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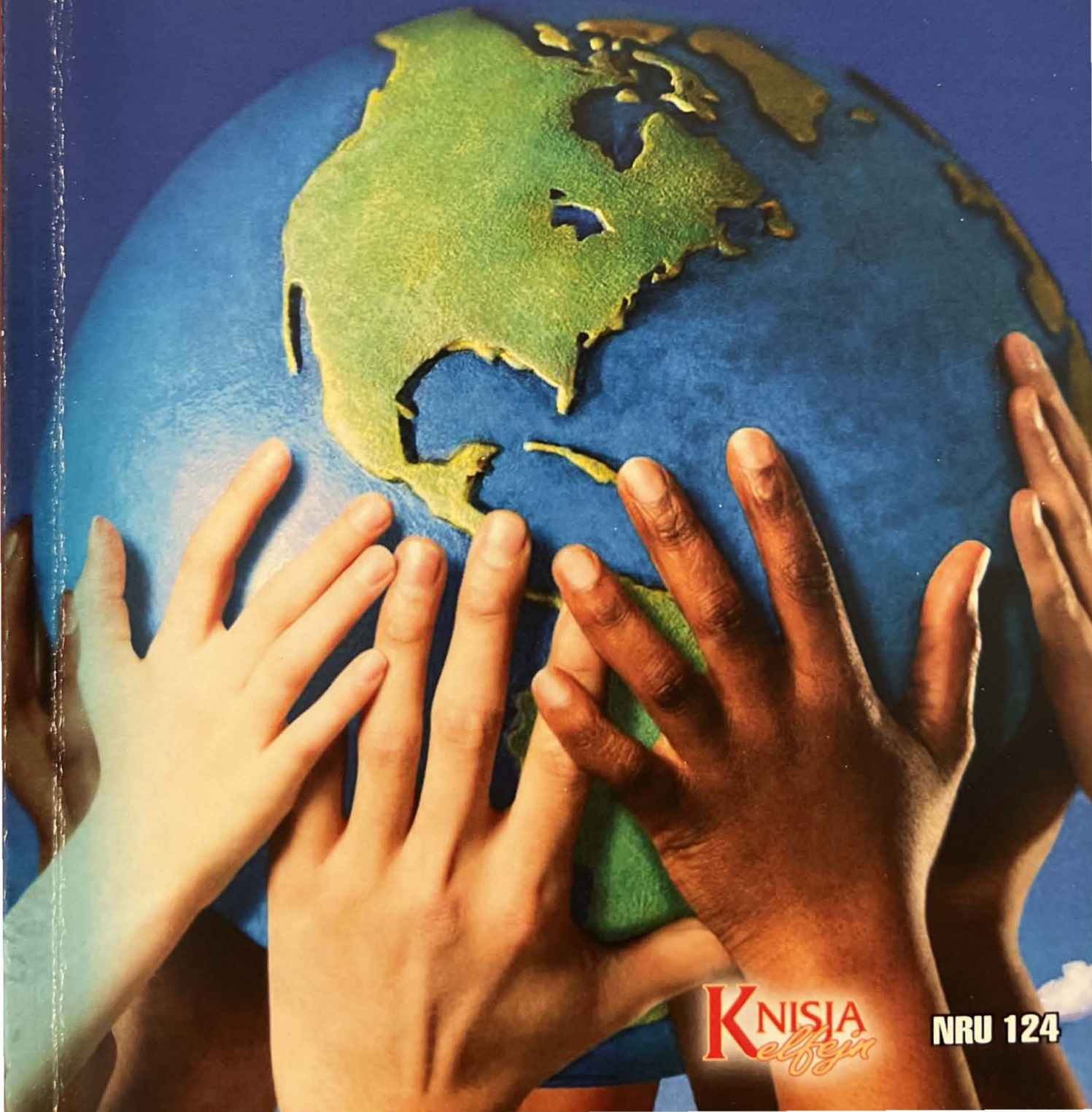

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Multiculturalism: Hidden hate

Dr Trevor Calafato

Multiculturalism is increasingly becoming an integrative part of modern societies, where people are incessantly being exposed to diversity in the fabric of their own culture, even among the smallest societies including Malta (Verkuyten, 2005; 2006; 2010). When looking at the trends in Malta, the National Statistics Office (NSO) (2016) stated, "in 2015, the increase in population was mainly explained by the increase in immigrants rather than babies born." In 2015, the population in Malta grew by more than 5,000, going to 434,403 inhabitants, where the immigrants amounted to 12,831 while the number of babies born that year was of 4,325. The NSO also indicated a constant increase in the immigration flow from 3,889 in 2006 to more than 12,000 in 2015. Being exposed to a growth in immigrants creates existential anxieties, which eventually trigger defensive responses in the community (Greenberg et al., 1997).

Among the global transformations experienced by most societies, particularly in wealthy ones is the change in diversity in fabric of our society. This diversity demanded political changes, as it became a perennial requirement to deal and manage ethnic and religious plurality. This colourful and yet heavily weighed approach brought new terminologies in our vocabulary, such as multiculturalism and multiculturalist policies, that though they might sound nice they are not always welcomed by everyone in society. Inter-ethnic conflicts and terrorist attacks, like the 9/11 are indicators of the deficiency of unity among minority ethnic groups and religious communities in relation with the locals, that consider themselves as native (Gove, 2006; Malik, 2007).

Politicians aim at implementing social and community cohesive agenda and this is mainly wrapped in an integration approach that aims

and accentuates the need to strengthen a shared national identity, ensuring the development of community ties and the adaptation of immigrant communities. This idyllic approach, where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds live in harmony is undoubtedly threatening the few, yet noticeable events or incidents that hit the headlines are shedding bad light on the various immigrant communities. Thus, concerns and doubts are often brought forward by the local native population about the failing in the political approach when dealing with everyday life issues that address properly, effectively and efficiently issues related to ethically, religiously and culturally diverse people and their everyday life with the rest of the ordinary people in society. Consequently, these top-down approach policies did not address the various issues encountered in the everyday environment and how the ordinary people are to negotiate with such situations. Also, immigrants tend to look for the easiest solution that is not to integrate but to seek accommodation in propinquity of other nationals that come to the same or similar cultural and ethnic background, creating ethnic enclaves (Fsadni and Pisani, 2012).

Immigrant population might bring with them customs and practices that are considered illegal or even inhumane to the country where they immigrate. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Malta experienced a number of cases where a new drug, called Khat, was involved. This particular drug is a plant that when chewed it releases stimulant substances. This particular plant is chewed across the east African region. Since during this period there was an increased influx of Somalis and Eritreans to Malta, some of their relatives living in other parts of Europe, where this drug is legal, were bringing it to Malta because this is a customary socialising practice. Thus, one can imagine the series of legal debates that such practices lead to in the courts of justice.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), or more commonly known as female circumcision was rendered illegal at European level and eventually in Malta only in the last few years. FGM is a horrific practice that forms part of the tradition of migrants coming from parts of Africa and Middle East. Besides rendering FGM practices illegal, policy makers needed to ensure that medical personnel are prepared to deal with the repercussions of FGM and related complications. FGM could have been undertaken

prior to the individual's arrival in Malta. Or women and girls might be at risk of FGM when in Malta. This new scenario requires that police and social services are trained and prepared to deal with such situations (NCPE, 2013).

Besides the customs and traditions that might not be legally abiding to the hosting country, parts of immigrant communities resort to other criminal activities causing disruption in the stability in the neighbourhood. Hirschi (1969) argued that control in a society could be achieved only if there are bonds that attach that person or group to that particular society. Once these bonds are untied, individuals lose their motivation to abide by the law. Also, issues related to multiculturalism and diversity are often discussed in over-simplistic terms (Noble 2009:25). Recently it is being witnessed an escalating alarm about the circumstances of how, when and why youths, with a specific focus on Muslim youths are becoming radicalized.

A completely opposite reaction to a multiculturalist approach, which envisages accepting and integrating people from different cultures is the far-right nationalist approach. Considering the number of violent extreme incidents that hit the news headlines are mainly veiled in a fundamental interpretation of Islam whilst the nationalist ideology is much less observed. Thus, there is an ostensibly less growing anxiety about the resurgence of extreme right ideologies throughout Europe. Yet, it is somehow implicit that young people are open-minded and embrace diverse cultures (Ang et al. 2002; Bulbeck 2004). Butcher and Harris (2010: 449) note that, "Youth are often simultaneously imagined as at the vanguard of new forms of multicultural nation-building and social cohesion, and as those most inclined towards regressive nationalism, fundamentalism and racism."

Studying, exploring, inquiring and analyzing the opinions and experiences of everyday multiculturalism is even more relevant for young people than it is for adults (Harris, 2010). Social media is an integral part of the life of young people. Facebook and other social media provide a platform where youths have ample opportunities to consume information and project their thoughts on various issues amongst which: mass-migration, international conflict and terrorism issues as experienced

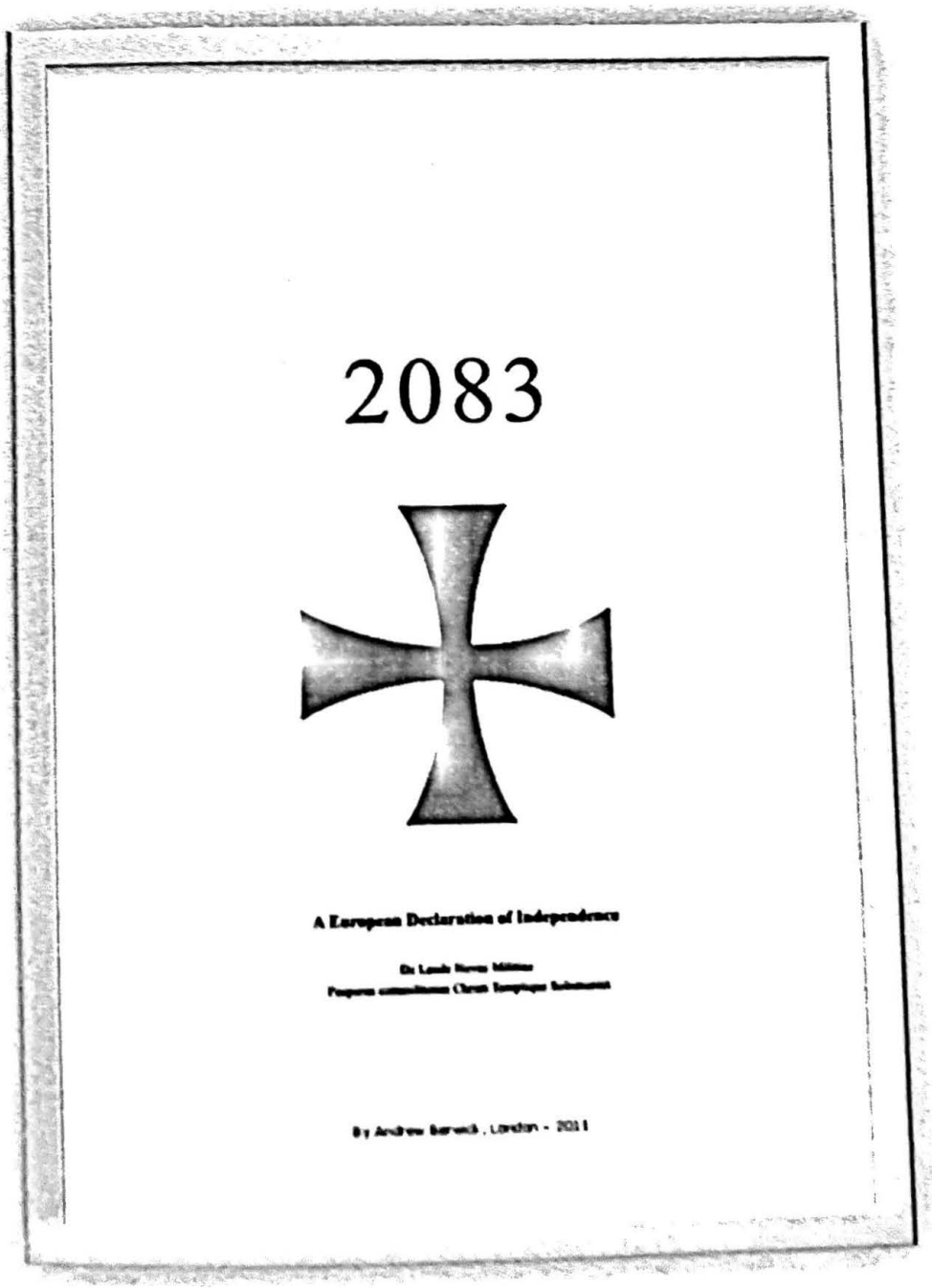
on everyday basis. Connecting to these lived realities enables us to recognize everyday hostilities and how young people manoeuvre and manage the ever-diversifying population they engage with. Once we accept such behaviour and the everyday conflicts faced by these youths we can understand better these situations and it would be possible to develop more preventative and positive approaches that facilitate young people's needs (Hardy, 2017).

The top-down conceptualisation of multiculturalism fails to take into account the struggles encountered in the interactions, the debates and the contrasting viewpoints forming multicultural and multi-ethnic life. In situations where integration fails, the outcomes result in hostilities, or hostile actions. Some of these hostile actions have been labelled as 'hate crimes'. According to Chakraborti et al. (2014) some of the hate crimes that take place in everyday environments (such as public transport and supermarkets) in the form of verbal abuse and harassment is considered as banal and routine by perpetrators and in some instances also by the victims.

Exploring the context and the numerous other aspects that trigger this hostility is key in identifying the underlying feelings and sentiments that motivate and trigger such reaction. Terrorist incidents committed by homegrown terrorists involving one's own multicultural society do not ease this tension on ethnic groups and their generations. Following the London attacks in July 2005, Britain experienced shockwaves indicating the failure of the multicultural model and the integration process embodied in government policies. This similar shockwave rippled out of Britain and influenced other countries creating a profound resurgence of xenophobia. Also some of the symbolism used in such clashes goes back to the times of the crusades where the nationalist and indigenous groups portray themselves as the modern Templars fighting against the crescent of Islam. A clear example of such symbolism is Breivik's manifesto *2083 – A European Declaration of Independence*, which as from the cover-page (Figure 1) one can identify the red cross that Templars used to have on their uniforms.

There are numerous theories that aim at defining the various factors that instigate this hate towards groups that are perceived as a threat.

When people feel threatened, as they perceive to be in a minority position stereotyping, prejudice and hostility tend to escalate (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Hogg 2005). Additionally, Breugelmans and Van De Vijver (2004) indicate that people living in communities that host diverse cultures tend to portray more negative attitudes towards multiculturalism. Aiming at maintaining or reestablishing the status quo, which emphasizes the culture and national identity outlines those individuals who form part of the in-group and consequently those who are part of the out-group.



This article sought to outline some thoughts on the everyday realities experienced as part of multiculturalism, the lived realities, and also the difficulties in creating a fluid social cohesion between people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. This drastically contrasts with the ideological and in most cases also political interpretation of multiculturalism. Thus, rather than simply providing policies that aim at facilitating the multiculturalism, one should invest in more research to create a framework for appropriate, effective and employable ethnographic strategies that minimize the complexities and daily challenges experienced from everyday multiculturalism. Addressing these challenges should buffer and curtail the hidden hatred experienced by those individuals who aim at maintaining or reinstating the status quo, which provided more safety and stability.

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