

Social Class in Malta: Insights into a homegrown relationship with special reference to education

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Introduction

The economic and occupational map of contemporary Malta has encouraged strident, though unsupported, declarations that "we are all middle class now"; whereas a number of academics continue to suggest rigid configurations of conventional class categories and hierarchies. While the fundamental relevance of the social class concept and explanatory value in social analysis is nowadays questioned, one has yet to assess whether the Maltese socioeconomic formation and the experiences of production, distribution and exchange warrant an idiosyncratic, locale-specific, interpretation of social class. In other words, is a home grown theoretical framework for social class in Malta justifiable?

Regretfully, a serious study which would work out inductively, from empirical data, a social class topography for contemporary Malta has yet to materialize. This article will nevertheless seek to serve as a further tentative inroad into research on social class in Malta, mainly on the basis of statistical and secondary data, plus some theoretical, albeit admittedly armchair, considerations where there is a dearth of other knowledge. It will propose an emergent, working definition of social class perhaps more sensitive to, and therefore sensible in, the Maltese context. Finally, it will also indicate some of the implications which may result from such new approaches to an otherwise hackneyed theme, using education as the referent.

The Subject of Study

If we accept the proviso that all societies, by definition, engender dynamics which establish an unequal distribution of desirables (Mandel 1968), then the concept of social class will remain a conceptually valid one, a relevant lens through which to scrutinize the patterns and implications of social inequality. Admittedly, the contours and mechanisms of such differentiation may and do change, in reaction to structural and agency initiatives and so

does their transparency. Indeed, one contemporary fad is to stubbornly insist that, given that the class struggle is purportedly over, a benign reference to status groups is more in order. Such a conclusion would, in a sense, be equivalent to throwing out the baby with the bath water; an illustration of a refusal to engage in a demystification of the underlying but pervasive unequal distribution of social power, in all its forms.

I understand social class to comprise both an identity and a structural component. It relates to a contextualised image of the self within a wider social weave - one which is peopled by actors, alone and in groups, operating within or alongside structures, some of which may seem to have an autonomous character and exercising an overbearing influence on other people, other structures, the general social going on. These perceptions are typically organized and reinforced around one or more principles, as is readily documented from interview based research and ethnography. An appraisal of the institutional parameters within which such self location takes place would be more concerned with revealing the, typically pyramidal, layered social class categorization and its organizing themes; research techniques here are likely to be loaded towards macro-statistical and socio-economic data collection and analysis.

This interplay between identity and structure is a sociological fascination in itself. It is to be expected that value positions and hypotheses will be developed and defended, arguing for alternative weightings to be assigned to these parameters in the social class equation. But whether the bias of social class configuration lies towards the objective-scientific or more towards the subjective-phenomenological, whether the source of constituent social power is single or multiple, and whether interpersonal/group/class relations therein are essentially consensual or conflicting are pertinent but different questions altogether. The definitional debate about social class has possibly blunted its incisive

critique of social organization. Energy has been channeled into often academic, sterile jousts between two rather sharply organized factions which, with all due respect, do not appear to mete justice to the theoretical position and vision of their respective mentors, Karl Marx and Max Weber. It may have been this internal preoccupation, a relatively petty exercise waged within a false sense of security, which may have caught social scientists unawares when confronted by the contemporary, neoliberal ideological tidal wave. The post-cold war scenario is likely to have influenced this emargination of a key sociological concept from both scholarly and popular discourse (Baldacchino 1989).

How have the battle lines been drawn? Observers of a primarily Marxist inspiration would emphasise objective class criteria, located ultimately within the sphere of production, with the haves and the have nots demarcated practically on the basis of the ownership and/or control of property, capital and labour power. The Weberian camp, in contrast, would tend to allocate more influence to the sphere of circulation, with a larger number of determining factors - including age, wealth, race, political affiliation, education, gender, over and above occupational status and production relations - brought together in a more pluralist, power jostling configuration (e.g. Marshall et al. 1988, Chapters 1 & 2).

An Empty Term?

The concept of social class in Malta may have been bandied about so often by so many: It has been used steadily in the context of doctrinaire, political rhetoric (Vassallo 1985); and perhaps partly as a reaction to this, the concept has been thrown out of the window as lacking currency and relevance in contemporary Maltese society. Thus one could easily fail to identify any longer any intrinsic meaning in the term. A case in point is Lanfranco (1989):

"Class. Why is there a tendency of referring to "The working class"? All people who work for wages and salary are workers, and others may work for nothing. As I see it, the only classes existing nowadays are the elected politicians, and the rest of the people."

And this gobbledeegook becomes even more glaring because it has been left largely unattended by Maltese social scientists to date. Most of the handful of academic contributions on Maltese social class have actually floundered in the shallows, failing to dislodge themselves from abstract and definitional

structures (Sultana 1991a, p.17). In a sense, this contribution is itself liable to the same deficiency.

Standard Typologies

Social class divisions in Malta on the basis of an orthodox Marxist typology would shape up approximately as illustrated in Box A below. The main difficulty of such and similar typologies is that they assume *a priori* a distribution of social power in terms of ownership or control of the means of production, including the state apparatus. The implicit orientation of the model is towards two main class positions, with a burgeoning proletariat opposed to a power elite. The implications of the pyramid are obvious, perhaps too obvious: the situation is ripe with revolutionary vigour. But is this perhaps a jaundiced exercise in wish fulfilment?

An Occupational Distribution

In contrast, the results of the 1985 census exercise reproduce information on occupational status which uses functional criteria to justify categorisations and demarcations. (See Box B below). Arguably, these have been carried over from previous census exercises, although the comparative value of these is not exploited in the 1985 census report (C.O.S. 1986, pp.86-8). They are also easier to note by time conscious census enumerators who also have usually only a skimpy initiation into the realms and methods of social science inquiry. The two relevant tables are broken down by age and gender in the census report (C.O.S. 1986, Tables 31 & 32, pp.278-9):

The disadvantages of this kind of classification in contrast to the previous one is that, first of all, the information is provided verbally by the respondent and may thus not be altogether sincere (C.O.S. 1986, p.86); secondly, the *occupational* label may be a rather formalistic assessment of a job description which may be very different from its practical deployment: actual tasks and their associated social and technical relations may be easily concealed behind official terminology. Thus, an occupational label devoid of its contextual application is not a strong enough indicator of social class: for example, the employer of hundreds of wage and salary earners and the employer of one skilled tradesman will both figure in the same occupational class category according to this second scheme, but not in the same social class category according to the previous one. Thirdly, the distribution is limited exclusively to full time productive workers: its catchment is therefore restricted to

approximately half that of its competing scheme.

Maltese Nuances?

It seems to me that both these categorizations are too dogmatic and exclusivist, not only in facing up to the perennial boundary problem, but more seriously, in their *a priori* conceptualisation, leaving little room for some important fine tuning which may be necessary in different socio-economic formations. The main difficulty of social class analysis is that observers and commentators may refuse to consider the extant social and economic reality, with its own unique blend of character and historical legacy, preferring instead to stick doggedly and snugly to precast and preset parameters. The two schemata described above are equally deterministic in this respect. Both these classifications after all find ready international support, allow pseudo-scientific comparability and draw copiously and comfortably from existing theorisation. And, let's face it, these approaches are also an easy way out from gripping the bull by the horns and avoiding the mammoth inter disciplinarian and longitudinal rolling research investigation which a proper appraisal of social class cannot ultimately avoid (Portelli 1992). If sociological analysis deals with a reflexive interpretation of the subject of study, then the critical disposition ought to extend beyond the rather circumscribed terrain of the research process and design, infusing also the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the investigation. Good, grounded sociology embraces a situational, apart from an empirical, sensibility.

Macro Considerations of Power

In dealing with Malta we are after all dealing with a small island archipelago whose perennial struggle has been to exploit, maximize and cash in on geopolitical variables. The historical development of Malta can be seen to read as a lesson not so much in the establishment and expansion of an autonomous economic production platform but more as a reconstitution of a transfer and rentier (rather than value) orientation and a client status, thanks to "geographical positioning", obviously draped within the dignity and rhetoric of independent and sovereign statehood (Baldacchino 1990, p.88; Boswell 1980, pp.27-30; Delia 1992, pp.48-9). We after all inhabit a small, resource poor archipelago. The survival of its inhabitants has depended, as it continues to do, on its attraction as a node, a hub within a global architecture, a site for the transfer and transshipment of 'merchandise' in all its forms: cargo, finance, tourists

and other invisible receipts (Baldacchino 1992, pp.2-3; Dommen 1981; Legarda 1984, p.43).

Can one, should one, therefore, in all fairness talk in terms of a local elite deriving its socio-economic power primarily because of control over *productive* capacity? Orthodox social scientists may continue to focus on the sociology of industry and on the capitalist relations of production therein as the ascendant casting moulds for social class location, identity and consciousness. And this may well turn out to be the case, where the international global economy is concerned. But the real power game, at least on the Maltese Islands, may be taking place elsewhere. To a considerable extent, industrial power is vested in foreigners based beyond our shores (Brincat 1989, pp.19 *et seq.*); and manufacturing industry in Malta, even at its all-time peak of 1980, never employed more than 10% of the total population (Baldacchino 1988, p.61).

Rather, the *raison d'être* of local economic power seems to be the distributive mechanism - where the key actors are importers, wholesalers, agents, franchise holders, real estate speculators particularly in oligo\monopolistic conditions which Malta's small size accentuates. We may therefore be dealing with a rather nebulous but finely articulated cluster of firms, agencies, businesses and perhaps even families who comprise local merchant, service oriented - rather than industrial, manufacture oriented capitalism. This observation finds ready corroboration from case studies focusing on other very small, resource poor, developing island territories (e.g. Bertram & Watters 1985; McKee & Tisdell 1990).

Hasn't Malta always been, and still remains, a service economy? It is not difficult to argue that even manufacturing industry has, and remains, located in Malta primarily because of the services that the island offers, not so much because of the 'cheap labour' argument. Attracting such industries to small island settings must take cognisance of the concomitant distance to markets, extra freight and insurance costs, absence of scale economies and typically high labour costs (Baldacchino 1993, p.43). Foreign capital location is thus more likely to be engineered successfully by means of heavy subsidies and strategic location, than by the maximisation of value added *per se*.

Isn't the structure of economic power still dominated by a service, local, commercial elite? And with a ubiquitous state impacting considerably on a

sizable chunk of even private economic activity, an influence over the direction and extent of the flow of state largesse is bound to be another strong (non-economic) determinant of derived economic power. The state joins in this articulated network, both as an actor in its own right and as a powerful instrument for the enhancement of the power of other actors, not least via its function in a welfarist economic system where so much widely acclaimed private enterprise is to be credited ultimately to government deficit spending, public funds, contracts and human resource development (e.g. McKee & Tisdell 1990, p.26).

Although a purely conjectural hunch at this point, would one be surprised to find the pinnacle of this local class structure occupied by an organisational triumvirate enjoying significant inter-family connections and collusions, plus a very ample presence on a large number of company directorships and state appointed boards? A judicious examination of records held by the Registrar of Commercial Partnerships may be enough to reveal this fabric. And any level-headed Maltese who operates in the world of finance would know this; although s/he might - in the interest of self-preservation - not wish to ever acknowledge this in public.

Micro Maltese Work Dynamics

Shifting from a structural to a processual perspective, there are a number of (some obvious) practices indulged in especially by the "working class" in Malta which do not find ready answer in hypothetico-deductive social class theorizations, be they of Marxist or Weberian inspiration. A cursory review of these follows.

The first is the overriding importance of kin and friendship networks which enable individuals to circumvent institutions, laws and procedures to maximise their interests. Network theorisation in sociological research (Boissevain 1968; Boissevain & Mitchell 1973) has been grounded primarily by socio-anthropological fieldwork carried out in Malta (Boissevain 1974). Individuals are seen to occupy the centres of social fields which exist and are cultivated by virtue of personalistic and particularistic relations. These erode impersonal standards of efficiency, performance and integrity; instead they enable an often speedy, economic and effective resort to desirables. Possibly, in the Maltese social formation, the social class concept is on one hand strongly correlated to the political (not only but including partisan) influence and size of one's networks: It is not what you *do* (that is, occupation) or what you

know (that is formal qualification) which matters but, more importantly, *who* you know and who you are, as well as who you know *well* and who would therefore not just promise but will, at the end of the day, deliver the goods. On the other hand, such political influences appear to strengthen, and to be strengthened by, economic - particularly commercial - leverage in the market.

The second is the importance of partisan political sympathy/antipathy as an institutionalised embodiment of such networks. These are therefore perhaps more akin to clans and ethnic groups than to ideologically divided class factions and alliances in the classical tradition (Baldacchino 1989, pp.109-10). Malta may be lucky in being blessed with the absence of religious, tribal or ethnic conflict. There is however still reason to support the proposition that the Maltese people are close to being two nations (but see Serracino-Inglott 1988). In spite (or because?) of the many policy convergences by the two main political parties - the Nationalist Party and the Malta Labour Party - the perceived outcomes of policy decisions as well as the political behaviour of partisan supporters is more attuned to the analogy of ethnic conflict. The reds and the blues are each armed with a particular set of economic, religious and moral values and vocabulary, each with a fully fledged cultural industry geared to ensure the preservation and social reproduction of diehard supporters. Given this condition, it is not uncommon to find sympathisers of the party in opposition who see themselves as an oppressed ethnic group (Baldacchino 1991, pp.51-2).

Third, there is the widespread existence of small scale enterprises which generate distinct employer-employee relations (Briguglio 1992), at times referred to denigratorily as "feudal relics" (Wright 1978). The positive aspects, fully within the 'small is beautiful' tradition, associated with small firms include a high level of motivation, corporate commitment, flexibility and adaptability (Hollingworth & Hand 1979; Storey 1982). But these all too readily cloud less commendable practices which include typically below market wages and working conditions, lower trade union representation and less protection from arbitrary management decisions than do workers in similar jobs in larger firms (Baldacchino 1990, pp.28-9; Rainnie 1985). This in the context of greater economic vulnerability which leads to systematically shorter organizational life-spans (Bluestone & Harrison 1982, Chapter 7).

There is then the "perverse" distribution of

income where a salariat cannot do without declaring total income on income tax returns, appearing thus to be financially worse off than most skilled manual labour; dominant perceptions also profess that skilled manual labour is financially a more promising occupational career (Sultana 1992, p.324). The Maltese economy continues to suffer from a shortage of technically skilled personnel whose going market rates and conditions are correspondingly very attractive.

Next is the ready resort to moonlighting, part-time work, housework, do-it-yourself jobs and multiple jobs successively and/or contemporaneously, among both men and women (Briguglio 1993; Delia 1987; Sultana 1992, pp.327-9). Underground economic activity of this kind is estimated to account for the equivalent of 25% of the nation's gross national product (Briguglio, verbal communication, 5th March 1993). This situation complicates, to say the least, social class perceptions. Each work experience will tend towards its own compendium of social and technical relations of production, associated images of society, occupational class ranking, income and other variables relevant to the social class equation.

There is next the relative ease with which individuals can develop a particular expertise in the domestic market on the basis of which they can exercise wide spans of discretion and job control, a condition best characterised but not limited to self-employment (e.g. Bray & Fergus 1986, p.94). A consequence of small scale and isolation, it has been described (although presumably not meant denigratorily) as a condition whereby one becomes a big fish because one lives in a small pond (Caruana Galizia 1993).

Last but not least, there remains the perennial difficulty of evaluating the class position of public sector jobs which account directly for about 40% of the total local labour force and, indirectly, to a higher, unknown proportion.

All the above purported nuances remain as yet only sketchily researched if at all in Malta. Nevertheless, the qualifications above seem to propose that the Maltese structure of social inequality contains a very high degree of fluidity, as individuals utilise an impressively wide repertoire of both economic and non-economic variables. Within these dynamics, the location of the self appears to be a highly personalised one, self-location being in terms of a web of coalitions, kinship, patronage (Zammit 1984, Chapter 7) and portfolio deployment and switching. The

critical balance of power between agency and structure in Maltese society is thus heavily circumscribed by the nature and diversity of one's resources. While this in itself is not stating anything new, the most insightful and locally specific detail of this proposition seems to be the overriding influence of the non-pecuniary variables. Rampant opportunities to make or save money (albeit at the cost of self-exploitation and "living to work" and not necessarily declared to one's income tax assessor), plus the critical infection of disproportionately non-economic ramifications of power suggest that the balance shifts in favour of status and political power considerations. An appraisal of expressions of Maltese cultural wisdom seems to substantiate this proposition, couched as they are in an individualistic, clientelistic behavioural cultural framework (Baldacchino 1990, pp.73-83).

Status Exhibitionism

A shift in favour of status exhibitionism can also be readily experienced: A cursory examination of the contemporary Maltese socio-economy suggests that the trappings of modernisation are everywhere. No wonder social class appears to have become a victim of cultural amnesia. There appears to be a near total elimination of absolute poverty, at least in a monetary sense, by a generous, paternalistic welfare state; there is near to full employment, luxurious dwellings and envious quality of life indicators certainly from a contemporary European and North American standpoint, these 'rich' countries being in the tight grip of economic depression and mass unemployment. Ownership of telephones, television sets, private cars, water and electricity consumption... emphatically indicate a widespread distribution of wealth and income. Compared to similar statistics derived from other nations, Malta qualifies with the rather ambiguous status of an "intermediately developed economy" (Briguglio 1988, p.171), quite a commendable feat considering that Malta is intrinsically poor in natural exploitable resources and that its open small economy is heavily dependent on foreign markets, investments and terms of trade.

This observation does not however in itself imply the obsolescence and irrelevance of social classes in Malta. Out of sight is typically out of mind: If we accept that all human societies have bottom heaps, then this layer does not exactly lend itself to any kind of scrutiny, except occasional compassion or disdain - by the press, by academics, by policy instruments. Elites, in contrast, may even enjoy and

cultivate being in the limelight and have the resources to do and be so. Social inequalities persist (e.g. Lockhart 1989), only perhaps that there has been an overall net upgrading of the class structure and that the demonstrability and expression of such a class structure has evidently changed. It seems, for example, no longer a question of whether one owns a car or has a telephone, but *which car* and *what kind of telephone*. Other current fads include designer wear, glasses and pleasure craft ownership (Tabone 1991, p.36). Indeed, it appears plausible to argue today - at least in the absence of alternative evidence - that consumer commodities, especially those considered to fall within the luxury category - serve as positional, status goods, continually charting and recharting the contours and terrain of social class distinction, at least from a subjective, perceptual point of view. In a way this concern can be understood as a reflection of the relative absence of strict economic and political closures in the contemporary Maltese social formation; status becomes thus a default category for social class location and measurement.

But are such and other prestige goods themselves determinants of social class or are they merely epiphenomena of more subtle workings, possibly traced to the economic, infrastructural (and as, is suggested above, commercial) base of the Maltese social condition? One may accuse the status argument above as ascribing too much influence and determinatory power to "market" manifestations beyond the sphere of production which, from the Marxist paradigm, read as appearances and fetishes rather than reality. Another critique is that these are actually not indicators of the *quality of life* but of the *quantity of life*, expressions of socially transparent, consumptive materialism which could be reinterpreted as the expression of a different and subtle poverty, a blind and reckless pursuit of the capitalist logic of sales maximisation. Indeed, status consciousness can be costly and misplaced, if one lacks the economic and fiscal baggage to manage it.

Locating Education

Education and credentialling may not be important independent variables on the road to social and occupational positioning and mobility. Various studies worldwide have already suggested that structural determinants such as family background, father's occupation and parental educational history and disposition significantly determine the attitudes to and achievements in schooling of students (e.g. Boudon 1974; Kelsall & Kelsall 1971; see review in

Sultana 1991b). Schools thus may not only disappoint as instruments of social uplifting - they may actually engrain class location by acting to reproduce the given social structure, ensuring that working class kids get working class jobs, etc. (Willis 1977). A structural correspondence has been argued to exist between the school's social relations and those of production, such that the former replicate the hierarchical division of labour (Bowles & Gintis 1976). It would be most challenging to test the proposition that Maltese schools may also act as reproductive devices but more so within a regime of consumption and distribution, identifying how this is indeed operationalised. A cause - effect relationship between schooling and social/occupational location and mobility therefore appears naive. In the meantime, any failure to obtain success according to the rules of the game is internalised as an intellectual inability for which individuals have only themselves to blame, thus legitimating the educational system's screening and closure functions.

In identifying education as more of an intervening variable, one can then argue that the experience of schooling - and not so much its paper products (certificates and qualifications) - builds and cultivates the access to non-economic variables, which seem to significantly mould and improve access to socially prized resources, including jobs, but also coalitions, alliances and "godfathers" per se. Recruitment practices do not seem to be so strongly based on explicit academic qualifications and other legal-rational considerations, in spite of the whole ethos of formal schooling (Zahra & Ebejer 1992). Perhaps ascribed criteria, inclusive of networking, could actually *explain* the structural distribution of Maltese school children across private and public schools (Darmanin 1991). Educational qualifications in a sense, do not remain positional goods in themselves; rather, the social environment in which education (often schooling) purportedly takes place also promotes interactions and behavioural patterns which may be cashed in eventually - and these interactions may in the Maltese context depend considerably on the location and management of the particular school and classroom setting.

Education and certification may therefore need to be replaced by good contacts with power holders as the key form of social capital transmitted by schools (Dale & Pires 1984, p.61, quoted in Sultana 1990, p.61). In considering knowledge as problematic, the school may act as a conserver of extant social differentiation because it promotes knowledge in the

style and language which discriminate in favour of privileged social groups (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bernstein 1965; Young 1971). And there is here a case to be made for the wider socio-economic capital which the English language provides as against the strictly parochial Maltese in our country. But schools may also achieve a similar outcome by fostering and widening the knowledge held by certain individuals of certain employers, politicians, businessmen, professionals, agents, who are therefore accommodated and populate their personal social network. So much may depend on the turn of a friendly card, strategically placed.

If these qualifiers are correct, then it would appear that one's prospects for social class location and/or mobility remain constrained and structurally determined to a significant extent. This is already being meticulously documented for the Maltese social formation (e.g. Hili 1988; Schembri 1991; Vella 1986). But the manner in which these constraints are actually activated and predetermined may deviate from the textbook models, perhaps even in ways uniquely Maltese.

It may also prove valid to propose here that a gendered perspective to this relationship would be able to trace male domination also to the traditionally wider and deeper social presence of males in Maltese society, permitting these to build, tend and manipulate networks with a greater intensity, frequency and confidence than would women. This because Maltese women's social universe and associated networks are still likely to be inordinately composed of relatively weak, socially powerless members (children? other women?) in relatively more bounded social spaces. Maltese women still by and large plug into social networks which deliver through their male partners...

Admittedly, these ideas are crying out loud for both theoretical and empirical corroboration. They can here only be put forward as hopefully sound and reasonable arguments. But perhaps enough frowns have been raised by readers to jostle some of them into embarking on important sociologically driven research into the character of the (distinct?) Maltese socio-economic formation and on the influence, if any, of educational exposure and credentialling, as well as other significant referents, on an individual's or group class location and active mobility therein.

Discussion

This paper has been an attempt at continuing

what have been described as my early empirical and theoretical forays into the subject of social class (Sultana 1991a, p.17), extending the argument with a basic plea for home-grown sensibility thanks in particular to my current, mainly unpublished, research on social dynamics and economic problems in small territories worldwide (Baldacchino 1993).

The implications of this observation, were it to stand the test of fieldwork, would be considerable. The linkages with education are an illustrative case in point: Education would not be so readily incorporated into this scheme as the means by which individuals can readily escape from strict class categories and usurp structural social stratification.

One of the uncritically accepted liberal fads associated with the educational system in Malta is that it is a strong, if not the crucial, determinant of social mobility. This is a popular conception in Maltese society and seems to have been borne out from empirical investigations carried out on a fairly representative base in the late 1970s (Boswell 1982; Zammit 1984, p.139). Yet, in spite of the centrality of this equation in justifying the attraction of education and the corrective potential that it offers in short-circuiting structures of socio-economic, political and cultural inequality, the issue has surprisingly only been sparsely researched. It remains as yet unaddressed head on by any serious empirical investigation drawing, among others, on diachronic methodologies like the "origins & destinations" research conducted in Britain (Haisey et.al. 1980; Sultana 1991b, p.211). The impact of formal credentials as educational outcomes may not be as strong as is purported and popularly believed to be in securing social and occupational mobility, and not even social and occupational placements for that matter; the vital contacts and the formative interactions and impressions built up at school, and within a particular school or class, may be even more powerful assets at the end of the day. Hence schools and schooling may be mediating mostly predetermined social variables and reproduce social formations, but not primarily through the credentialling mechanism. This observation, if substantiated, would have profound implications on, say, the effects of multiple streaming which currently plague the Maltese educational system.

The myth of course shows no signs of erosion, as the rat race for credentialling and placement in certain schools or certain streams continues unabated. Texts such as the *Who's Who* continue to cultivate this belief system, with their testimonial of

BOX A: A Marxist Inspired Social Class Map for Malta

The power elite (controllers of the largest industrial, financial & commercial enterprises in the private sector and the commanding heights of the state system):

large employers	=	112 (a)
the state	=	-executive 75 (b)
		-legislative 200 (c)
		-judiciary 30 (d)

major bankers,
industrialists, businessmen = 33 (e)

-Sub-Total = 450 - (0.2% of total)

-the bourgeoisie (business, professional & senior administrative elements):

employers	=	1900 (f)
professionals	=	8100 (g)
business	=	330 (h)

-Sub-Total = 10,330 (4.6%)

-the petty bourgeoisie (occupying a contradictory class location between the two main class clusters: consists of small businessmen, traders and self-employed artisans, semi-professional and supervisory staff):

small businessmen	=	2000 (i)
semi-professional/ supervisory staff	=	5500 (j)
traders	=	3500 (k)
self-employed artisans	=	8000 (l)

-Sub-Total = 19,000 (8.4%)

-the working class (those whose exclusive source of income is the sale of their labour power or, failing that, reliance on transfer payments):

male employees	=	94,330 (m)
female employees	=	32,890 (m)
housewives, whose spouse is an employee	=	54,000 (n)

-Sub-Total = 181,220 (81%)

-the underclass (peripheral workers and the reserve army - the open and disguised unemployed, elderly workers, the sick and handicapped, part timers and outworkers, child labourers, twilight economy operants):

part-timers (women)	=	6,000 (o)
unemployed	=	5,300 (m)
other workers	=	2,700 (e)

-Sub-total = 14,000 (5.8%)

Grand Total = 225,000 (100%) (p)

(Based on Miliband 1987, but drawing on Vella 1989 & Sultana 1991a). The size of each class grouping is guesstimated by interpolating available data.

Notes to the above:

a= No. of enterprises employing 50 or more employees (C.O.S. 1990, p.200).

b= Heads of Government Departments & Permanent Secretaries

c= Members of Parliament, Private Secretaries to Ministers & Parliamentary Secretaries, Chief Canvassers

d= Chief Judges, Judges and Magistrates

e= Estimate

f= Total of 2,100 from 1985 Census less large employers

g= From C.O.S.(1986), Tables 31 & 32 (professional & technical cadres combined).

h= Three persons each from Malta's largest enterprises-see Note a above

i= No. of establishments with less than 20 employees- (C.O.S., 1990, p.200)

j= From C.O.S.(1986), Tables 31 & 32 (administrative & managerial cadres combined)

k= An estimate, but keeping in mind membership within the GRFU (3,200 in 1992/93: *Government Gazette*, 24th Nov 1992, p.5732.)

l= An estimate based on half the self-employed population - includes about 3,000 farmers: Delia (1990, p.7).

m= September 1992 figure, from *Economic Trends*, monthly bulletin. n= Non-working housewives, taken as 90% of non-participation rate of women (i.e. 100-30%=70%). Such housewives may be seen as thriving on the transfer payments of their husbands. 86% of husbands are taken as being employees. A figure of 6,000 is deducted, to take into consideration part-time females -see Note o below.

o= Official statistics on female part-time employment levels

p= Corresponds well to 1990 population projection of 219,000 in the 15-59 age category: C.O.S.(1986, Table 22, p.266).

BOX B: An Occupational Class Map of Malta

Occupational Status	Number		Total	(%)
	Males	Females		
Employers	2148	10	2158	2.1
Own-Account Workers	9653	1042	10695	10.2
Employees classified as:				
-professional, technical and other related workers, qualified professional scientists, doctors, dentists, architects, engineers, surveyors, qualified marine and aviation workers, university academic staff, qualified teachers, systems analysts, computer programmers, lawyers, accountants, members of religious orders, artists, librarians, qualified social workers, nurses, other paramedics:	5658	2448	8106	7.7
-administrative, managerial and other related workers, consular staff, directors, police officers:	4996	510	5506	5.2
-executive, clerical and other related duties, including bookkeepers, postmen, salesmen, tourist guides, supervisors and draughtsmen:	13810	6419	20229	19.2
-skilled and semi-skilled workers including Group D government workers, machine operators, shop assistants and catering workers:	29071	7850	36921	15.1
-unskilled workers	15102	6417	21519	20.4
Grand Total:	80440	24853	105293	100%

the men (and some women) "who affect the political, religious and social life of the country", this after having been duly screened and ascertained by "knowledgeable persons" (*ibid.*, p. ix.). Funnily enough, behind this facade, as it were, it may be a totally different kind of acumen - business, coalition building, risk hedging, role multiplicity - plus ascribed criteria such as the accident of birth (including gender) or marriage - which suggest themselves as more powerful explanations for the nature of the Maltese contemporary social class structure and of one's relative position therein.

Conclusion

The thread of my argument is, that irrespective of whether one adopts a social class perspective which ascribes primary causality to the configuration of economic power or to market and status manifestations, the extant Maltese socio-economic, cultural and political formation and its historical legacy suggests relevant class conceptualisations which depart from any ready made framework. As has been described with respect to other small and peripheral nation states, the inability to control and determine one's own economic development trajectory may be understood by the relative lack of social classes in the structuralist sense. The *a priori* primacy of production must therefore be questioned, and the greater relevance of other social cleavage factors seriously entertained (Duncan 1980,p.5).

Implications on educational policy and im-

puted outcomes have been introduced above to ground some of the powerful implications of revised conceptualisation. I leave these as tentative but studied seminal remarks, possibly a spur towards further illuminating and revisionist empirical research.

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