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Combating Islamaphobia through History Teaching

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Introduction

Islamaphobia has long been a phenomenon in Malta due to the island's strong Catholic culture and long history of conflict, with Muslim Arabs or Turks frequently regarded as "the enemy". Today with the appearance of irregular immigrants from Africa who started arriving in Malta after 2000, the local population is now faced with a new situation, that is, with the presence of a small but growing Muslim community on the island. This paper details an attempt to use history teaching as a possible tool to combat prejudice and one-sided images of "the other" within the Maltese context using a topic from the Maltese history National Curriculum, that of the Great Siege of Malta in 1565.

The history learning activities were carried out in a co-educational private school with three different classes of Year Eight students (12/13 year-olds), a total of 74 pupils. These classes consisted of mixed achievers and were not set or streamed in any way; the pupils' social backgrounds were reasonably homogeneous, with their parents tending to come from an upper middle class background. The vast majority of pupils are Catholics and the school offers compulsory Catholic Religious education, although it exempts pupils from attending Religious classes if their parents formally request that their children opt out. This school educates pupils from the ages of 3 to 16 and most subjects including history are taught in English.

Phobias based on religious affiliation in the 21st century

A phobia is an extreme or irrational fear or dislike of a particular situation, animal, thing, or, as in this case, a group of people. This phenomenon of Islamaphobia, is, of course, not solely a Maltese concern; in most Western societies Islamaphobia is a growing problem.

One might even posit the view that today Islam has replaced communism as the perceived global enemy to the West. Ali A. Mazrui goes as far as to describe the situation as a 'Global Apartheid', and calls it a new form of tribalisation (Mazui, 2007). International events like the ongoing war and conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq have contributed to an Islamophobic atmosphere, fanned further by the publication of the infamous Danish satirical cartoons in 2005. More recently, we have observed, European states taking measures to contain the perceived Islamic threat by such political moves as the referendum in Switzerland on the banning of minarets and the proposed ban on burkas in France. This fear is not always irrational; for one cannot deny the fact that religious affiliations can in extreme cases lead to brutal acts. Violent interpretations of Islamic jihad are on the increase, fueling hatred of Christians and Westerners, among radicalized fanatics who, according to Irshad Manji writing in *Newsweek*, describe moderate Muslims as the "near enemy" and Westerners as the "far enemy" (Manji, 2008). Similarly, some Christian extremist affiliations promote a doctrine that the white race will one day take over and secure complete dominance after a cataclysmic war against other races and religions (Barkun, 1994); a belief exemplified in the reasons given by Anders Brevik for the massacre he committed in Norway in 2011.

There is no doubt that a phobic attitude towards a group of people based on their religious beliefs or affiliation, whether this attitude is held by Christians or Muslims, can have an impairing and damaging function in a democracy, quite apart from the real danger that this type of phobia can lead to hate-motivated conduct which inflicts harm on society. Since in the case of Islamophobia the constructed enemy profile encompasses various diverse nations, cultures and societies, the prejudice is not limited merely to interpersonal dynamics but infects relations between and within larger social groups. All this implicates more than one country and needs a global response, ours is an interdependent age in which the 'other' is always present. A response is needed which involves new forms of cooperation based on respect aimed at everyone's interest. Therefore it is important that the negative experience of this phobia is replaced by a more realistic perception based on rationality. A strategy is needed that recognises that ordinary Muslims and Christians are indispensable partners in the fight against prejudice and xenophobia.

The unique contribution of history teaching and learning

A correct approach to the teaching of history can offer unique opportunities to experience the perspective of the “other”. The theory of constructivism describes the process of change that occurs in one's thinking as learning occurs. Traditionally, knowledge has been treated as a collection of facts and information; however 'knowing' also involves organising information and the forming of concepts. The very process of collecting information brings about new frames of thought into which the knowledge can fit. Knowledge itself is not fixed, but rather is continually transformed with each new discovery. There is the view that, combined with the correct pedagogical approach, history in the classroom can be “the most overtly constructivist subject” (Copeland, 1998 p. 119).

Lee, Dickinson and Ashby (1996) have shown that children's thinking in history is far more sophisticated than previously imagined: they propose that the attainment targets in the English National Curriculum for history radically underestimate children's cognitive thinking ability. After analysing children's ideas on testing explanations in history, Lee, Dickinson and Ashby (1996) advise:

“From the point of view of day-to-day classroom history teaching, our analysis so far suggests that we need to recognise that quite young children can begin to make sophisticated distinctions and develop powerful intellectual tools. We may need both to match such ideas with greater precision in our teaching objectives, and to increase our awareness of assumptions which hold some children back.” (Lee, Dickinson and Ashby, 1996, p.19)

The theory propagated by Vygotsky, known as a socio-historical approach to learning, has contributed much to the constructivist movement in education. His well-known contribution to teaching and learning is his idea of the zone of proximal development, which refers to the relationship between pupils' developmental level when working on their own and their potential development through problem solving under the guidance of adults or peers who know more. Another of Vygotsky's concerns was the over-use of and over-importance given to testing to measure children's abilities, these which Vygotsky believed produces a static rather than a dynamic learning environment.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the role of the teacher as facilitator. Absorbing skills and concepts on one's own is a slow process; however under structured guidance the learner can reach a higher attainment.

According to Vygotsky (1962), teaching and learning are inseparable from their social context. Keith Barton and Linda Levstik's work in America on children's learning in history is significant in highlighting the importance of the social context. Beside cognitive developmental stages and children's experiences of school, they describe how other factors such as relatives and media, influence children's thoughts processes and learning (Barton 1994, 1997; Barton & Levstik 1996).

Human beings are capable of cultural and cognitive behaviour which Vygotsky called "semiotic mediation"; this belief led Vygotsky to place great importance on the role of instruction in children's learning. Thus, the intervention process is crucial and the teacher who knows his or her pupils well is best placed to instigate learning. Today we frequently refer to this process as "scaffolding" to describe the interactions between adult and child, which constitute the support provided as children learn how to perform a task they previously could not do on their own.

Transferability of thinking skills and concepts used in history

While attempts to readdress the balance in societies and to teach about groups perceived as the "other" through history teaching projects run by such agencies as the Council of Europe and Euroclio (European History Teachers Network)¹ are commendable, it is rather naïve to expect change in content to be the whole solution. A shift in topics will not cause a shift in thinking; placing "Immigration" and the "History of Human Rights" instead of more traditional topics such as the "French Revolution" or the "First World War" will not necessarily make people respect human rights or sympathise with the plight of newcomers in their homeland. Unfortunately, prejudice endures even after considerable exposure to logical cognitive reasoning, or as G. W. Allport famously said: "defeated intellectually, prejudice lingers emotionally" (Allport, 1955, p.311).

Projects such as *Historiana* and *Navigate*¹ are a step in the right direction, for they do go hand in hand with a pedagogy based on thinking skills. This is important because unlike facts and content information which could be classified as “content”, skills are not tied to the topic being studied, but the concepts and knowledge experienced may be transferred to other, unrelated topics.

If one assumes that learning can be applied to new settings one must also believe in this transferability of learnt skills. The research described in this paper was designed with the hope that the skills pupils learn while studying the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, will in fact be transferred to the way they view Muslims or Christians today. There are various studies in existence which emphasise the idea that much of what is learned is specific to the situation in which it is learned (Lave, 1988; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Greeno, Smith, and Moore, 1992). Carraher, Carraher and Schlieman (1985) gave accounts of Brazilian street children who could not work certain mathematical computations in the classroom but were performing similar ones everyday while selling in the streets. These studies appear to imply that particular skills practised in one situation do not transfer to other situations.

It would appear that in certain occasions the human mind does compartmentalise tasks for particular situations and transfer of these skills to another situation does not occur. However, it does not follow from this that transfer of skills cannot occur at all. Many of the examples which support strictly situated learning come from the field of mathematics, while it is obvious that some skills, like reading, are continually transferred from one context to another. As Anderson, Reder and Simon (1996, p.6) say “The fact that we can engage in a discussion of the context-dependence of knowledge is itself evidence for the context-independence of reading and writing competence”. In history education Barton and Levistik’s work showed that the cultural situation their pupils were coming from determined their historical thinking (Barton and Levistik 1996). The skills learned in a non-school setting, the family and the media were being used to work out the tasks given by the researchers in a classroom exercise. Therefore transfer of historical knowledge as well as skills such as understanding chronology did in this case occur.

History does not repeat itself; there are too many variables at work for exactly identical situations to arise. However, similar patterns can be detected in history. David Theo Goldberg certainly sees racism as specific to a particular situation and not as a clear-cut fixed emotion: “race is irreducibly a political category...and there is no generic racism, only historically specific racisms each with its own sociotemporally specific causes” (Goldberg, 1993, p.90). On the other hand, Bodenhauser, Mussweiler, Gabriel and Moreno seem to be correct when they state that “pervasive, culturally embedded forms of social conditioning tend to produce consistent patterns of affective reactions to certain social groups” (Bodenhauser, Mussweiler, Gabriel and Moreno, 2001, p.321). There does seem to be a mechanism that puts into action an automatic response which is triggered off when a group is negatively evaluated, regardless of circumstances and temporal context. For example, there are many parallels between historical and present-day hate crimes; racially motivated acts are born out of racist attitudes, making those attitudes powerful predictors of subsequent hate crime (Hamm, 1993). Other similarities between past and present hate crimes include characteristics of the crimes, perpetrators and victims (Petrosino, 2003).

Islam and Christianity are two religions which each have their own set of beliefs, rituals and practices; historically these two organised religions were communal systems which historically defined two blocks of empires. One was either a believer or an infidel, one either belonged to the group or not; interestingly both groups used very similar terms to describe themselves and the “other”. It was a division into two comprehensive domains, a division which unfortunately may take on a central significance even today in history classes in Maltese schools.

Exploring identity, diversity and multi-perspectivity in the teaching and learning of history is an acute current concern of history pedagogists². In some ways the researcher is fortunate in that while Islamophobia is very much a present day phenomenon, the topic chosen here for the classroom, that of ‘the Great Siege’, is not related to a present ongoing conflict situation. Therefore, there is not the added difficulty of an on going conflict situation when it can be very difficult to address the ‘other’ perspective as attested by the work of Eyal Navah³ and Alan McCully⁴.

A key part of a democratic process is understanding different points of view, learning to tolerate uncertainty and gaining awareness that history holds very few cases in which guilt and innocence can be assigned unambiguously to one particular side of a conflict. Cognitively understanding shades of grey can be a very difficult concept for students to achieve and a very hard concept to teach. As Christine Counsell says, “Teachers need time to learn to teach in ways that are challenging and pupils need careful training if they are to get used to the idea that the history lesson is the place where you learn to tolerate uncertainty” (Counsell, 2004, p.29).

Maltese society

Malta is predominately a Catholic island. Its constitution clearly states:

- (1) The religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion.
 - (2) The authorities of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church have the duty and the right to teach which principles are right and which are wrong.
 - (3) Religious teaching of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Faith shall be provided in all State schools as part of compulsory education.
- (Constitution of Malta Act, 1964 line 2)

This notwithstanding Malta is a member of the European Union and functions as a democracy, which grants freedom of conscience to individuals. Unfortunately this does not safeguard against fundamentalist religious views which do exist and these distort images and misconceptions of “the other”. Borg and Mayo describe this basic lack of knowledge of the culture of “the other” in the case of Malta in the following way:

“...the term ‘Turk’ is often used interchangeably with ‘Muslim’. The imagery generated by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature dealing with the ‘traditional enemy’ (read: Turks) is that of ‘the sons of Mohammed’, who regarding the Maltese as ‘wicked’, were bent on ‘enslaving’ Malta to convert it to Islam and to replace the Bible with the Qu’ran.” (Borg and Mayo, 2007, p. 181)

The various minor racist incidents against Moslems that occur in Malta, undoubtedly owe their roots to this and similar depictions in the Media with regard to Moslems. For

example in May 2009, a small group of Moslem men as a form of protest, after being refused the use of a flat to gather together and pray, decided to pray outside on a popular seafront promenade. This provoked a major incident in Malta with numerous newspapers and blog sites being inundated with complaints at this perceived provocation, and the fifteen Moslem men “needed the presence of two police officers to ensure they were not attacked, insulted or otherwise harassed” (Caruana Galizia 2009, 13).

The design of the research

The objective of this research study was to readdress the negative depictions of ‘the Muslims’ in Maltese society and to offer pupils in one school an opportunity to explore history through the perspective of “the other”.

The author decided to work within the topic of ‘the Great Siege of 1565’, which is one of the topics on the school’s curriculum. The 1560s were the heyday of the Ottoman Empire and Malta was part of a larger Turkish plan to imperial expansion. At this time, Malta had great strategic value, for if the Ottomans captured Malta, they would be able to use it as a location where they could build their forces and Malta was territory very close to the Christian Europe. However, rather than the usual presentation of the “Turks” as the invaders who suddenly make an appearance in the narrative, I gained the permission of the school and class history teacher for the class to include an extra lesson on the ‘Great Ottoman Empire’ as an introduction to the topic.

The aim of this study was to provide an opportunity for these students to learn about the Ottoman Empire by understanding different perspectives and learning about the complexities of human motivation. The medium through which this was done was by the analysis of primary historical sources.

The study

A few days before the session, the pupils in each of the three classes were asked to answer in writing the following questions “*What do you think Malta would have been like in the 16th century, as a place to live in, had the Ottoman Turks won the Great Siege in 1565?*” and “*Why do you think this?*”. A few days later the following lesson on the Ottoman Empire was carried out.

The teacher introduced the lesson by showing a timeline to explain the time period during which the Ottoman Empire existed. (See figure 1).



Figure 1: Teacher explaining timeline.

This was followed by a teacher-centered Powerpoint presentation on the Ottoman Empire (See figure 2). This was basically a short 10-minute narrative accompanied by maps and sources to show the expansion of the Empire placing particular focus on one event, that is, the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The pupils were told how the Ottoman Empire is important because many states which are now in the Balkans, in the Mediterranean, in the Middle East and Arabia were under the control of Ottoman Empire which means that at one time the people of these regions were all citizens of one Empire. Besides this, people

who have different religious and identity used to live together in peace for a long time as a citizen of the Ottoman Empire. The presentation further explained that besides this, people with different religious affiliations and identities had lived together in peace for a long time as citizens of the Ottoman Empire, and that for this reason, the Ottoman Empire is one important example of peaceful multi-cultural coexistence.

Passages from secondary sources were used to narrate Mehmet's entrance into St. Sophia's church. The teacher explained how historians agree on the story that Mehmet, the Ottoman Muslim leader, bent down to scoop up a fistful of earth, pouring it over his head to symbolise his self-abasement before God. Hagia Sophia was the physical embodiment of imperial power; and now it belonged to him. He declared that it was to be protected and was immediately to become a mosque. Historians say that an imam was called to recite the call to prayer. The teacher gave particular attention to the fact that Mehmet was also a man of the Renaissance, an intellectual who recognized Hagia Sophia's greatness and saved it. The teacher commented on how remarkably the sultan allowed several of the finest Christian mosaics to remain, including the Virgin Mary and images of the seraphs, which he considered to be guardian spirits of the city.



Figure 2: Powerpoint presentation on the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.

The class was then divided into four groups and each group was given a set of primary sources (see Appendix 1) on the Ottoman Empire (see figure 3) as follows:

Group 1: Artefacts

Group 2: Politics

Group 3: Buildings

Group 4: Society



Figure 3: Each group was given a pack with primary sources on the Ottoman Empire.

These sources (Appendix 1) had been chosen by a group of Turkish secondary history teachers during a teachers' workshop conducted in Ankara, Turkey by the author in 2009. During this workshop the author had explained the objective of this research project and asked the Turkish teachers to choose the most suitable primary sources which would in their opinion best represent the splendor and richness of the Ottoman Empire (see figure 4). This workshop was a very good opportunity for the author to obtain Turkish history teachers' insightful perspective on the Ottoman Empire, and the occasion generated a great deal of feedback and discussion. One particular concern of the Turkish history teachers was that only the positive aspects were being presented and therefore the Maltese Catholic students would be presented with a biased view. However, after much

discussion it was decided that because of the strong negative images of the Ottoman Empire that prevailed in Malta up to now, it was necessary to re-address the issue. By presenting the positive aspects the teachers concluded that in fact a more balance view would result.



Figure 4: Turkish history teachers discussing the best primary sources to show the splendour and richness of the Ottoman Empire through its artefacts, politics, buildings and society. The chosen sources were then eventually presented to the Maltese school children as part of the activities. Ankara, 2009.

Together with the primary sources the pupils were given the following grid which they had to fill in after they analysed the sources (see figure 5). For a sample of students' responses see Appendix 2.

Look carefully at the Ottoman-Turk sources

What can you say about these people from your pack of sources

Society	Religion	Politics/ Leaders	Arts/Music	Others



Figure 5: Pupils working in groups on the Ottoman primary sources.

After the 20-minute group work session, each group reported back to the class on what they could say about the Ottoman Empire from the set of sources they had been given (Figure 6). A sample of their replies can be found in Appendix 2.



Figure 6: Pupils talking about the Ottoman Empire after analysing their sources.

A few days after this lesson, pupils were then asked again to answer in writing the same question they had been asked before the lesson: *“What do you think Malta would have been like in the 16th century , as a place to live in, had the Ottoman Turks won the Great Siege in 1565?”* and *“Why do you think this?”*.

Description and analysis of students' responses

Analysis of “What do you think Malta would have been like in the 16th century , as a place to live in, had the Ottoman Turks won the Great Siege in 1565?”

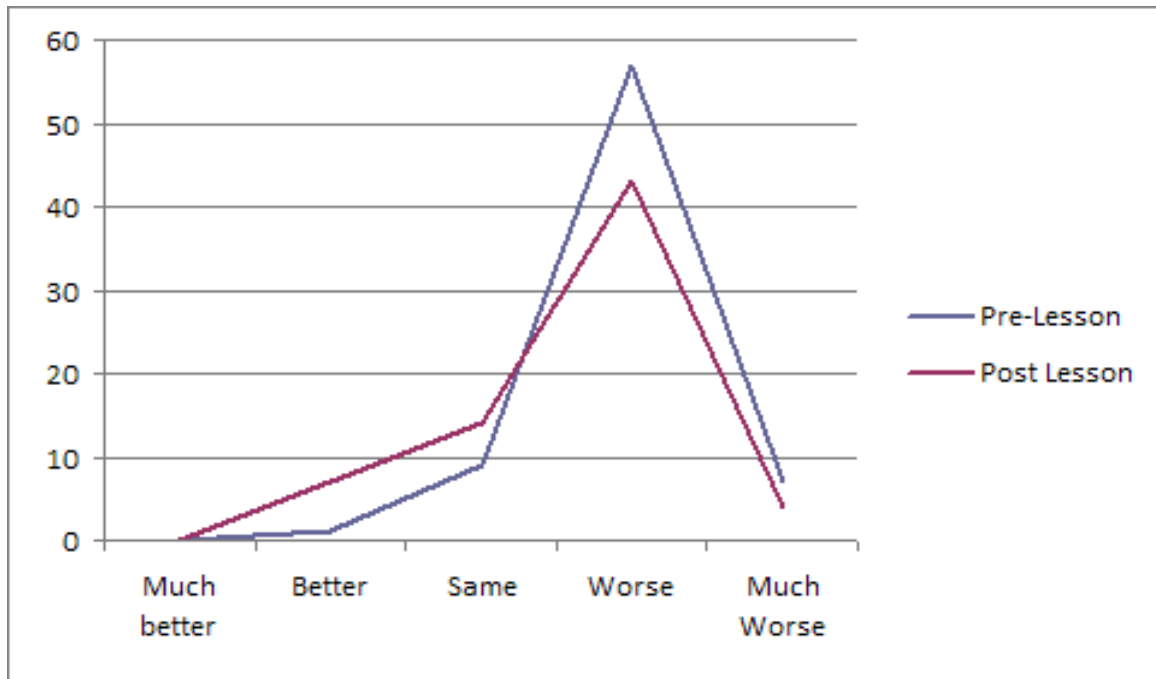
The students' response to the first part of the question produced the quantitative data. The Likert scale was used to analyse the pre-lesson and post-lesson responses.

“What do you think Malta would have been like in the 16th century, as a place to live in, had the Ottoman Turks won the Great Siege in 1565?”

- A much better place to live in
- A better place to live in
- The same
- A worse place to live in
- A much worse place to live in

	Much better	Better	Same	Worse	Much Worse
Pre-lesson	0	1	9	57	7
Post-lesson	0	7	14	43	4

Table 1: Results of analysis of students' responses to the first part of the question



Graph 1: Students' responses to the first part of the question displayed as a line graph

From Graph 1 comparing the pre-lesson results (blue) to the post-lesson results (red), we observe that after the lesson fewer students selected worse/much worse and more selected better/the same than before the lesson.

Another way of representing the pre- and post-lesson results is to assign the following values to the different responses and then calculate an average score for each case:

A much better place to live = 1

A better place to live = 2

The same = 3

A worse place to live = 4

A much worse place to live = 5

This gives a mean score of 3.95 for the pre-lesson vote and a score of 3.65 for the post-lesson vote. These figures indicate that in the pre-lesson results, the average score was almost at "A worse place to live", while the post-lesson results lie around midway between "The same" and "A worse place to live", indicating a shift of 0.3 in the mean from pre- to post-lesson results.

This is quite a reasonable positive result considering the small scale of the experiment; it is very encouraging to note that a slight shift in attitude occurred after just one lesson. Of course there might be various variables at play which affect students' responses, such as students picking up the enthusiasm of the teacher in favour of the Ottoman Empire and therefore re-thinking their response the second time round to conform more to what they think is the "expected" response rather than what they really believe. However, it is also possible that they might genuinely have responded differently because they now have a better insight into the Ottoman Empire and their awareness has been raised to other possibilities.

Analysis of "Why?"

The students' responses to the "Why?" in the second part of their question was of great use as qualitative data, which shed further light on students' thoughts on the topic. It was evident that a major concern which influenced students' responses¹ was undoubtedly the issue of religion. According to many students, whether Malta would have been a better place or not after a Turkish conquest depended on whether the Maltese would have been allowed to practice their religion. As one student commented before the lesson, taking the view that it would have been a much worse place to live in: *"I think it would be bad because the Order (the Christian leaders of the Maltese, the Knights of St. John) was a very generous environment and the Turks were not so we would probably be living in a place full of hate and cruelty against the God that we believe in."* The following are more examples of students' comments before the lesson on why Malta would have been a worse place to live in where the apprehension of losing one's religion is clear:

"Because the Order of St. John were kind while the Turks were cruel and maybe wouldn't have the right medicines and our religion would change."

"I think Malta would be a worse place to live in because the Turks are ruthless and they would have made Malta slaves possibly converting our religion, which would have a big impact on our country's heritage."

Despite a shift towards less extreme views, after the students participated in the lesson, as indicated in graph 1, religion still remained the primary concern of the students albeit now tempered with positive remarks such as the comment that the Turks were “good at medicine” and would not destroy churches but convert them. However, this would apparently have been insufficient to prevent Malta becoming a worse place to live in.

“I think that if the Ottomans won the Great Siege, it would be a worse place to live in because they would probably put up more taxes and change some of our charges and cathedrals into mosques.”

“The Turks will kill all the catholic people but the Turks are advanced in medicine.”

“Because we would have had to learn another different religion and live a completely different lifestyle to now.”

After the lesson which showed that Muslim leaders such as Mehmet could act responsibly one student did not think this was enough and was of the view that Malta would have been a much worse place to live in because *“A worse place to live in because although Mehmet let some christian items in the church stay up he would have made them convert to Islam and made them their slaves and would have to pay harsh taxes to the Ottoman Turks.”*

Nobody either before or after the lesson said Malta would have been a much better place to live in, had the Turks won; before the lesson only one student from the three classes answered that Malta would have been a better place to live in had the Turks won. She said *“I think it would have been a better place to live in because the Turks were good people”*. On the other hand, after the lesson there were 7 students who said that they thought Malta would have been a better place to live in. These are their responses to the “Why?” question:

“As the Ottoman Turks had a very interesting culture, it would add much more to the Maltese culture and add to its architecture”

“The Turks respected all religions in Malta the majority of the populace was Christian only some of the populace was Muslim, the Turks wouldn’t change the populace, they would respect our religion no matter what”

“I think it would be different and so I would like to try it and it would be different”

“I think it would be better because the Ottomans are very peaceful and hard working people. They are also musical, artistic and rich.”

“After learning a bit about them I think that they are very good rulers and they were a very large empire. The only problem is that they were a monarchy.”

Again there are no guarantees that the answers represent an actual change in attitude however, the statements are accompanied by information students gained during the activities of the lesson, specifically mentioning the areas they analysed in their primary sources. It would appear that indeed knowledge does bring about more nuanced judgements and a more complex understanding of a historical situation. There is also an acknowledgement that, while the Ottoman Empire was different from Malta, it was not necessarily a “bad” difference but an interesting one - as one student said *“and so I would like to try it”*. Greater knowledge did not always give rise to less hostile attitudes towards the Turks; indeed, newly acquired knowledge was used by some students to justify why Malta would have been a worse place to live in: *“It really depends but if the turks used it for a port or something we would have become slaves and have to build Mosques and our religion will have to change and lots of confusion and wars to get Malta back to the Order”*.

The reasons given by those students responding that Malta would have been the same, neither better nor worse, were also highly illuminating. Before the lesson, we recorded simple and superficial answers such as: *“It would be the same because everyone will still be happy, even if our religion changes.”* As well as the slightly confused response which again hinges the interpretation of such a change as good or bad on whether the religion of the Maltese people would have been subject to changes: *“I think it would have been the same because perhaps the Turks would have been like the knights just wanting the Maltese to convert to Islam. They could have justly done the conditions if you want to convert to Islam or not.”* As practical as well as a nationalistic reason was given by one student who said that he chose “the same” *“because whether a Maltese leader or a*

Turkish leader won the Great Siege it wouldn't make a difference. I would have preferred a Maltese leader obviously because we live in Malta. If the Muslims took over Malta would probably be very rich because Muslims come from Libja and Libya are very rich". After the lesson, the responses that said Malta would have been the same after a Turkish conquest, were more in number and tended to be more detailed and revealed more historical thought such as this example: *"I think it would have been the same because the Turks would have taught us different things like medication; but then again we would probably have had to change Religion yet again. We might not have been able to be under English rule so we might not be speaking English now. They could have also used the poor as slaves."* And: *"Because the knights helped the Maltese live a good place but even the Ottomans would because when they showed mercy in Rhodes to the knights they most probably would have done the same to Malta. Also they show a lot of mercy as they did when they conquered Constantinople."* Other comments considered that Malta would be the same because *"I think it would stay the same as the Ottoman Turks are very cultured but I think the only thing which would change are the religion and the way we are governed."* And: *"The Ottoman Turks would have brought a lot of different culture to the Maltese Islands and the Turks were decent people."*

While change of Religion was the most frequently cited as a reason for Malta being a worse place to live in after a hypothetical conquest; it was not the only consideration; captivity and slavery were fears before and after the lesson. Students said *"I think this because the Turks wanted Malta probably to make the Maltese slaves."* and *"Because if you were a Christian you would be slave"* (before lesson) and *"because we could have been slaves for the Turks"* (after lesson). There is also the concern that it would be *"a much worse place to live in because there will be fighting!"* and that Malta would be caught up in wars and fighting. One student explained the confusion that would follow a Turkish conquest by alluding to several historically and in our times military considerations *"It really depends but if the turks used it for a port or something we would have become slaves and have to build Mosques and our religion will have to change and lots of confusion and wars to get Malta back to the Order"*.

For history teaching it is also worth noting students' understanding or lack of understanding, of the concept of long term and short term consequences in history. The questions "*What do you think Malta would have been like in the 16th century , as a place to live in, had the Ottoman Turks won the Great Siege in 1565?*" and "*Why do you think so?*" actually ask for students to name short- term consequences, as it was deemed too complex to ask 12/13 year olds about the long- term consequences spanning hundreds of years which would be necessary if one asked about how an Ottoman victory in the Great Siege would have affected Malta today. Indeed some student responses did focus only on the short-term consequences as in this example "*Because the Turks would want to capture other Islands and make Malta a base of war and make them fight with them*" and "*Because at the time things were harder and there was always a risk. It was easy to lose a family member and easy to lose your house. Freedom and happiness was also hard to gain as if the Turks would have won everything would change and they would destroy the Maltese spirit and do everything there way and how they want it and Malta would have no rights.*"

However, analysis of the responses indicates that many of the responses of the students, when thinking about the consequences, pictured Malta today. Many students were not thinking of the short-term consequences for Malta in the 16th century; rather for many of them there was an immediate shift to today. More specifically it is evident that their thought processes focused on how this would effect "us" / "me" (the Maltese/me a Maltese person) today. It is interesting to note the frequent use of pronouns like 'I', 'we' and 'our' even when referring to the 16th century the students are indentifying with the Maltese population of that time as "us" and analysing the situation in a very personal and subjective way. For example:

*"I think that if the Turks won the Great Siege Malta would be a worse place to live in because **our** culture would be changed completely and **we** would probably have to follow new rules and religions and probably dress in different ways and there would be a lot of Arabic buildings and artifacts."*

*"I think Malta would be a worse place to live in because of the cruel masters. Maybe **our** religion would have changed and **our** life wouldn't be the same as it is now."*

“I think that it would be a worse place to live in because there won’t be much Christianity, no more freedom and I am happy to be Maltese.

Some even attempted to relate the effects of a hypothetical Ottoman conquest in Malta in 1565 not to today or the immediate short term but to other historic events, such as Malta becoming an British colony in the 19th century: *“We might not have been able to be under English rule so we might not be speaking English now.”* And the student who said *“Because if they won in 1565, then there might’ve been war more often, and Malta wouldn’t have much independence”* is most probably thinking of Malta’s independence in 1964. One student even explicitly referred to a perception of the Turks to today *“Because the Turkish countries nowadays are in war and are having a lot of problems”* although the student was probably referring here to the Arab uprisings which were current news when this research was conducted, therefore the student is evidently making the typical Maltese mistake of mixing up the Turks with the Arabs.

Conclusion

One cannot change hundreds of years of “us” and “them” mentality overnight. However, by moving away from “lecture-type” traditional history teaching towards a more constructivist approach, some progress in terms of attitudes in this study, did occur. In this study students were not presented with a collection of facts but they participated in the construction of the narrative.

Students created different interpretations from primary historical sources, which greatly helped to create new frames of thought and a sense of ownership of the interpretation. This can be seen from the frequent reference in their statements after the lesson to their “discoveries” on the Ottoman Empire which came about from their class tasks on the sources. It is evident from this that the teacher was not doing the thinking for the pupils; but by conscious support and key questions allowed learners’ change of perception to gradually emerge. In Vygotskian terms, the teacher was the facilitator of the learning. It would seem that what is actually happening in this instant was that learning occurred

piece by piece, one step at a time, students absorbing fresh knowledge while old information was discarded and conflicts resolved as they constructed new conceptual frames of reference.

Strategies learnt in history lessons have an immediate importance outside history; history is not an inert discipline, but rather affects the whole way in which we see the world. In this case the students became acquainted with the Ottoman Empire, which is traditionally figured as “the enemy”, and they started making sense of a world that was alien and foreign to them and how it interacts and impacts on their world. All this notwithstanding one must tread very carefully and not blithely assume that history teaching can automatically change attitudes. Roselyn Ashby and Peter Lee present a forceful argument warning against “simple-minded and grandiose claims – that prejudice against other cultures or ethnic groups will be dispelled by empathy exercises in history at school. People’s views are in large part based on material interests, fear, and their social relations with others: the presentation of rational alternatives in education is often almost powerless against all this” (Ashby, R & Lee, P. p.65).

Nevertheless from students’ responses in this study one can detect evidence of a deeper historical understanding taking root after the lesson, and a change in attitude did occur, although it is difficult to say how significant and long-term that change will be.

More studies are needed to produce empirical evidence to support the notion that communication promotes awareness and that in turn this knowledge about “the other”, acquired through such awareness, will make society more democratic and more humane. One possible way of achieving this, is through education, and in this case specifically history education.

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Notes

1. *Historiana* is an ongoing project by Euroclio, the European History Teachers' Association, which started in 2010. It is an attempt to create the first ever online history interactive textbook for the whole of Europe. While *Navigate* is a similar online history interactive site for school children produced by the Council of Europe.
2. For example Euroclio (European History Teachers' Association) 2008 Conference was entitled "The Past in the Present: Exploring Identity, Diversity and Values through History Teaching". Similarly Euroclio (European History Teachers' Association) 2009 Conference was entitled "Taking the Perspective of the Others: Intercultural Dialogue, Teaching and Learning History".
3. Professor Eyal Navah attempted to use history teaching to produce a common narrative of Israel and Palestine. This project was explained in his paper "First Steps towards Reconciliation: A two Narratives Approach of History Education in an Inter-Conflict Situation: Palestinians and Israelis." Paper given at Euroclio April 2008 general conference.
4. Alan McCully used history teaching to analyse the Northern Ireland conflict with school children. See for example: McCully, Alan and Nigel Pilgrim. "'They took Ireland away from us and we have to fight to get it back': Using fictional characters to explore the relationship between historical interpretation and contemporary attitudes." In *Teaching History* 114 (17) (2004), 17-21. And: McCully, Alan. "History Education's Responses to a Divided Community: the example of Northern Ireland." In *Storia e Memoria* 14 (1) (2005), 97-106. And: McCully, Alan. "Teaching controversial Issues in a Divided Society: Learning from Northern Ireland." In *Prospero* 11 (4) (2005), 38-46.
5. Students responses are quoted verbatim including grammar and spelling mistakes.

Appendices

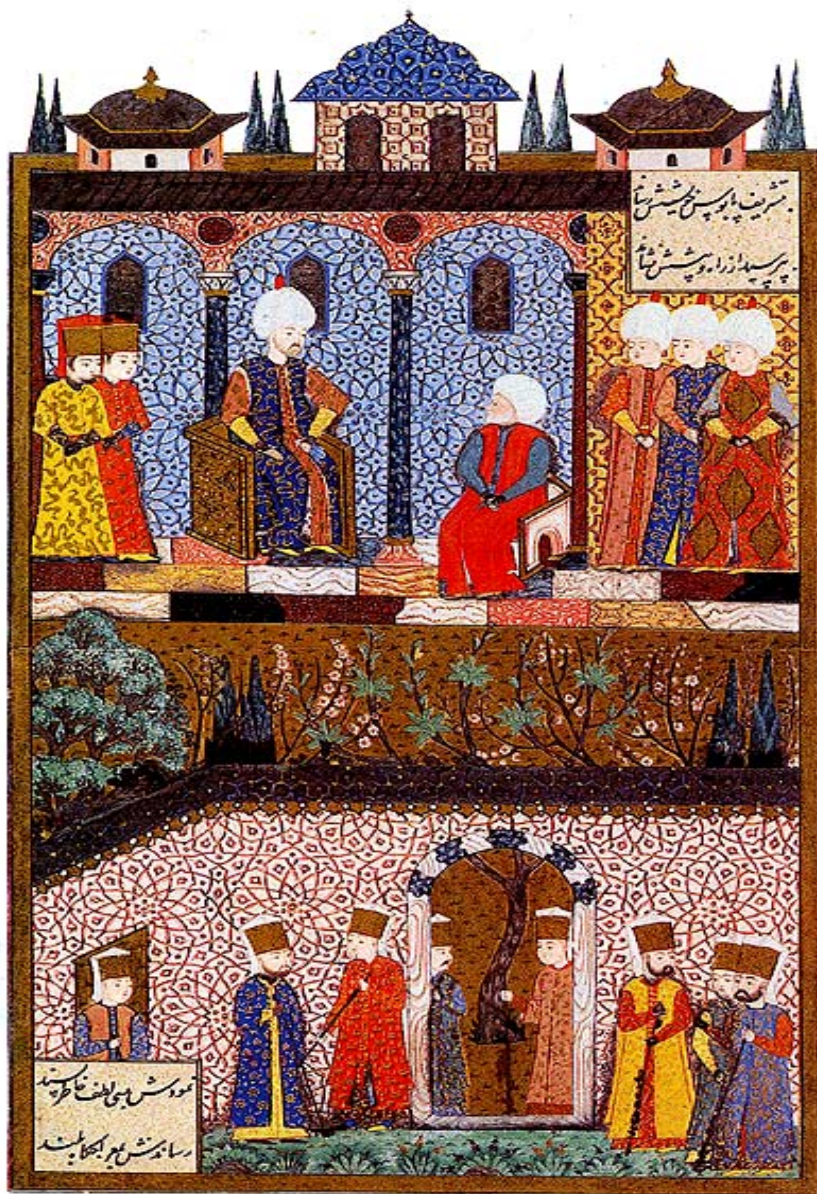
Appendix 1 The Sources in the Packs students worked on in groups

Group 1 Artefacts





Group 2 Politics





Group 3 Buildings





Group 4 Society



Appendix 2

What can you say about the Ottoman Turks from the sources found in your group pack?

Their Society	Their Buildings	Their Politics	Their Artefacts
			Carpet They were Crown - They had different materials Crown - They were very rich For a trumpet they liked music

GRP 14

What can you say about the Ottoman Turks from the sources found in your group pack?

Their Society	Their Buildings	Their Politics	Their Artefacts
1 their civilized, 1 cultured, 1 wealthy, 1 and have capability, 2 great sense 2 of 2 architecture, 2 devoted to 2 their city 2 religious. Multi cultural			

What can you say about the Ottoman Turks from the sources found in your group pack?

Their Society	Their Buildings	Their Politics	Their Artefacts
		The king made the <u>decisions</u>. You have to be of a certain title to vote. Maybe they had the <u>Feudal System</u>. Maybe they had their meetings in a certain temple.	

What can you say about the Ottoman Turks from the sources found in your group pack?

Their Society	Their Buildings	Their Politics	Their Artefacts
They were big	They were big by the water Powerful Rich beautiful have a dome nicely decorated with gold		