



I focus

andrew azzopardi

Prof Andrew Azzopardi,
Dean Faculty for Social
Wellbeing,
University of Malta &
Broadcaster - 103 FM
Malta's Heart

www.andrewazzopardi.org

Jaiteh, the face of what this country has turned into

So much has been written and said during this last week on this infamous and abominable incident that shocked our country.

Lest we forget.

Alas it was reported that Gambian Jaiteh Lamin, after falling two stories in a construction site, was allegedly bundled in a car following which he was dumped on a pavement with what seems to be injuries of a serious nature. Apparently, the contractor he worked for was responsible for this and the latter has been remanded in custody. In the video, he was heard crying and sobbing with pain and the fear of being arrested; 'I don't want to go to prison', he was heard saying.

Sadly, this is what we are turning into.

I am troubled to see this country degenerating. We seem to believe that our 'value' is determined by material things. This culture has seeped into our lives in a way I thought would never happen. The values of the people of Malta are in peril. The love of others, our availability towards those who need help and our renowned gracious attitude towards the greater good, are all being forsaken. Our goodness has morphed into a hyperbole. We have been mutated into neoliberal creatures and all the rest has vanished.

The story of Jaiteh just surfaces this dark ugly place we are in.

The witch hunt against the contractor is probably the best we will be able to manage. Justice needs to be done, fair enough, and seen to be done, agreed once again, but this will lead to no change what-so-ever. Our communities are getting poorer by the minute. Our morality has festered to an incredible low level.

Do you remember the death of Lassana Cisse Souleymane?

Do you recall the beating of a man in Marasalforn, Gozo, following which he was punched into the sea and at the same time another foreigner was bullied and beaten in Swatar?

Do you not see people ambling around in streets (for example near the ex-Lowenbrau factory)



waiting to get picked up for miserly pays and uncontrolled employment?

Do you know of people (you might be one of them) who employs a *Filippina* to look after their home, kids and pets whilst 'they' live the Maltese dream? *Taf inti* because it is ok to exploit people *ghax naghtuhom iktar milli kieku qeghdin pajjizhom!* As if anyone deserves to be treated this way, working round the clock whilst 'we' go about doing 'our' thing, *ghax il-karriera hux!*

These people have simply become a commodity paid penny-pinching wages and legislation is nowhere near close to protecting these people.

Back to Jaiteh. What we have on our plate is not simply an isolated incident. I can mention endless cases of *construction worker accidents* including those that led to deaths and little or nothing was said about them.

What is unfolding in front of us is a discourse that is lending itself to a very dangerous public stance.

Much as this may sound painful and heart wrenching, we seem to be normalizing discrimination. This is particularly evident towards African people, but not only. Added to this is a discourse around the fact that they have

become a commodity and we are allowed to squeeze the life out of them. We expect them to work endless hours, with ridiculous rates (which are also impinging in some sectors on the wages of Maltese people as well), oh, and 'we' expect them to show gratitude! This is all fueled by the lynching of a public discourse in the media and at times serious claims by politicians.

The negativity surrounding migrants is fueled;

- When we hear about allegations of black people being hosed down and physically threatened in prison following a mass arrest operation in Safi. It has also been reported that cells that usually take in one or two inmates were being packed with 6, 7 African inmates.
- When we talk about push-backs as being fair and justified even if these people are sent back to war torn zones and areas where torture of people is as normal as they come.
- When we talk about ramming NGO boats in the middle of the Mediterranean to stop them from saving distressed migrants.
- When two Prime Ministers and a former Leader of the Opposition have opted for (or en-

dorsed) policy decisions that leave people rescued after fleeing Libya in the middle of the sea, left bobbing up and down for days on end.

- When on more than one occasion we bring busloads of meagerly paid migrants to help in major construction projects as if we're herding cattle, knowing well-enough that the wages they are getting and the conditions they are living in are inhumane.
- When we know that people are being released into the community from open centers (because their time is up) with nowhere to go.
- When we hear public officials admitting that unaccompanied minors are leaving Malta and no one knows how to stop this.
- When we hear of allegations of use of solitary confinement in detention services.
- When we know of migrants living in squalid conditions (remember the story of people living in stables?) and nothing is done to address this issue.
- When so many migrants are allegedly kept in detention beyond the time they are expected to be there.
- When we do nothing to address the fact that people are on the street waiting for a job

hoping against hope that they will be picked up and paid for the work they are asked to do.

- When it is ok that Filipinos and other people work as servants for hours on end and with miserly wages so that middle-class families can live the 'Maltese dream'.
- When one regularly witnesses, as I did a couple of days ago, a black man running like crazy to make it to the rubbish truck with black bags in one hand and trying to latch on to the truck as it was speeding down the main road.

No regard for life. These are the images we see of black people and other foreigners which impinges on our psyche.

This is what my colleague at the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, Dr Maria Pisani, wrote on her Facebook wall:

It is horrific, but hardly a surprise, to hear that a man was discarded like waste. There is a clearly mapped journey demonstrating how we got here. And if you can't see it, then either you have not been paying attention, or you just don't care. #blacklivesmatter

All of this is catching up on us. We have lost traction and it is all about to topple over - very little time left to address these issues.