones in ethical contexts'. Dobbernack and Modood (2013: 5) provide a synthesis which collapses some of the concepts discussed above into three analytic 'classes of acceptance'. In situations of non-toleration and non-acceptance (or intolerance), toleration sought is not granted. Toleration or Accept I refers to situations in which toleration is granted, subject to the discretionary power of the tolerator/s, whilst 'Recognition, respect and equal admission as normal or Accept II' (also known as accommodation) involves 'going beyond' toleration to more 'demanding' forms of acceptance.

Since toleration in both the personal and political sphere is, by virtue, *inter alia* of differences of culture, religion and /or beliefs, values, and life-style, of a ' disliked or disapproved of' person or community, McKinnon (2009: 55) finds that the question of how to relate to Others will differ between what is required of the personal attitude ('appropriateness') and what is expected of the political sphere (reason and justice). The distinction between the personal attitude/ethical values and the political sphere/moral values is important since it allows a more demanding toleration in the political sphere of the esteem, accommodation or recognition type, while accepting that in their personal attitudes tolerant majorities may still retain their own valued ethical beliefs. In the political sphere, Bader's (2003: 131 *passim*) proposal for 'democratic institutional pluralism' emphasises that it flexibly includes religious and other minorities (representation) as equals, rejects 'institutional monism', distinguishes between cultural assimilation and cultural pluralism, and supports membership in collective groups as well as individual autonomy. Most importantly, it is based on 'overlapping and crosscutting membership in many associations' which increases opportunities for integration into the political process in institutions 'characterised as power-sharing systems' (Bader: 2003: 133). States differ in how they respond to the discourses and claims of their

competing publics (Modood 1997), a response which is prompted by the interaction between the (historical) personal attitudes of citizens and public policy formation in the political sphere.

Methodological note

This article draws on data generated from an EU funded project[21] [REMC] on the place of religion in educational systems across Europe. Primary data was collected on the relative role of school and home in the religious socialisation of children of primary school age 9-11 (Smyth, Lyons and Darmody 2013). The data presented here are based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 32 parents or guardians of primary school children aged 9-11 from the state (two schools with relatively large immigrant and Muslim ethnic minority populations), government-dependent Church (one girls' school) and independent school (one Muslim faith school and one formally non-denominational, but culturally Catholic school) sectors in Malta. Schools from the different education sectors were included in the REMC project to explore how important religious education is to these education market sectors, as well as to their clients, who have distinctive SES characteristics (Darmanin 2013b). Of these, 29 informants were female[22]. Recruitment for all participants was on an opt-in basis. They have been given pseudonyms. Amongst a raft of questions, parents/guardians were asked about their own religious belonging, about how important religion was in their choice of partner /spouse, how they regarded the presence of children with diverse religious and ethical values in their children' schools and how schools could accommodate to religious difference. The interviews were transcribed; the data discussed

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[21] This FP-7 study was co-funded by the European Commission and the University of Malta. 'Religious education in a multicultural society: School and home in comparative context'. [REMC] Topic SSH- 2007 - 3.3.1 Cultural interactions and multiculturalisms in European societies.
[22] One participant was the grandmother of the child, another the Social Care Worker of a boy in residential care.

here have been analysed using critical discourse analysis. Where required, they have been translated from the Maltese by the author. Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Malta Research Ethics Committee. The opt-in method may have presented a bias in favour of participants more attached to their ethical beliefs and more interested in their children's religious socialisation (more female respondents). The sample includes parents from different social economic backgrounds and geographical locations. The participants self-identified as practising Catholic (18), Muslim (2), Catholic convert to Islam (3), Catholic married to a Muslim (3), non-practising Catholic (4), an agnostic (1) and an atheist (1). Amongst born Catholics, there were participants who believed and belonged, who believed without belonging, and who belonged without believing (Davie 2007). Of the participants, 29 were Malta born nationals. Two Muslims from Syria have acquired nationality by virtue of residency of over 18 years, and a third is from Bulgaria. The Catholic mothers of Muslim children were married to immigrant spouses, who have since acquired Maltese citizenship. Their children, though Maltese citizens by virtue of birth to Maltese mothers, occupied an uneasy positioning whereby though 'Maltese' they were 'Othered' as Muslim and as the children of an immigrant (the father).

Personal attitudes of toleration

In this section, personal attitudes to religious Others are explored by examining attitudes to religious familism, to the fear of religious dilution, to Muslims (Islamophobia), and through attitudes to the presence of religious Others in schools, especially regarding their accommodation. Additionally, the perspective of the minority Others and of 'Accept II' participants is described.

Religious familism and classes of acceptance
The religious familism of the Maltese is expressed in attitudes regarding the choice of spouse, where an attachment to the faith coincides with the desire to live a harmonious Cath-

olic family life. A number of participants would not consider marrying a 'foreigner', especially a non-Catholic.

> I think to be of the same religion is a wonderful[23] thing. However, I surely would not marry a Muslim. Other Christians are more like us. Do you understand? A Muslim, surely not! (Ms. Borg, state school)
> No. Not even a foreigner. I think. (Ms. Shaw, independent school)

Many mentioned how being of a different faith would create 'conflict' in the family, especially in relation to the religious socialisation of the children:

> For me it is important [to have a husband of the same religion] because I think had my husband been of another religion, the children would not know what to do. …If he had been of another religion I would not have considered him.
> (Ms. Vella, independent school)

The apprehension regarding potential 'conflict' translated into a form of xenophobia. Ms. Mercieca, who lives with neither of the fathers of her children, thinks that the 'confusion' resulting from a mixed family arises from an ethnic 'mixing' or even untoward permissiveness; the word 'tahwid/ mixing', used in different contexts, incorporates these different meanings. Her lack of acceptance is directed at Islam and Muslims:

> From what I hear, understand? From others. You get confused /mixed up/ mixed with [tithawwad]. The result is that usually, the woman, the Maltese [women], I know many women who have turned to/over [jeqilbu] to Muslim men/Islam[24]. They convert. I do not agree with this. I would not convert. No. That is what I learnt. And then? He [the Muslim man] will live 'the way'. But the children will be torn/broken [jkissruhom]. Would you keep arguing? What would you do?
> (Ms. Mercieca, state school)

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23 In the original Maltese 'hija haga sabiha'.
24 In her words 'hawn li nisa mal-Mussulmani jeqilbu huma.'

Fearing religious dilution

Ms. Vassallo, a grandmother, talks about how her son joined the Jehovah's Witnesses, which threw her into a 'panic'. She is relieved that he has now left 'the sect' and is bringing up his children in the Catholic 'normal way'. That he survived a possible permanent 'turning' or conversion is of great relief to his mother.

> My son still has a friend who is a Jehovah's Witness. At first I was thrown into a panic. 'Don't you dare, don't you dare come back [as a Jehovah Witness]'. Up until recently, I mean, this boy, youngster, man, I mean. Because he is father of two now. His son has made his First Holy Communion. *In the normal way*. Because now he [my son] is of age. And he has realised [the damage]. He goes nowhere and he does not participate [with the Jehovah's Witnesses]. I mean, my son had the chance to convert [be turned/jaqleb] and he was not converted. Not because I pushed him. He realised himself.
> (Ms. Vassallo, state school)

The fear that religious Others may persuade Maltese Catholics to 'convert' to another sect or religion is not restricted to a concern regarding children. Ms. Gatt, a carer in residential home for the elderly, says that she herself found that Jehovah's Witnesses, who frequently knock on her door, 'made her feel confused [igerfxuni]'. She is not the type of person 'who slams the door in their face'. However, she found she was getting so 'confused' that she then broke off contact.

> If you don't have that true faith, they try to see [if they can convert you]. They begin to say, hmm, 'Death...you will always be happy'. They try to tell you appealing things [affarjiet sbieh] and these begin to attract you. But if you really have the true faith, you do not change [turn from/ iddurx] your religion.
> (Ms. Gatt, state school)

Islamophobia: a 'repression' approach

The non-accepting or intolerant views were expressed against Islam as a religion and Muslims as persons. For example, Ms. Borg, who like Ms. Gatt (above) 'did not condemn[25]' the (Mal-

tese) Jehovah's Witnesses at her door, went on to remark that 'however, there are certain religions which I look upon with dislike[26]'. She argued:

> Muslims, Islam, is not like us/ours [bhalna]. No. Because for them war is holy. They consider a woman a slave.
> (Ms. Borg, state school)

Ms. Borg's stereotyping of Islam coincides with a 'repression' approach to Muslims. In a telling phrase 'you cannot discard/throw them away[27]', she reluctantly concedes that her son should 'integrate' with Muslim children in school. For her, the question regarding the accommodation of minorities is about immigration and how to interact with Others who are not 'Maltese' (where being Maltese is conflated with being Catholic), since it is 'only recently that we are getting mixed/mixed up[28] with them [Others]'.

> Well, they came to our country. When we go to their country will they bring a Catholic priest to instruct us, our children? I mean, when you go to another country, you have to go by the norms[29] of that country.
> (Ms. Borg, state school)

Ms. Williams, a nurse, thinks 'it is good that children should be exposed' to Others of different religions, but talks about being *'a bit sceptical about a certain religion in particular'*. She recounts how when they passed the Mosque a week or so ago, her son told her that they were studying about Islam in school. Her son referred to Muslims as 'those people we see on TV'. On the one hand, Ms. William states that 'I try to instil in them that there are different religions, we have to respect them'. On the other hand, in responding to her son's comments, Ms. Williams does not distinguish between Muslims and

[25] In the Maltese 'Ma nikkundannahomx, ta'.

[26] She uses the word 'inhares lejhom bl-ikrah' where 'ikrah' suggests distaste, deriving as it does from the word for ugliness.
[27] In the Maltese 'ma tistax tarmihom' where 'tarmi' means 'to throw away' and refers to the rescue of undocumented migrants at sea.
[28] She uses the word 'jithalltu' which has a pejorative connotation.
[29] The word used is 'ezigenzi' or exigencies.

'jihadists'. The message is that all Muslims have a propensity to kill in the name of God:

> I said but, hmm, 'Those who say that they are, like, killing in the name of God', I said. I said, sort of, I really painted a picture, I said 'Nobody can kill and say [it is acceptable to kill], because God always preaches love …'
> (Ms. Williams, independent school)

'We are a Catholic country': a permission discourse

When asked about how they feel about the presence of religious Others in their children's schools, parents frequently expressed anxiety arising from a dilution of the faith by recourse to the idea of the Nation as unitary, Catholic and European (white); if the faith were to be lost, the unitary, Catholic and European (white) identity would be lost with it. This anxiety is most strongly expressed in relation to the religious socialisation of children. These discourses are of the 'permission' type where the Other is required to assimilate or to live his or her faith in private.

> As long as they don't influence my son. As long as in class they don't, for example, talk about themselves. There are a lot, a lot of polemics. There are those who want the crucifix to be removed from classrooms. No. As long as these things do not happen, I would not disagree [to having Others in school]. *We are a Catholic, Christian country and I expect that in my children's classroom, this is how it is.*
> (Ms. Massa, state school)

A typical response, such as Ms. Massa's, purportedly disavows the racism of visible difference by using a cultural (racism) card. As in Islamophobia (above), Muslims Others are constructed as those wishing to undermine the religious education and socialisation of Catholic children.

> Myself. Personally. I am not a racist. Absolutely [not]. I mean, these people do not bother me. They're in class with my son. It's not a problem whatsoever. No. But that they impose [their] religion on my son, just because one of theirs…No. I'm sorry, but just take them [Others] aside to another class, by all means, They have every right to do something else [during CRE]. In other classrooms,

however. Not whilst the Religion lesson is being held in our children's class.
(Ms. Massa, state school)

This understanding of the nation as Catholic and Christian[30] justified, for a number of participants, the imposition of the majority culture. Even less accepting are those parents who desire a more religious formation for their children, this despite sending them to a non-denominational school. Ms. Shaw is unhappy that the school stopped her daughter's teacher (a member of the Charismatic Renewal group) from saying the Rosary every afternoon. For her, the majority should determine what is to go on in class, even if this denies freedom of conscience to minority faith children. If these children find that a Catholic ethos pervades school and lesson time, from which, unlike CRE, they cannot opt out, then 'that is their problem'.

> Apparently someone asked about this. And they said that [it was stopped] because we have a lot of different religions. Which I don't think is fair because as a country, *we're a Catholic country*. Now, if they [the minority] don't like it, I mean that is their problem, cause …
> (Ms. Shaw, independent school)

'Smallness': a pragmatic minimalist tolerance

The 'nation as Catholic majority' argument was made even by those whose personal attitudes were more positively tolerant and respectful of different Others. For example, Ms. Randon, a successful business woman, has a pragmatic *'modus vivendi'* approach finding it 'no problem whatsoever' that her son is at school with religious Others; 'this is the real world' in which she does not see 'why our children should be segregated' since segregation 'can only narrow their mentality'. This attachment to the mantra 'we're a Catholic country', repeated by Ms. Randon, is argued in relation to the question of size; 'smallness' dictates a minimalist toleration.

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[30] The word 'Insara' which was most frequently used whilst specifically meaning 'Christian' has come to mean 'Catholic Christians'.

We live in a world where there is everybody. We need to know a bit about everyone and accept everyone, you know. And having said that, as I said, if you have a religion lesson and you have people of other faiths in the class. Ok, so what? Are you going to have a lesson in the Catholic, Catholic faith and a lesson in [Islamic Studies]? And again it just becomes more and more complicated for the school, you know.
(Ms. Randon, Independent school)

Ms. Constantin also reiterates the 'smallness' argument; it is 'too complicated, I think to organize something for the non-Catholics', since at every year level there are only 'maybe two, two children' who are not Catholic. While Ms. Randon recognises the unequal power relations in toleration, stating that '*Toleration is not a nice word*, actually, because you sound almost like with, with reservation' toward the presence of the Other, at the same time she finds that 'political correctness' (or recognition) is excessive:

I do not think that to be politically correct we should go completely the other way, just as they have done in many other countries. In fact there's the, the ridiculous uproar about that you don't say 'Happy Christmas' because it is not Christmas for everyone. Christmas is the birth of Christ. You either celebrate it or you don't. You don't have to celebrate it but it is still Christmas and there's no denying it is Christmas. So why should you be [politically correct] because you might be worried you might offend someone, you do not say 'Happy Christmas'? Say 'Happy Holidays' instead? It's ridiculous you know.

Ms. Randon goes on to explore the concept of 'to offend' by stating that the present toleration which denies recognition to Others is not 'offensive' to her, as if it is she who should be accommodated.

At the end of the day it's a Catholic school. So you can have a crucifix in a class and you can introduce Catholic values in an assembly. I don't find it offensive. As long as you're not putting down, obviously, other faiths.
(Ms. Randon, Independent school)

Another justification for minimalist tolerance that involves a reversal (or counter-transference), in which a majority participant makes a case

as if she were the Other, occurs in the position articulated by Ms. Xerri. Whilst stating that she herself has no objection to having religious Others admitted to her daughter's Church school, a very long case against this admittance is made on the spurious grounds that a minority religion pupil would feel 'a fish out of water'. She argues that 'it is obvious' that the church school teaches 'certain [Catholic] values':

There are ten pupils and you are the only one, you begin to feel that you [are different]. . . If I am of a religion and have values that are different to the Church school, I am not going to send my child to a Church school *because I know she would feel uncomfortable*[31] with this. Because she is not taught these values at home…You might try to avoid [certain practices]. But, certain practices, it is obvious that in a Church school, you are going to have them.
(Ms. Xerri, Church school)

Another 'smallness' *modus vivendi* approach is articulated by Ms. Williams who argues that since the school is an independent and *not* a Church school and that there are 'Indian children, Russian children, I mean, Muslim' then the school should 'make exceptions and have these children practice their religion'. Though Others have a right to a religious education, the religious majority should be able retain its dominance of the school's ethos (and ethnos) through public symbols.

In a school like this, which is, like, independent … I don't think that it [accommodation] should take over. Like if there is a crucifix in the class I don't think it should be removed. You know, we're not disrespecting them by that, but I think they have to have some time to practice their own religion in their [own way].
(Ms. Williams, independent school)

Accept II: Respect, Engagement, Appreciation and Esteem

A small group of participants have personal attitudes of respect, engagement, appreciation and esteem. Ms. Gili, a lone parent on social benefits,

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[31] The word used is 'antipatika'.

describes how upset she is with the 'racism' (her word) present in the state school her sons attend. She responds to the racist comments of other parents by telling them how she encourages her children to assist all children. Her son takes extra food to school which he surreptitiously[32] passes on to a girl who comes without a meal. Regarding a pupil who is not Catholic, Ms. Gili argues 'I don't think there is any need to send/expel[33] him from class, just because he is not Catholic.' Another mother, who also by virtue of her marriage breakdown and the Catholic response to this, has become 'believing without belonging', thinks that 'it would be ideal' if minority religion children could 'follow a religion lesson, according to their religion, definitely.' A teacher in the Church school her daughter attends speaks with esteem of the one Muslim pupil in the school. This esteem is based on the way the pupil and her family live the Muslim way; their religiosity is of value.

> In their own religion, they are very religious. For example, this particular girl was in class with one of my daughters. I know how much her mummy used to help others of her community. …As long as there is sincerity and the idea of faith in the sense of true love toward your neighbour and toward your God[34], there are no clashes that I can see.
> (Ms. Ciantar, Church school)

Ms. Lia, a teacher, who, together with her husband and children, is actively involved in the Church and is profoundly accepting of different Others, such as of non-practising Catholics and others who are separated, divorced or gay, non-believers and minority religion Others.

> What I tell Ella is that people have different upbringings, they have different lives, they have different needs. We can't judge a person because she

is that or she does that. We can't, we can't point fingers at anyone, we can't… So for her, for Ella, a person, she's, *she's ok with different* and we are ok with her having friends who, who have parents, for example, even if she had friends coming from a different [religion]. She does have friends actually who are, who are not of the same religion, who have different perspectives on life.
> (Ms. Lia, Church school)

This personal attitude translates into a concern regarding the present exclusion of Others from CRE in schools. As a teacher herself, Ms. Lia finds it morally wrong that minority Others have to sit in on CRE. Despite her valued religiosity and her own socialisation of her daughter into the Catholic faith, she would prefer a Values Education which would effectively express and foster respect and esteem of Others.

> First of all I don't agree with, with schools that make children of other religions sit in for the Religious Education [class]. And that is why I prefer Value, Values Education rather than Religious Education. Because I wouldn't feel comfortable with having to chuck out a child out of class simply because he is of another religion.
> (Ms. Lia, Church school)

The position is one clearly articulated from a respect and esteem position which incorporates 'fairness' as equality. Ms. Lia ponders how, in providing a Values Education in place of a Religious Education, schools could still provide a faith-based RE for pupils. She cannot envisage an easy solution; one that would be 'unfair' would not be acceptable:

> Or else they could hold special classes for the children. But then, I think to be fair to everyone, they should hold them, for, for, for the different religions. It would be unfair to, to give Religious Education because she's a Catholic, so you provide religious education and another child who's Muslim, for example, you don't provide religious education [for her].
> (Ms. Lia, Church school)

Minorities: From toleration to Accept II

Both the Catholic and Muslim parents of Muslim children, accept that a catechetical Roman Catholic education should continue to be provided

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[32] Unfortunately, when the boy was openly passing the food on, he too became the butt of disparaging comments. He was told he had nits, that he was the boyfriend of the girl he was befriending, among other hurtful comments.
[33] The word she uses is 'ikecci' which means 'to send out' but also 'to expel' or 'send away'.
[34] In the Maltese 'Alla tieghek' where 'Alla' refers to both a Christian and a Muslim god.

in state schools. Most of them accept that the cultural ethos of schools, especially state schools, would be strongly informed by Catholicism. However, they wish that within this context there would be respect and esteem of their religion and for their person as well as equality for their children as Muslims. The parents made claims that could be considered to be moving beyond toleration to Accept II. For example, Ms. Daher felt that 'at least they [Muslims] should not have to follow the Maltese [sic] religion lesson'. She wished that at least one Muslim teacher would be available in schools with a Muslim population to enable Muslim pupils to get an Islamic Studies education. This would avoid the problem whereby 'they are sent to watch a video in some room' where they 'gain nothing'. This would also encourage the majority Catholic pupils to appreciate Islam and Muslims:

> Because there is no lesson for them [Muslims]. Perhaps this exactly why there is the desire to insult them. Because they [Catholics] would ask 'What are they learning?' And then the Christians would, sort of, learn more about what Islam is. And even better they would not just insult[35] [Muslims].
> (Ms. Daher, Muslim independent school)

This sentiment is shared by Ms. Essa, a Maltese Catholic who converted to Islam. She would like state schools 'especially' to teach 'World Religions, Christianity and Islam' so that there 'would not be that hatred[36] [of Muslims]'. She talks about teaching her children to respect their Christian teachers, a respect and esteem personal attitude taken also by her born-Muslim husband who argues for a tolerance of respect and equality without discrimination.

> And respect for everyone. There is no difference, neither between who is white or who is black nor of religion. On the contrary, if I make a distinction, I am not worshipping Allah. If we discriminate… To obey my religion I need to respect the religion of others. It is not my religion I should respect but the

religion of others. So, to respect my religion I need to respect the religion of others.
> (Mr Essa, Muslim Independent school)

Ms. Spiteri, another Maltese convert to Islam, whose children attend a state school because she cannot afford to send her children to the Muslim independent school, would be content with 'at least one Islamic Studies class a week' where her children could learn the *Qu'ran*. Given that the 'school is half Muslim' in intake, according to her to group Muslim pupils in vertical age groups at the time when their peers are at CRE; this is 'the least it could do'. Living at a distance from the Mosque and unable to send her children to Saturday classes, Ms. Spiteri states that this 'would be enough for me'. Similarly, Ms. Himsi Borg, a Catholic, also points out that not all Muslims can afford the independent sector school. In the state school he attended prior to moving to the Muslim independent school, her son found it 'hard to live the Muslim way of life'. For her, the provision of an Islamic Studies teacher together with some minor adjustments to the state schools' culture would be acceptable.

An acceptance of the CRE cultural norm was also held by Mr Naudi, a 'belonging without believing' guardian of a boy in care, and Ms. Dinova, the non-believing mother of a newly arrived Bulgarian child. Mr Naudi feels that although it is not 'right' that there is no alternative to CRE, since both the school and the residential care home where his charge lives are 'Catholic organisations', then 'one has to go along with it'. Ms. Dinova, who as a child was brought up under a repressive Communist regime and was forced to be atheist, is content that her daughter, of her own choice, is now following the CRE curriculum:

> Yes, yes, she likes it, she likes it and for me it is good…Because the religion is something good.
> (Ms. Dinova, state school)

Ms. Dinova feels that since 'Malta is a Catholic country' she should not expect any religious education apart from CRE. It is sufficient that there is the tolerance of 'choice' and 'opt-out'. The

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[35] Expressed thus 'Mhux joqghodu jghajjru biss.' where 'jghajjru' means 'insult' or 'call names'.
[36] In the Maltese 'dik il- mibgheda'.

minimalist tolerance of the 'conscience clause' is regarded as sufficiently protective of rights and freedoms; equality is not sought.

> Maybe they, if they give, give a chance to make a free choice for the religion. If they *don't tell them* 'You must be Catholic' or 'You must be…' like that. It is enough, I think.
> (Ms. Dinova, state school)

Discussion

Currently, Maltese persons from very different social and economic backgrounds embrace Roman Catholicism as an ethno-religious identity. For many, this combines deeply held beliefs with a religiosity that presumes a culture of public religion. The values attached to the importance of the family and to a harmonious family life make a shared religious belonging between spouses and children a central element. Participants' responses to questions about whom they would or would not marry/partner indicate a religious familism 'that interprets religious involvement as central to the construction of a good family life' (Edgell 2006: 8). This religious familism discourages intimate contact with non-Catholic Others. However, there are a number of individuals who live religious familism in other ways, either by converting to the spouse's religion (as with converts to Islam), or who, whilst retaining their own valued ethical beliefs, such as with Catholics married to Muslims, offer sincere support of their spouses' and children's religious beliefs and ethical values. In all families, the religious socialisation of children is seen to be a major responsibility of parenthood and guardianship. The Catholic parental response to suggestions of change to their children's religious education should thus be understood as a response to a rather complex context, in which the presence of new religious Others is seen as a further strain on already delicate 'chains of memory' (Hervieu-Léger 2006). That said, there are parents like Ms. Lia, who, though a very active participant in the Church, interprets her religious vocation of Christian love as one of appreciation and esteem of religious

Others; the Muslim Mr. and Ms. Essa share the same approach. This contrasts with the attitudes of those, such as Ms. Mercieca, whose religious familism translates into non-tolerant personal attitudes regarding religious Others.

Minimalist toleration of religious Others is characterised by recourse to the idea of the Nation as unitary, Catholic and European (white). It articulates an anxiety that the presence of the Other might lead to a dilution in the religious identity or religious practices of the Nation. The sensorial experience of anxiety of these Maltese has not yet led them to 'an endurance of pain' as the 'world making' active tolerance of 'empowerment and pluralisation'; in their majority, they are as yet stuck within a passive tolerance of 'restraint and repression' (Tønder 2013: 90). Participants are oblivious or indifferent to the fact that with a predominately Catholic culture pervading all school time, the freedom of conscience clause is not being respected. They turn on its head the 'reversibility' argument. Instead of testing the provisions made for religious Others against standards that would be acceptable to them as Catholics, they behave as if the majority culture is under threat, especially from immigrant religious Others. Even among participants with a pragmatic or *modus vivendi* approach who are positive regarding 'diversity' there is still an inability to 'go beyond' (Dobbernack and Modood 2012) to accommodation. The recognition that is shown to Others by *not* taking Catholicism as norm (such as in wishing them 'Happy Holidays') is considered an extreme 'political correctness'. In the 'pragmatic attitude', an ideology of 'smallness' permeates the arguments against extending a faith-based education to religious Others. This attitude matches the justifications for refuting accommodation put by key policy stakeholders (Darmanin 2013a) which are of the 'official discouragement' type (McKinnon 2009). The minimalist toleration argument is evident also in the attitudes of those who argue that Church schools, in particular, cannot be expected to accommodate religious Others. For these participants, the segregation of faith-based school-

ing is the solution to the vexing challenge of cultural pluralism.

Currently, intolerance is expressed as Islamophobia, where there is a conflation of 'Muslim' with 'foreign' and 'undocumented immigrant'. Rather than an appreciation of the ethical values and religious devotion of Muslims, there is the anxiety of dilution, of the 'mixing' of conversion (to Islam) and/or of intermarriage with Muslims. However, this personal Islamophobic attitude is not monolithic, as the attitudes articulated by converts to Islam, or of those married to Muslims, or who are parents of Muslim children, demonstrate. For these latter participants, whose personal attitudes are characterised by engagement and appreciation, there is much consternation regarding the intolerance, even 'racism' of Catholics. Whilst they accept a political response of minimalist toleration, for example, in their fidelity to the idea of Malta as 'a Catholic country', their desire to have an Islamic Studies curriculum in State schools with large Muslim populations would require, minimally, an Accept II (Dobbernack and Modood 2013) political response (discussed further below). Neither as individuals nor as a group have their 'claims' been articulated publicly, though they are being presented in closed, formal meetings and selectively reported in the press.

Given these personal attitudes it is perhaps not surprising that a political response or institutional attitude has been very slow to develop. Having given recognition and considerable support to the Muslim community in the early 1970s (Darmanin 2013a), diversity rather than equality discourses have since permeated policy texts such as the National Minimum Curriculum and education policy practices (Darmanin 2013a). The Ethics Education Programme is the sole institutional response to religious Others contemplated in the education sector. The Interfaith Forum of President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society is creating a 'public sphere' space where the claims of religious minorities for formal and substantive equality may be made. Through the press and its own social media site, the Founda-

tion broadcasts some of these demands to the public. The President herself champions the rights of religious minorities[37]; as a result of this, she often receives criticism on the social media. There are limits to her endeavour; the Office of the President has no executive power.

Conclusion

This article asks whether minimalist toleration (Dobbernack and Modood 2012) may, given personal attitudes of in/toleration, secure more stable forms of acceptance for religious minorities in Malta or whether democratic institutional pluralism is now required for both formal and substantive equality? In the case of Malta, the attachment to Catholicism as an ethno-religious identity and to children as bearers of that 'chain of memory' suggests that any changes to the CRE of Catholic children which arises out of the claims of minority religious Others or from non-believers will lead to a 'backlash' and to more intolerance in personal attitudes. This could see a rise in hate crime and a shift in voting patterns to the Far Right, a trend already evident in the 2014 European parliamentary elections. Whilst the new settlement of the EE Programme may suit humanists or other non-believers, it leaves religious minorities, such as Muslims, without a faith-based education in public schools. Since the state provides a faith-based religious education for Catholics in its schools, then how it can support the faith-based religious education of minorities is an equality question requiring a 'justice and reason' reply (Forst 2009). For religious minorities who desire a faith-based education in public schools, rather than a segregated faith-based schooling, this present settlement will be not only disappointing but also unjust. When the National Curriculum Framework of 2011 introduced the EE Programme, no public discussion regarding what type of religious and moral education would best suit Malta took place, or

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[37] **https://www.facebook.com/Presidents-Foundation-for-the-Wellbeing-of-Society-1515279792042330/timeline/**

was even contemplated. A short statement declared that 'an Ethics Education Programme is preferred over a Comparative Religion Education programme' (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family 2011: 8). The Humanist Association of Malta[38] made the point that all children, including Catholics, would benefit from an Ethics Education. By discarding a Comparative Religion (and Moral) Education Programme, the opportunity for majority and minority children to together learn about and from different religious and secular ethical beliefs is lost. With it is lost the opportunity to foster intercultural understanding, engagement, appreciation and esteem. The settlement leaves intact a CRE which desperately needs revision (Secretariat for Catechesis 2008) and which is open to critique from an autonomy perspective (MacMullen 2004). Moreover, the Accept II participants who hoped that Maltese Catholic children could learn enough about Islam, in particular, to reject stereotypes and prejudice against Muslims, will be disappointed to learn that Catholic children will not benefit from an education in ethics, nor learn about the ethical beliefs and practices of diverse religions, currently promoted (albeit modestly) in the new EE Programme.

Most significantly, the process of establishing this new curriculum has fallen short of the institutional democratic pluralism proposed by Bader (2003), since non-believing and religious Others have *not* been invited, as equals, to participate in the formulation of policy leading to the 2001 National Curriculum Framework, nor to subsequent curriculum development of the EE Programme. The political inclusion of religious and/or non-believing Others, (McKinnon 2009) in public institutions has, to date, been lost but not irrevocably so. There is still time to establish democratic institutional pluralism which, as Bader (2003: 148) argues, is a power-sharing process that leads to trust, to the political empower-

ment of minorities, to egalitarian distributive policies, and to the interaction required by a political project of multiculturalism. Within a *positive* tolerance, understood, following Lægaard (2010: 29), as a 'positive engagement with difference' made even when one has a *negative* toleration of the ethical beliefs of Others, it would be possible to include religious and non-believing Others in the on-going plans for the EE Programme. Having been one of the political movers in the Divorce Referendum Campaign, the present Minister of Education and Employment[39] is well placed to make a bold move towards this democratic institutional pluralism and toward respect and accommodation of religious and non-believing Others. This shift in the political sphere can, firstly, reassure the Catholic majority that their children will still receive their CRE entitlement (controlling the climate of intolerance and repressive tolerance in personal attitudes). Secondly, it can serenely introduce the concept of institutional engagement and institutional pluralism as processes of incorporation (Bader 2003) and participative equality that do not require majority individuals to give up valued ethical beliefs (Forst 2009). The incorporation of Others as equals in the political sphere will, as Lægaard (2010: 29) and others argue, 'reveals the non-neutral character of social norms and values'. Furthermore, as Bader (2003: 144) points out, this 'integration into some common public institutions' provides an opportunity for respectful 'everyday interactions' and 'the development of common civic virtues, and a *minimally required identity and commitment in the polity*' as well as the establishment of the 'expansive' connections of persons, their empowerment and pluralisation (Tønder 2013). It supports 'public ethnicity' (Modood 1997: 19). This is the foundation from which minimalist tolerance may 'go beyond' to the accommodation of Accept II (Dobbernack and Modood 2013), to the equality of respect and esteem (Forst 2009) and, ultimately, to 'deep equality' (Beaman 2011).

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[38] In comments posted on the HAM website following the seminar on 'Ethics Education'. **http://www.maltahumanist.org/ethics-education-in-malta-information-seminar/**

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[39] The Hon. Mr Evarist Bartolo, MP.

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