

Global and Local Football

Politics and Europeanisation
on the fringes of the EU

Gary Armstrong and Jon P. Mitchell



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Global and Local Football

What can the history of a nation's football reveal about that nation's wider political and socio-cultural identity? How can the study of local football culture help us to understand the powerful international forces at play within the modern game?

Based on long-term and detailed ethnographic research, this book uses Malta as a critical case study to explore the dynamics of contemporary football. Situated on the fringes of the EU, and with a very poor record in international competition, the Maltese are nevertheless fanatical about the game. This book examines Maltese football in the context of the island's unique politics, culture and national identity, shedding light upon both Maltese society and on broader processes, both local and global, within the international game. The book explores a range of key issues in contemporary football, such as:

- the dynamics of international player migration
- football corruption and ethics
- the politics of sponsorship and TV deals
- the global appeal of footballing 'brands' such as Manchester United, Juventus and Bayern Munich.

This book is essential reading for students and researchers working in Sports Studies, Sociology of Sport, Football, Globalisation, Politics and Ethnic Studies.

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Series editors' preface

In the burgeoning multi-disciplinary field of Sport Studies, there are plenty of books about football. This is inevitable given the centrality of football in our global sports culture. Most of these texts focus on issues such as violence, commercialisation, media, masculinity, fandom and inequalities. They tend to take as their remit the important football nations or take a broad sweep to examine football cultures across the globe or within continents (such as Europe, Africa or Asia). It is indeed a healthy and vibrant field of study. However, what this field of study lacks is more in-depth accounts of football cultures on the fringes of the global game and its power networks. We know so little about the passions, characters, commonalities and idiosyncrasies in football cultures of small nations. And, of course, a perfectly logical reason why there are so few such studies is because they are difficult to do. They require adept sociological and anthropological skills and a deep knowledge of the society in question that comes from years of systematic research and engagement with key players – those on the field, those who organise the game, and those who are in powerful positions in that society. Gary Armstrong and Jon Mitchell display that rare combination of expertise in their book, *Global and Local Football: Politics and Europeanisation on the fringes of the EU*, which tells a fascinating story about the transformation of global football as a popular cultural form through an exploration of its development in one small place: the Mediterranean island of Malta.

Malta is a football-loving, self-contained community, yet it is also historically shaped by a range of cultures. It offers an illuminating perspective on the global/local cultural dynamic, where ideologies of tradition and modernity are at one and the same time contested and intertwined. Armstrong and Mitchell breathe life into their analysis with a narrative that culminates in the battle for the Presidency of the Maltese Football Association, a battle between European cosmopolitanism and Maltese populism. Written in an accessible and engaging style, we anticipate that students and scholars in Sport Studies and beyond take advantage of this book to enhance their understanding of the diverse, complex and rich cultures of football.

Global and Local Football extends the range of books in the Routledge Critical Studies in Sport Series. It fits with our commitment to publish accounts of sport that are interrogative, interventionist and innovative. We welcome

studies – like this one – that challenge common-sense ideas and expose relations of power in the world of sport; that highlight the relationship between theory and practice; that provide arguments and analyses of topical and polemical issues; that develop new areas of research; and that stimulate new ways of thinking about and studying sport. Gary Armstrong and Jon Mitchell are both internationally known and highly respected authors and we were always confident that this book would reflect the best of the anthropological and critical traditions. For these reasons and more, we are delighted to have *Global and Local Football* in the Series.

Jennifer Hargreaves (University of Brighton)
Ian McDonald (University of Brighton)

Acknowledgements

The authors are both anthropologists and have spent considerable lengths of time in Malta. Gary Armstrong was resident in Malta for one year (1979–1980), and has returned annually since. Jon Mitchell conducted two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Malta (1992–1994) and also returns annually.

The authors are indebted to many people who answered their questions and made the research task enjoyable. Particular thanks are due to a variety of people and institutions which for convenience we will put into the following categories.

From the world of academe, we are grateful to Rosemary Harris who introduced us in 1996 and from which this research project began. Further inspiration came from Dr Paul Clough of the Institute of Mediterranean Studies, University of Malta, who not only inspired the research process but assisted no end with his willingness to run an Anthropology of Football module between 1999 and 2007. We are indebted to the students on this course, particularly the following – Jean-Paul Baldacchino, Joe Grech, Matthew Vella, Victoria Galea, Sean Vigar, and upward of 200 others who contributed their thoughts and impressions.

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The project was tolerated with good-humoured amusement by our families, who endured our absences and the conversion of family 'holidays' into research trips in Malta. To Hani Armstrong, Lennie and Phoebe, and to Hildi Mitchell, Polly and Elsie we are eternally grateful for everything.

Introduction

Europeanisation and football

In Malta football is a national obsession. Social and political events come second to World Cup fixtures. Those about to be wed in holy matrimony avoid clashing with football fixtures, thereby ensuring that their guests will be both present (and attentive), and in good humour. Political rallies in Malta are shifted so as not to clash with a big game (be it club or national team) broadcast on satellite TV from England or Italy. The Malta Parliament has even had its sittings adjusted to suit the international football calendar. The greatest participatory commercial event in Malta – the annual Trade Fair – which one-third of the Maltese population visits, was shifted in 2002 so as not to coincide with the World Cup finals, the organisers having made their mistake in 1990 when the tournament was hosted by Italy, and visitors to the event were down some 50 per cent. For all the love of the game and the *joie de vivre*, the game brings its enthusiasts and asks questions of the Maltese, which the population are not always comfortable in answering.

This volume examines Maltese football in the context of its politics, culture and national identity. In doing so, it uses football as a lens through which we might understand this island nation in the margins of Europe. It also suggests, though, that by investigating the specific contexts of Maltese football, we can shed light upon broader processes within the international game, which lies at the intersection of the global and the local.

As social anthropologists, the authors of this volume have followed what Clammer has called the ethnographic ‘fieldwork concept’ (1984). This involves long-term periods of social immersion in a particular setting – in this case, Malta. We have been examining Maltese society since the 1970s (in the case of Armstrong) and the 1990s (in the case of Mitchell). Our visits to the islands are regular and differ in length. Mitchell conducted a single 21-month period of fieldwork from 1992 to 1994 and since then has returned regularly for one, two- or three-month trips. Armstrong was resident in Malta for one year (1979–1980) and has regularly visited the islands since then, for similar, shorter research trips.

Where standard ethnographic practice focuses on a particular village or town, generating a totalising and holistic description of that place, we focus on a particular class of activity – football – and have effectively treated the whole

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of Malta as our 'village'. The dominant method within the 'fieldwork concept' is 'participant observation' – although this label is used to gloss over the variety of methods actually used by ethnographers. Thus, our research has involved simple observation, the collection of stories/life histories, interviewing, household surveys, archival research and so on. The descriptive ethnographic vignettes which adorn the text – italicised to distinguish them from the main argument – are derived from direct observation. Historical materials have been gained from oral, published and archive sources. Much of our time over the years has been spent in club houses, bars and cafés discussing football, politics and other issues with club members, fans, administrators and players. We have gained unprecedented access to the 'big-men' of Maltese football, which has informed a large part of this volume.

Joining Europe – Malta: March–April 2003

The result of the referendum was announced at 4.45 p.m. on 9 March 2003; a Sunday afternoon. Those landing at the country's only airport had to wait to change money and have their baggage unloaded from the hold as the airport staff joined the rest of the nation in watching events on television. The result was a YES vote to join the European Union and, typical of Malta, voting was a close run 52 per cent to 48 per cent in favour – in actuality a voting difference of 8,000 people. Both sides of the political divide began to celebrate the outcome. The YES faction – promoted by the governing Nationalist Party (Partit Nazzjonalist, or PN) – claimed a majority victory. The NO faction – promoted by the opposition Malta Labour Party (MLP) – claimed victory in the closeness of the ballot. The numerically defeated Labour Premier, at a spontaneous public rally of some 3,000 supporters broadcast live on television and radio, ordered Labour voters on to the streets to celebrate. This Harvard-educated economist had calculated that if the NO votes were combined with the abstentions and non-voters (due to illness), those voting against EU membership numbered 52 per cent – a majority. Both sides took to the streets in the long-standing political tradition of noisy car cavalcade celebrations.

The police had their hands full. For the next ten hours the mobile rival factions celebrated their respective victories and taunted their rivals. Some attacked the premises of their political rivals, often in villages where such premises were merely metres apart. The unofficial toll next day was 40 people requiring hospital treatment from injuries arising out of violence, and a narrow escape for one celebrant when a bullet missed him as it passed through his car. Another man was not so lucky.

The Labour Premier had instructed his sympathisers to spoil their ballot papers. Television footage of him doing so was, on the day of the referendum, not broadcast – by order of an official of the Public Broadcasting Service. Another public figure (an ex-member of the MLP) was stabbed hours later by (ostensibly) unknown assailants. Violence and reputations were exploited in more subtle ways when the Labour Party used posters of Nationalists Party Leader, Eddie Fenech-Adami, in the company of Zeppi l-Hefi (Joseph the bully), a man given a presidential pardon for the attempted murder of a Labour politician. The case was notorious and saw the accused pardoned

for drug-trafficking, armed robbery and the attempted murder of Richard Cachia Caruana. The Nationalists had used wider, more historical fears in their campaign by issuing leaflets suggesting that the alternative to Europe was the country and its populace being considered 'Southern' and even Arabic. Labour voting fans of Valletta football club – one of the strongest in Malta – were none too happy when two of their players were broadcast on television singing the Iva (YES) anthem while wearing their Valletta team's shirts.

Football fixtures had been suspended both on the day of the referendum and the day after. The Championship, however, was almost over, with Sliema Wanderers running away with the title. This would be their 24th title, but their first since 1996. In the same year, the Sliema President, the hotelier and entrepreneur Robert Arrigo, was also elected Mayor of Sliema. Interviewed on a TV sports programme, he was asked about the paucity of fans supporting his club, and responded with a quip, which was contemporary and political, by stating that more could be counted if one included the dead. This referred to the hard-fought elections of the politically turbulent 1970s and 1980s when it was rumoured that not only were the ill and infirm taken out of hospital to cast their ballots, but also the recently deceased were able to vote with the 'help' of party canvassers. Arrigo's mortuary humour broke the first taboo of Maltese football – that although everybody knows football and politics are inextricably linked, this should not be acknowledged in public.¹

Political controversy raged for the next six weeks right up until the country's General Election. Everyone considered this to be a rerun of the referendum. A victory for Labour would see them reconsider the decision to join the accession to the EU. The Nationalist Party wanted a further affirmation of the people's desire to join Europe. Meanwhile the local media was full of accusations and refutations with Labour politicians and followers still insisting that the NOs won the vote. The Nationalist opposition in return ridiculed the claim, joking about the numerical abilities of Harvard economists and the ability of the dead to cast their vote. The election produced ominous statements from Labour leader Alfred Sant and Dom Mintoff, the elder statesman of Maltese Labour politics, that the outcome could provoke mass disorder. The electorate were wary of a return to the post-election street violence that characterised elections in the 1980s.

As it was, the election and its aftermath did not produce the anticipated disorder. The only incident of note came when an obese politician out canvassing inadvertently sat on a small sleeping dog of a supporter who had invited him into her home. The election result came through unofficially at 10.45 a.m. on Sunday morning. Political analysts knew from their own calculation the outcome and transmitted it by mobile phone an hour before the official declaration. Celebrations first began on the Sliema promenade with corpulent youths in expensive cars hanging out of the windows with their flags and blowing their car horns. Within an hour hundreds of cars were part of the cavalcade, the Sliema promenade effectively a no-go area for the curious, and for Labour voters. Pensioners and children of the middle class were blatant in their noisy and public carnivalesque celebrations. The Labour leader conceded defeat in the afternoon, expressing his dismay that the victorious had chosen to celebrate with the flags of the EU, and not of the nation. The Nationalist celebrations for the rest of the day

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bordered on the hysterical – they had voted YES in the referendum; and now this result had been ratified. The 13-year project of Malta's EU accession was about to become a certainty.

The day after the election victory for the Nationalists most of the nation took a day off work. Even Labourites recognised the benefits of this. Thousands of nationalists toured the island in vehicle corteges continuing their taunting of opponents in their celebrations. Most businesses closed. Flights abroad were delayed due to mass absenteeism of airport personnel. Mass sickness gripped employees of state enterprises, who called in sick on mobile phones adjacent to carnival music on the back of victory floats. Their claims fooled none of the recipients, but political arrogance could not be defeated in Malta at this moment; those phoning in were Nationalists and knew that, employed in state enterprise, they were safe in a job until the next election, regardless of their behaviour.

A football match was played the day after the election results. The 2–1 victory for Sliema more or less confirmed them as champions. At the end of the game the team took their acclaim in front of the enclosure that held their celebrating fans – all 60 of them. Such a following provoked ridicule from fans throughout the island, and soul-searching within the footballing and wider press as to why this was so. The half-dozen fans in the Sliema Wanderers's supporters bar the following Friday night had a ready explanation. Happy that their team had won the league, the following did not want the glory to reflect on their club President, who had been elected as a Nationalist MP days earlier.

The EU vote brought about a new political movement in Malta. The 'Alleanza Nazzjonali Repubblikana' (ANR) announced its aim to bring together 'genuine nationalists and Catholics in defence of Christian values, the nation and the family – the foundation of a stable and prosperous society with respect to our national identity as a Maltese, Latin and European people.' This was not a political party, but a movement aiming to work with politicians who were prepared to put the national interest first. Critical of petty parochial politics, ANR favoured a nationalist synergy in opposing liberal trends and leftist ideology. It criticised the rape of the country by unfettered capitalism, unbridled consumerism and the culture of debt. At the same time the *Viva Malta* political and cultural movement was begun by retired bank manager Norman Lowell, combining Nietzschean ideas with evolutionary theories on race. Away from public manifestations came the rise of the far right websites and the inaugural electoral appearance of Imperium Europe, which obtained 1,600 votes on an anti-immigration stance at the European Parliament elections.

The issue of national identity and migration was added to when the beauty contest to decide Miss Malta in 2003 selected Dana Ben Moussa who came from a union of a Tunisian father, a Maltese mother and was schooled in France. Prior to this, racial hatred had become illegal in Maltese law for the first time ever in 2001. Between 2002 and 2004, over 3,600 immigrants washed up on the beaches of Malta, making the country the recipient of the highest levels of illegal immigration in Europe. That Malta have no idea how to deal with

such unwanted visitors was evident when its soldiers publicly beat dozens of protesting migrants at the Hal Safi detention site in January 2005.

Only 17 miles by nine miles at its extremities, Malta is one of the world's most densely populated countries.² It officially has 340,000 permanent inhabitants, but tens of thousands more than this living on legal temporary visas – as expatriots, students or migrant workers. Add to this over one million tourists visiting Malta every year, and the number of actual inhabitants is probably closer to 500,000. There is also a constant stream of illegal immigrants – *clandestini* – who arrive in Malta on boats from northern Africa, hoping to gain a stepping-stone into the European Union. The rise of the political right is assumed to be a response to these *clandestini*, but it is just as easily explained as a consequence of Europeanisation. In the new political order an opportunity has been created for the emergence of smaller political parties and protest movements, in between the entrenched and established PN and MLP. As early as the 1990s, the former Labour leader Karmenu Mifsud-Bonnici had warned that EU membership would bring AIDS to Malta. Subsequently, a host of evils were cited by this staunchly Catholic people as an inevitable consequence of their Europeanisation – drug abuse, free sex outside marriage, divorce, abortion. These became the symbols of the threat of EU accession.

Borneman and Fowler (1997) argue that Europeanisation should not be seen as synonymous with homogenisation. Europe and the EU, they argue, should be seen as objects in-the-making. EU expansion, institution-building and attempts to create a supra-national EU identity (Shore 2000) should be considered as projects yet to be finished. Like most commentators, they conclude that the much-anticipated replacement of the nation state and national identity with the European Union and European identity has failed to materialise; that the nation is still alive and well, despite the announcement of a new, post-national and transnational world. Despite this, however, they argue that there are significant practices of Europeanisation emerging across the continent. Rather than 'top-down' institutional processes, these are everyday forms of social exchange which see 'Europeans' increasingly interacting with each other and thus practising – if not 'imagining' – a European community. They cite language, sex, food and – significantly – sport as key processes of this new Europeanisation; and among the sports, football – or soccer – stands out as the most significant.

The Europeanisation of football means that fans are increasingly travelling the continent in support of their teams, promoting their own home teams in opposition to new others, and generating new historical enmities. At the same time, the 'representativeness' of the big European sides has become increasingly tenuous – as larger numbers of fans are drawn in from a wider geographical area, and the players themselves are drawn from almost anywhere but the city which they represent. Since the 1995 Bosman ruling, which allowed free movement of European footballing talent, it has become possible for Manchester United to field an all-Dutch team in, say, Amsterdam against an all-English Ajax.

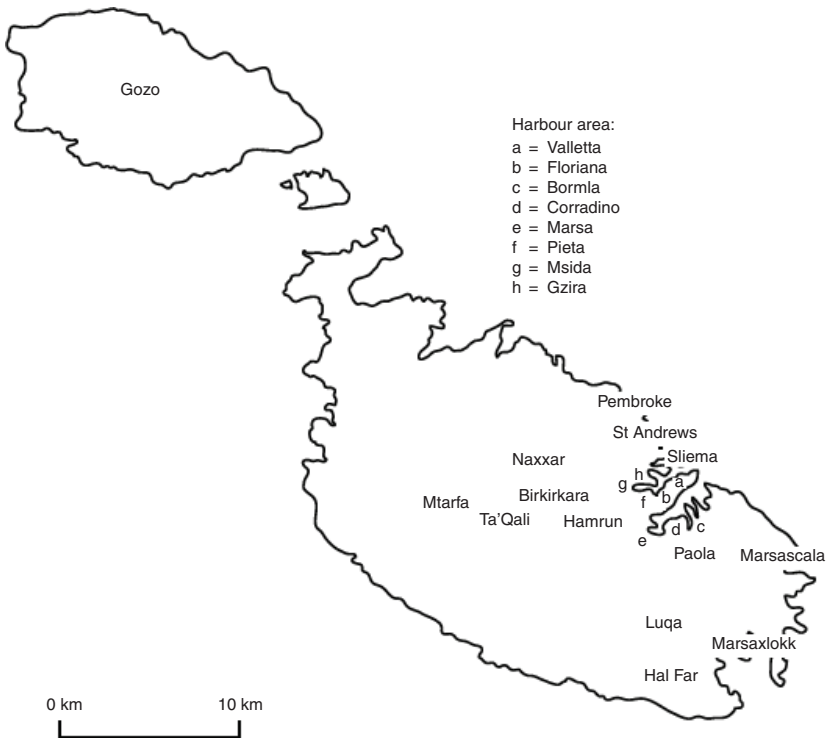
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Developments in media communications mean that the game could be witnessed across the continent, with groups of fans of either side congregating in sitting-rooms and bars to watch 'their' teams.

Such is the case for the footballing giants. For the minnows, such as Malta, the Europeanisation process is more awkward. The Malta Football Association (MFA) has systematically opposed the Bosman ruling in an attempt to protect local footballing talent. For them, the image of an egalitarian space of Europeanised football is dangerous; an opportunity for the more powerful footballing nations to consolidate their position, at the expense of the Maltese. This attitude is born of a post-colonial society living on the edge of Europe for the majority of its history – in which narratives of solidarity and equality between powerful 'others' and the powerless 'self' have usually accompanied times of extreme hardship and violence.

God and Mammon in Maltese history

Malta is a serial colony. Given the historical preponderance of 'significant others' it is not surprising that the Maltese appear to be constantly looking over their shoulders at what 'foreigners' are up to. Developing slowly throughout the



Map of Malta.

twentieth century, but exploding in its last two decades was a veritable industry of identity, geared towards investigating, explaining and debating who ‘the Maltese’ are. Central within this is an image of Malta as a place ‘in between’ – with three significant historical influences: Italy, Britain and the Catholic Church. Much of recent history has been dominated by negotiations concerning which of these influences should be considered the ones which lend Malta its identity. That these debates are inconclusive is a product of post-coloniality.

Malta has existed under the foreign rule of variously: the Phoenicians (800–480 BC), Carthaginians (480–218 BC), Romans (218 BC–AD 395), Byzantines (AD 395–AD 870), Arabs (870–1090), Normans and Angiovinos (1090–1283), Aragonese and Castilians (1283–1530), the Knights of St John (1530–1798), The French (1798–1800), and the British (1802–1964); only the latter were invited by the Maltese (Blouet 1984). That said, Malta has enjoyed a degree of self-government since the Middle Ages, under a document called the *Consiglio Popolare*, which safeguarded Malta’s national rights. The Knights of St John weakened this; as a consequence, the Maltese Council was formed under the French Occupation in an attempt to defend the liberties of the Maltese, and was carried forward into British rule (Frendo 1993).

Malta has twice been besieged – by the Ottoman Turks in 1565, who invaded and took over the island, laying siege to the Knights and Maltese in the harbour city – then capital – of Birgu. Under Suleiman’s general, Dragut, the Turks bombarded the city from the higher ground of the Xiberras peninsula – now the site of Valletta – until the unfortunate general was killed when one of his cannons exploded. The rhetoric of history narrated the siege as a triumph of cooperation between the occupying Knights and indigenous Maltese, who worked together to repel the Turks. Likewise the ‘Second Great Siege’ of 1940 to 1942. During this wartime siege, the islands as a whole were cut off from lines of supply by the German–Italian Axis. Again, there was widespread bombardment – this time aerial – of the harbour areas, where the British fleet was concentrated. There was great hardship and hunger. Again, accepted narrative of these events is of a glorious time when Maltese and British stood side by side in mutual resistance to a common enemy. The significance of these narratives has produced what many Maltese consider a ‘servile mentality’, manifested in a submissive mentality that ‘the foreigner is always right’.

Malta was not conquered by the British, but placed in its care at the request of the Maltese seeking protection. The 1802 Treaty of Amiens, signed by England and France, saw Malta returned to the Order of St John, but politically neutral in the European-wide battles of the time. The Maltese, however, did not want the Order to return and, after various diplomatic movements, was one of several nations, which signed the 1814 Treaty of Paris, to entrust Malta to Britain on a ‘rule based on the love of the Maltese themselves and on the opinion of Europe’.³ The British gave degrees of self-rule to the Maltese. In 1835, 1849 and 1887, Councils of Government were elected to help the British Governor in civil administration. In the 1887 Constitution, for the first time

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the majority of elected members were Maltese and the Council implemented laws which directly influenced Maltese life.

Under the British Empire, Malta's main function was to provide a harbour and shelter for the British military in the Mediterranean. Malta was effectively a storage depot, strategically placed for Europe, Africa and Asia Minor. Malta was crucial strategically for British campaigns in India and the Crimea. Malta's strategic location in the centre of the Mediterranean, 65 miles south of Sicily and 90 miles north of Tunisia and Libya, has made it a valuable fortress for the British Empire (Frendo 1979).

With representative government came party politics, which even in its earliest manifestations pitted two versions of national identity – and national destiny – against each other. The pursuit of Europe had a long history. In 1912 the pro-Italian Nationalist, Nerik Mizzi, proposed that Malta become a federation of a united Italy. It was a theme that was to develop, with the pro-Italian Nationalists transforming into a pro-European Christian Democratic party of the centre-right. In the mid-1950s, the then socialist firebrand, Dom Mintoff, considered integration with the UK. This was a curious move for a socialist Prime Minister – who in many ways was more nationalistic than the Nationalists – in his insistence on *Malta Maltija*; a Malta for the Maltese. The two possibilities – of Maltese integration into either Italy or Britain – came to dominate politics in the twentieth century. Initially this manifested in the so-called Language Question, in which violent political activism surrounded the choice of language policy for the Maltese state education system. The choice between on the one hand Italian, the language of the elites, of the Church and the legal system, and on the other hand Maltese plus English, the language of the people plus the language of the colonisers, generated such political friction that the British felt obliged to rescind the constitution in the 1930s, and implement emergency measures. This became a feature of colonial rule, as successive political crises emerged.

The Labour-sponsored integration referendum of 1956 was surrounded by controversy, as the Catholic Church issued a pre-election statement that declared a vote in favour of integration with the UK a mortal sin. It was a defining moment in relations between the Church and the Labour Party, which have remained at loggerheads ever since. The referendum saw 44.25 per cent vote in favour. The result was not accepted by the British or the Nationalists, because of the 41 per cent abstention (out of 152,783 registered voters, only 67,607 voted in favour). In March 1962 a letter worded in Latin instructed priests only to forgive people if they deemed them to be truly and sincerely sorry having voted for the party hostile to the Church. Many consider that the actions of the Church only had parallels at the time of the Inquisition.

The failure of the integration referendum set the ball rolling for Independence. When the Nationalists came to power in 1962, they successfully negotiated an Independence constitution, and in 1964 Malta became sovereign; an event which passed relatively peacefully. The British, although now not rulers of the nation, retained a naval base, and a strong military presence. The MLP argued, therefore, that Independence was meaningless. When they came

to power in 1971, they entered into negotiations with the British over the rentals that were paid for the naval dockyards, increasing the rates to such an extent that the British finally left Malta – in 1979, on a day that Labour supporters now refer to as Freedom Day. The Labour Party also established a Presidency. As a former colony, Malta is part of the Commonwealth, but Mintoff in particular was unhappy with the Queen being head of state, so in 1973 declared Malta an Independent Republic within the Commonwealth – with its own Presidential head of state, but nevertheless part of the Commonwealth.

The Labour Party were to retain power from 1971 until 1987. It was a difficult time for Malta, which saw experiments in local state socialism coupled with the forging of attempted alliances with nations other than the historically significant English and Italians. The nation's foreign policy from 1979 seems to have been based on periodical searches for new friends, be they China, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia or Libya. At times friendship with the North was seen as rescuing Malta from the South. In August 1980, when Malta seemed about to strike oil, Mintoff became fearful of Libya and Colonel Gadaffi, and travelled to Rome to plead for a guarantee of military assistance from Italy (a member of NATO and a founder member of EU) should Gadaffi begin military action following a dispute over the Median line.

A restrictive import system resulted in foreign-made chocolate and toothpaste becoming a currency of exchange. Those with fewer resources had to eat the Chinese produced 'Desserta' made with cocoa butter substitute. Both the public services and the dry docks were overmanned and underworked. The 8,000 unemployed were recruited by the Labour Party to ostensibly work for government and parastatal organisations. The police were the political servants of the Labour administration. Political opponents faced custody on trumped up charges. Ostensibly a democracy, Malta was a democracy with unique characteristics in the Western European context. The Constitution has evolved into one of the most complicated in the world, with a single transferable vote system embellished by the provision that, should the final transfer of votes result in the party polling the highest number of 'first choice' votes not achieving a majority of seats, seats should be added to their total, to give them a majority.

The many visitors to the island, by virtue of the burgeoning Mediterranean package holidays, were met in the early 1980s by a dilapidated airport terminal and primitive airport facilities. Throughout this same period, Malta had a power station that could not guarantee electricity and a public water system that cut off areas at will – usually those areas that voted the 'wrong' way in elections. Financial services were basic, which manifest themselves, most visibly, in interminable bank queues for tourists seeking currency exchange. The early 1980s saw the proclamation of clichés and new words entered political debate. The Nationalist campaign against Mintoff and his political thuggery proclaimed '*Xoghol, Gustizzja, Liberta*' (Work, Justice, Liberty). Crude incendiary bombs killed opponents from both sides of the political spectrum and were carefully located to frighten foreign embassies. In this era electoral counting agents were accompanied by armed soldiers and after the 1981 election the word

'Gerrymandering' entered the Maltese lexicon for the first time after the Nationalists received the majority of votes, but three less Members of Parliament than Labour. In 1987 (after 16 years of Labour) the Nationalists once again won the majority of votes but once again gained three seats fewer. As a power to itself the Labour cartel plundered the monies of local banks for self-aggrandisement – the banks wrote off the debts.

In 1987 Nationalist leader Eddie Fenech-Adami, a lawyer, took the office of Prime Minister in an island whose politics was characterised throughout the preceding decade by violence, particularly around election time and at mass political rallies. Post-1987 saw the removal of trade barriers and the emergence of a European-oriented foreign policy. The Nationalists, however, continued the unbridled and corrupt land speculation of their predecessors which produced monstrous planning and saw environmentalists beaten by police for their protests.

In 1992 the Nationalists had a 13,021 majority. However, in the 1996 election, Labour won with a majority 7,633 votes, only to be defeated two years later by the Nationalists, who won 12,817 more votes (51.8 per cent against 47 per cent). This latter figure was indicative of a significant change in electoral thinking. The 12,817 majority was characterised by strong inroads of the Nationalists into the traditional strongholds of Labour in the south of the island. The rise in educational attainment in the population was leading to a greater number than ever of floating voters.

The debate over the EU inevitably provoked issues of nationalism. In the lead-up to the 2003 referendum, issues of colonialism were resurrected by the anti-EU campaigners (mostly Labour in sympathy). They argued that a 'Yes' vote to EU membership would lead to loss of Maltese sovereignty, just four decades after the nation had won its independence. For the Labour Party, partnership (of some vague kind) was preferable to full membership, and their rhetoric spoke of the preservation of national identity. This was manifest most obviously in election rallies wherein Labour sympathisers used a Maltese flag as much as that of the flag of the Labour Party.

The defeat in the Referendum and the General Election shortly after produced for the Yes voters the third consecutive electoral defeat for Labour. In seeking to explain the defeat, some Labour sympathisers sought causation in the question of language and blamed the media, in particular, for the absence of any English-language newspaper sympathetic to their cause. The Nationalists by contrast had the pro-EU sympathies of the two daily English-language papers and two daily Maltese-language papers (Labour had three daily Maltese newspapers). Labour had an English-language website but was to have an online English-language newspaper in 2003 which received 12,000 global hits a day. Perhaps it was not the medium but the message. The Malta Labour Party was the only socialist party in European politics that did not favour EU membership. The EU commissioner Gunter Verheugen was alleged to have informed politicians he would do everything he could to ensure that Labour lost the referendum. The PN was supported by 31 organisations, all English-language news-

papers, and the Christian Outlook column in the *Sunday Times of Malta* (23 February 2003) which wrote, 'God wants us to be in the EU'. The 'Front Maltin Inqumu' (The Maltese Front Awakes) relied on the oratory of Dom Mintoff and mass rallies in its anti-EU stance. Eddie Fenech-Adami received the European of the Year award in 2003 from the influential Brussels-based newspaper *European Voice*.

The history of Malta has generated an ambivalence to the ever-present outsider (Mitchell 2002a). A feature of the post-colonial, it sees more powerful 'foreigners' – the British, the Italians, the EU – as sources of wisdom, stability, progress, modernity. However, this positive attitude to 'all things foreign' is tempered by an inherent suspicion; an unwillingness to supplicate, and bow down to the authority of this 'other'. As a consequence, a rhetoric of compliance and self-denigration is undermined by practices of subversion. Foreigners may be better than the Maltese, but not as 'better' as the Maltese themselves.

Global and local understandings: sport in Malta

As Hall (1989: 28) has written in the abstract, but might well have written specifically for Malta:

The great social categories, which used to stabilise our collective identities such as class, gender, race, education, have been deeply undermined by social, political, economic and technological developments. Among these developments are the globalisation of economies, dramatic shifts in international migration patterns, and a burgeoning post-colonial consciousness.

Such developments have caused various disjunctures in the categories that establish collective and national identity. The consequence has been a radical reconceptualisation of a variety of phenomena (Appadurai 1990, Kellner 1995). Sport is not immune from these processes. Writing in the 1990s, anthropologist Appadurai, used the term 'disjunctures' in his recognition of five dimensions of global culture. While not specifically addressing sport, the five disjunctures of the author have a relevance to this analysis.

- *Ethnoscapes*: can describe the migration of playing personnel, and has been crucial in mediating styles of play, manifestations of fandom and football marketing. Crucial to this analysis is identifying instances of onward migration and the paucity of outward migration, and concomitantly, recognising which epochs welcome a migrant player and which do not.
- *Technoscapes*: the global configurations of football-related technologies require an analysis of everything, from flows of football information to the importation of sports goods. This would also require knowledge relating to and the financing of fandom, the financing of football clubs and the revenue streams of support for both domestic and foreign club sides.

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- *Financescapes*: in seeking what Appadurai called the ‘mysterious dispositions of global capital’, analysis needs to examine the payments to local players, and the endorsement the local game attracts from brands both local and global. This inevitably raises issues of sponsorship, agents and entrepreneurship, and how such economics produce cultural transformations in Maltese football.
- *Mediascapes*: the images of world football are to a huge degree a creation of electronic media conglomerates. Able to disseminate commodities and personalities, they are also essentially responsible for football images and football ideas. The marketing of the game is thus crucial to any inquiry into local and global aspects of the game.
- *Ideoscapes*: the ideologies of the state and the counter-ideologies it provokes are crucial to an understanding of sports and the nation, be it the building of stadiums, the educational curriculum or the funding of sport.

Sport – and in this instance particularly football – is a useful arena to examine local and national identities because such occasions epitomise power relations and the politics of difference and exclusion (Jarvie and Walker 1993). While most people will accept that sport is an ideological site, and that indeed it can be the broadest common cultural denominator in many societies, it also has an appeal to all ideological temperaments (Bale and Maguire 1994, Houlihan 1997, Cronin and Mayall 1998, Armstrong and Giulianotti 1999).

Sport has been integral to global processes since the nineteenth century. Games have been disseminated and imitated for some 150 years for their intrinsic worth, alongside their extrinsic parallel globalising forces of commerce and communications (Allison 1986, Maguire 1999). Games and sports have facilitated a variety of identities – real, imagined and submerged – and inculcated a variety of disciplines based on the requirements made of the individual body and, collectively, of the concomitant team efforts. Sport and the clubs which operate within the regulatory bodies have been the vehicles for a variety of diffusions around praxis (Bale and Philo 1999).

At the elite level, sport is the vehicle for global interactions in both its shared practices and the relations engendered by its governing bodies in regional, and ultimately, global tournaments (Crawford 2004, Gilchrist 2005). At times, sport can undermine notions of practices of nationhood and, at other times, encourage it in special ways (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1999, Budd and Levermore 2004). Thus, what undermines a sense of nationhood needs exploring before analysis examines the role that sport has played, historically, politically and globally.

The game of football offers a variety of metaphors and facilitates many narratives (Giulianotti 1999). In an ideal world such events would be perfect settings for the peaceful articulation and celebration of beliefs people hold about themselves and others. In the real world the game is and always has been used as a vehicle for nationalism, chauvinism, prejudice and loathing of social others (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001). At the same time, football has been able to galvanise otherwise heterogeneous localities. The local entity is inevitably

linked with the global via invitations to play friendly games, beyond that considered local. In such scenarios the culturally exotic is visible. Boundaries could be broken as much as stereotypes confirmed. Football is confrontational and forces people to choose sides. Essentially non-linguistic and overtly physical, footballing practices are theoretically accessible to all, including the least intellectual of the populace. Its simplicity is its essence as is populist ethos and in its ability to articulate collective identities. Since the late twentieth century, the game has hit the global *Zeitgeist* attracting the highest global sporting TV audiences, *par excellence*. World Cup tournaments are increasingly facilitators of the rise of globality – generating a consciousness of the player and spectator as part of humanity rather than particular (nationalist) collectives. Ironically the game celebrates the concept of nation at the same time as many would argue that there is a decreasing relevance of place and territory in both the footballing and even global consciousness (cf. Appadurai 1988, 1990, Polley 2004, Scholte 2005).

Choosing sides: football and Malta

No sport in Malta can match football for levels of participation or support.⁴ An established structure makes, in theory, for an apex of talent. The pinnacle of the domestic football system is the Premier League; below this exist Divisions One, Two and Three; all of them exist under the jurisdiction of the Malta Football Association (MFA) established in 1909. The MFA also control the corresponding Youth Team leagues from under-12s to under-19s. Malta's sister island of Gozo has its own football association, which enjoys regional status.

While enjoying a hegemonic sporting position for a century, football in Malta has to compete with the global flow of new sports. Since 1990, the Maltese can watch or participate in imported sporting pastimes, such as Tai-Kwondo, body-building, triathlon, and even baseball, which in the early 1990s had a league of eight teams; since 1995 Malta has had a Rugby Union team. There are currently 44 Olympic and non-Olympic sporting organisations with structures recognised by the Maltese Olympic Committee. In 2005 Malta faced the unusual prospect of being present for the first time at the 2006 Winter Olympics held in Turin, following an application from a disgruntled Swiss-born ski-jumper, who sought Maltese nationality in exchange for representing Malta at the Games. In the event, Malta fielded no entrants for the competition.

Schools and parents encourage their children to participate in football to varying degrees. As recently as the 1970s, football between boys' schools would see final ties attracting crowds of up to 5,000 people. Social class was always evident in football participation. A variety of Catholic schools, built in the early twentieth century, provided good sporting facilities in the spirit that epitomised the English public schools they emulated. One of the most famous, the De La Salle school named after its Catholic religious teaching order and built in 1903, stressed sport in emulation of the muscular Christianity espoused by the British. One can thus argue that the development of football in Malta was

inseparable from the pedagogic methods of the middle-class Christian religious orders that provided both the basic and elite-level education for Maltese boys. The fee-paying boys' schools of Malta held their own competitions, which did not include teams drawn from state and trade schools. The decline of school football since the late 1980s, however, is reflected, in part, in the low status accorded to physical education in the school curriculum.

Maltese schools have a very short working day and very long summer holidays. As a result there is little time in the curriculum for sport. The amount of sport is minimal, especially in the vital primary school years where the greatest gains in skill level are attained. The lessons can also take place on unsuitable surfaces such as concrete and in unsuitable kit – usually the children's normal school uniform. A further problem is that sports lessons in the primary schools are taught by class teachers with a limited knowledge of sport.

In primary school, the teacher often decides when the children do sport. As such there is the possibility that children may get no sport in a week if the teacher decides that there are other priorities. Mark Miller, Malta's under-21 manager, said, 'They do one, maybe two PE lessons a week of half an hour, the teachers are over 50 and they don't care.' Carmel Busuttil, Malta's best-known player, even claimed that '50 per cent of boys don't do any PE'. Until very recently, children have not been able to study sport and its theory. This cultural apathy is accentuated by the government. Sport policy is based on giving young people something to keep them occupied so that they are not causing trouble. Indeed, it was not until 2004 that the first students sat PE at O level. It is also now possible to take PE at university degree level. However, the lack of qualifications in sport prior to 2004 has led to a distinct lack of sports science knowledge.

The sporting nation?

The emergence of a sense of national identity via Maltese football mirrored developments in other sports. It was at the 1928 Olympic Games and via the game of water polo that Malta first achieved a sporting team of international status. This, however, was a struggle achieved against British colonial wishes. Nine years earlier four Maltese had been shot dead by colonial forces while protesting in Valletta against poverty and bread prices. Before this there occurred pre-war agitation for Malta to be awarded the status of a dominion instead of a colony. Continued political agitation produced the first (but very limited) constitution in 1921 (Cremona 1963). Three years later Viscount Plummer, then Governor of Malta, following his enthusiastic spectating for the game of water polo, suggested that Malta enter the Olympics with a water polo team. Retiring soon after, Plummer's idea was taken up with the Maltese Water Polo Committee by Meme Buscetta, at the time the island's best water polo player. Politics then became involved. Following the formation of the Amateur Swimming Association in 1925 the Water Polo Committee applied to take part in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. The reply from the Olympic Organising

Committee was that, since Malta was a colony, it could not take part as a nation, but could be part of the Great Britain contingent. A lawyer argued, however, that Malta was a Crown colony with a degree of self-government, and on this basis the Dutch decided that the team was eligible to participate under the name of Malta – the first sporting entity to do so.

Sport on and in sea water has an inevitable appeal for the people of a Mediterranean island with a hot climate. Water-based pastimes and sports, however, come with the baggage of history and social class. Despite the surfeit of water and a fantastic climate for swimming training, Malta has never achieved any international recognition in this sport. Local swimming competitions existed for decades before the foundation of the Malta Amateur Swimming Association in 1926, which by the end of the twentieth century also administered diving, water polo and synchronised swimming. The Malta Amateur Swimming Association (Water Polo Division) was founded in September 1913. The inaugural meeting was held at Flores College, Valetta. Army, Navy and civilian teams were eligible to join the National Association. Under the Presidency of Hon. Edgar Bonavia, LL.D., the Malta Amateur Swimming Association introduced the first-ever official knock-out competition in 1913 and the first-ever National League Championship in 1920. On 15 November 1925 at the Circolo Ghar-id-Dud, Sliema, the Amateur Swimming Association (Malta) was formed, replacing the dormant Malta Amateur Swimming Association (Water Polo Division).⁵ Bonavia was again elected as President.⁶ Swimming has brought some recent success for Maltese athletes,⁷ but historically swimming should have been one event that the Maltese excelled in.⁸

In an attempt to improve standards, Malta played as a national team for some years in the Third Division of the Italian Water Polo League. In time, though, the Malta team could no longer afford to pay the players' wages or travel costs and so withdrew. A 2,000-all-seater National Pool stadium was built in the early 1990s for water polo. Similar to the Ta'Qali Stadium for football, this new structure was considered by *aficionados* to be lacking in passion and its inland location saw attendances similarly fall. Similar to football in pursuit of raising local standards, water polo players were signed from the 1970s from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Italy. The national team manager was at one time Romanian. As with football, accusations of bias in those officiating abounded. To combat such accusations, referees for major games were and are flown in from Sicily. Akin to football the clubs are overspending to achieve local success. Due to overgenerous wages and declining sponsorship, many Maltese water polo clubs went broke in the 1990s; only nine had survived by 2005. In 1980 the league had double the number of teams of 20 years later.

Water-borne physical activity can produce huge numbers of spectators for occasions with a 400-year-old legacy bound up with the defence of Christendom. The largest attendance at a single (annual) sporting venue, after that of vital football fixtures, is the annual rowing regatta. At one time called the Victory Regatta, the event was later named the National Regatta. Performed on 8 September on the feast of Our Lady of Victories, the day coincides with the

titular feast of the village of Senglea. This national holiday marks the end of the Great Siege of 1565. Held in the Grand Harbour, the eight districts that border the harbour compete in a four-man boat race over 1,000 yards; crowds of up to 40,000 line the route. Introduced in 1824 by the boatmen, who worked the harbour and who historically had enjoyed boat racing, a curious onlooker could learn that the imported Christian warriors added to the occasion when, in 1642, the Knights of St John organised boat races between the villages that existed on the peripheries of the Grand Harbour on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The event was interrupted during the 1940s due to a shipwreck, which was not cleared until 1951. Further spice was added to the rivalries in 1955 when the Aggregate Shield was inaugurated, which introduced categories of rowing and a point-scoring system. The winners of the various races are each awarded a flag, and at the end of the event the Shield is awarded to one of the eight competing districts.⁹

Local and traditional: birds, horses and gambling

Attempting to shoot anything feathered which can fly has been a common hobby among Maltese men for centuries. This hugely controversial pastime (sport?) might win or lose Maltese elections and is the subject of intense political debates. In recent decades, an attempt has been made to channel enthusiasm for shooting into representing the nation in global sporting events, without the necessity of killing birds. Malta's first shooting club was established as far back as 1908, which is hardly surprising considering the thousands of guns on the island, by virtue of the British military. But it was only 50 years later, in 1959, that Malta was accepted into the International Shooting Union. In the 1960 Rome Olympics, Malta had two representatives in the Olympic Trap Shooting event, and has sent representatives to all subsequent Olympics, bar Seoul in 1988. Some success has arisen from this. The possible sporting glory, however, is muted due to the implications shooting has for the country's image in the eyes of outsiders.

Horse-racing is considered to be Malta's oldest organised sport. Horse-racing was patronised by the Knights of Malta. The Grand Masters normally attended such events and showed their appreciation by throwing handfuls of gold and silver coins to spectators. The origin of horse-racing in Malta dates back to 1593 when the St Rocco Races (16 August) were introduced during the reign of Grand Master Verdala. Horse-racing also formed part of the programme for local celebrations, such as the national feast of St Peter and St Paul (known as *L-Imnarja*) and the village festivities.

A combination of man and beast provides for a form of horse-racing, known as trotting. Held every Sunday between October and May at a race-track at Marsa, trotting can pack in crowds on a Sunday morning of over 5,000. The Marsa track measures 1,000 metres and hosts around 700 trotters who compete in 500 races in the 50-plus annual meetings. With horses divided into nine classes, the sport relies on the importation of horses and is a pastime considered

synonymous with the island's southern population drawn from what constitutes the countryside in Malta and the lower (uneducated) social orders. While these events are organised, the Maltese use methods beyond the legal to get their horses to win. Drug doping of beasts is rumoured to be widely practised. The sport also provides for a variety of credibilities and challenges, which produce early Sunday morning two-man and two-horse duels decided on rural roads temporarily blocked off to traffic (and police) by spectators' strategically placed vehicles. The association with the rural and traditional alongside the gambling and its propensity to defy the dictates of the state means that trotting has never been promoted in tourist literature nor considered to be an integral part of national identity.

The volume

Despite these established and 'traditional' competitors in the Maltese sporting 'marketplace', it is football that continually triumphs as the number one concern. This is a curious paradox, given both the national and local teams' objectively demonstrated (in poor results) and universally acknowledged ineptitude. If the Europeanisation of football is a process of exchange, then the exchange is far from egalitarian, and the Maltese are all too aware that they are at the poor end of the relationship.

It is this paradox with which we start in Chapter 1, which examines the predicament of the national game – poorly played and poorly supported – and the history, linked to the history of party politics, of support for *other* nations; particularly England and Italy. Analysis then moves on to examine the development of the footballing infrastructure in Malta, a process dominated by the history of party politics. Chapter 2 presents an examination of the development of club football in Malta, which in contrast to the national game is well supported, and dominated by inter-district rivalries informed by historical considerations of reputation and social class. These are processes that also inform party political support, and are explored in Chapter 3, which links the rivalries of different clubs to their association with the political parties – party political conflict maps on to footballing conflict. These associations are not merely corporate, collective identities of the town or village which teams represent, but are also determined by the political identities and allegiances of the football club presidents, or 'big-men'; financiers and patrons who use their capital – financial, social and symbolic – to further their own reputation and those of their clubs.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the Maltese preoccupation with footballing importations from Europe, which on the one hand are regarded as a panacea – a means of developing a better, more successful game; professional and modern. On the other hand, they are regarded with suspicion, and many of the overseas personnel brought in to play or administer the game are frustrated by what they regard as deeply entrenched tendencies, which militate against success. Chief among these is corruption. If the first taboo in football is the disclosure of its

intimate links with politics – a phenomenon that everybody quietly acknowledges – the second is the disclosure of corruption within the game. Yet corruption is tacitly regarded by the footballing ‘big-men’ and their supporters as part of their responsibility to ensure their club’s success. This is revealed in Chapter 6, which examines the careers and opinions of the more prominent of these ‘big-men’. In a country dominated by an ethos of voluntarism and amateurism, the use of money within football appears undifferentiated – using it to pay your own players’ inflated wages or using it to pay off opponents are to some regarded as equally shrewd uses of financial capital.

Such utilisation is focused on the common good, but can also spin off into benefits for the big-man himself – many of whom use their footballing patronage to launch political careers at national or local levels. Chapter 7 focuses on one such big-man, or ‘super big-man’, Joe Mifsud. President of the Malta Football Association (MFA), Mifsud has pursued a successful career in footballing administration outside Malta. He is involved in UEFA and FIFA committees, and his financial dealings as MFA President are intertwined with those of these supranational footballing institutions and their personnel. Regarded with contempt by many local club ‘big-men’, he is seen to have worked consistently for the benefit of the MFA against what they perceive to be those of the local clubs and the local game.

If the figure of Joe Mifsud brings us from the local to the global stage of footballing ‘big-manism’, the final two chapters return to the issue of globalisation and Europeanisation addressed in this introduction. Chapter 8 examines the recent influx of non-European foreign players to Malta – many of whom are from African nations, and are utilising Malta as a hoped-for stepping-stone into the more lucrative and secure footballing markets of UEFA. The local ‘big-men’ have (largely unsuccessfully) attempted to capitalise on this, by bringing talent into the country and selling it on to larger European clubs. The process parallels the illegal immigration trade that sees thousands of *clandestini* shipped from North African ports into Malta, and then on to Sicily and mainland Italy.

The final chapter examines the emergence of foreign fan clubs – clubs dedicated to the larger UEFA teams: Juventus, Manchester United, Inter Milan. Like all such associations in Malta, they are built by the energies, linkages and acumen of entrepreneurial social actors, keen to make a name for themselves, and to make money in the process. They are the sites *par excellence* for the Europeanisation of Maltese football – of Maltese society. If in May 2004, Malta became part of the EU, it is through such processes that it is becoming Europeanised.

1 Team selection

Producing the nation

Ta'Qali Stadium, December 1996

For the spectators on one side of this football ground, the backdrop behind the opposite covered side is one of the most striking of any football ground in the world. The citadel and fortress walls of the medieval former capital city of Mdina stand proud as the winter sun slowly disappears behind it. All-seated, with a running track distancing the fans from the pitch, the ground has no intimacy. Today it is barely a quarter full; 5,000 or so spectators watch two First Division games and then go home in darkness. Outside the stadium thousands attend a car boot sale/flea market while dozens watch a four-wheel-drive motor rally; others fly motorised model aeroplanes.

The ground was built on what was once an aerodrome for the military aircraft of the British colonial forces. Today, imperialism of a different kind is manifest. The League is sponsored by Coca-Cola; previously it was Rothmans cigarettes. The scoreboard is plastered with Rothmans' logos; 14 large flags advertise Coca-Cola, partnered only by the flag of the Malta Football Association. The half-time whistle heralds tannoy announcements which begin and end with Coca-Cola jingles. The name of a bank is inlaid in seats behind one goal. Other hoardings advertise Pepsi, Lowenbrau, Daewoo, Nike – international brands that vie for attention among those of local products: milk, beer, pizza and batteries. Behind each goal stands a warning sponsored by a government ministry about the dangers of drug-taking.

The matches are played on grass that appears too long, and slows the game down. The small crowd is fenced in, and supporters self-segregate in a system they all comply with weekly. There is no 'home' and 'away' here. It is the national stadium, where all First Division games are played, and all fans know which 'end' they should occupy when playing a particular opponent. Most men who enter are subject to having their pockets searched by police. Women are allowed half-price entrance. During the match members of the Task Force – a special police unit – occasionally intervene to eject or warn fans who use swear words, or perpetrate or provoke violence. Fans resist the advertised urge to 'Enjoy Coke' – Maltese beer is more evident, and the local snack of hobz biz-zejt (lit. 'bread with oil', a traditional sandwich with tomatoes and tuna fish) is enjoyed more than a German hotdog or pie. The 50 uniformed police on duty stand smoking in groups watching the match. The nearby four mounted police are surplus to requirements.

The sedate and generally quiet crowd is animated only by periodic responses to perceived injustice and contempt. The linguistic mixture of English and Maltese brings hybrid calls: 'Ref . . . half-time', 'Ejja Blues c'mon' and 'Bastard . . . Justine'. Later, following missed chances on the pitch, come the inevitable accusations of match rigging, and shouts of 'Mafja!'. A dozen juveniles make their own spectacle. Having brought a football into the stadium they play a game of their own at the bottom of the terracing. Their aim is occasionally erratic and they repeatedly hit a police officer who patiently smiles and returns their ball. Some of those watching have somewhat disparate loyalties. Juventus and Inter Milan baseball caps sit alongside team shirts of Liverpool and Manchester United. Dozens watch the pitch, but have radios clamped to their ears listening to the match reports from Italian State radio covering the games being played simultaneously in Italy. On the pitch there are players from seven nations. Few are adored like the Italians being listened to, although the joy expressed at the Italian score lines reflects more illegal Maltese betting syndicates than football loyalty.

Europe's footballing losers

In the winner-loser culture that is football, it is in the interests of the game that frequent losers sometimes win. At the level of world competition small nations know their chances of victory against larger ones are negligible, but their fans will expect the occasional drawn game and certainly a victory over countries of similar standing. When such logic does not realise itself, problems set in, and scapegoats are found. In 2006, the followers of the Maltese national side were some of the most disconsolate fans in the world. The results tell the story. In 1997 a World Cup qualifying campaign was concluded with Malta having lost all 12 games, conceded 37 goals and scored only two. Consecutive 6–0 defeats at the hands of Yugoslavia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic might have been expected, but losing home and away to the Faroe Islands was not. At club level, Malta's showing in international competition has been similarly abysmal. In European qualifying competitions, clubs have had some limited success, but the reality of their status hit home when in 2006 the Birkirkara team, at the time leaders of the Malta Premier League, lost 3–0 in Malta to a tiny club, again from the Faroe Islands.

Such is the despair provoked by this situation that international fixtures are chronically undersupported. In the final game of the 1997 World Cup qualifying campaign, a mere 300 fans turned up to witness another defeat, this time against Yugoslavia. It was a record low in the history of the European section of the World Cup competition. That same evening, however, saw half of the Maltese population glued to TV sets watching the Italy–England decider in Rome. At its conclusion more people took part in a motor car cavalcade celebrating England's qualification than were leaving Malta's national stadium.

Even in one of Europe's least successful footballing nations, the game is globalised. From advertising sponsorship to the range of different nationalities

representing Maltese local sides; from the replica shirts and other merchandise from top European teams, to the kit of the local sides themselves. Like many other places, football began in Malta in the globalised context of colonisation; growing up around the dockyards of the British Imperial fleet, and providing an opportunity for the colonial subjects to compete on an equal footing with their masters. Although there are various moments in the history of Maltese football in which support for the national team galvanised anti-colonial, nationalistic sentiment, the nationalistic attachment to footballing endeavour did not survive into the post-colonial era.

The foreigner is best

Maltese support for football as a game – as a spectacle – verges on the obsessional. We have known Maltese fans to set up special satellite dishes – and their alarms – to watch live Japanese league football in the middle of the night. Most men avidly follow Maltese, English, Italian and other European leagues, and hold an impressive knowledge of the tactics, team selection and historical successes of a range of teams globally.

One would expect, given this preoccupation with the game, that the Maltese would be obsessed with their own national side. That they are not is linked not only to the team's serial ineptitude, but is also a product of the schizophrenic identity politics of Malta. Godfrey Baldacchino (2002) has argued that in contrast to the many stateless nations of Europe and elsewhere, Malta is best characterised as a nationless state, 'a 37-year-old sovereign unit where the nation is yet to be formed' (pp. 194–195). Whereas the established model of the nation-state – the central building-block of contemporary global politics – presupposes a congruence of sovereign territory and national grouping, or *ethnie* (Gellner 1983, Smith 1986), Baldacchino argues that the political polarisation of colonial and post-colonial Malta is and was such that the political party has taken on the role of *ethnie*, 'a moral community, extending the locus of empathy, trust and identification with others as if in an extended family' (2002: 197). This division has prompted other Maltese scholars to refer not to its nationlessness, but to two Maltese nations, separated by radically different ideas about the Maltese past, present and future (Serracino-Inglott 1988: 370). Given this indeterminacy, national identity in Malta is a perpetually unresolved debate (Mitchell 2003).

That football fails to resolve the debate at a national level, and to unite the perpetually antagonistic political *ethnies* – as it demonstrably does at a sub-national level, where otherwise riven towns and villages are united in support of 'their' team (Armstrong and Mitchell 2001) – is a product of the orientation of the debate itself to political units outside Malta. As Baldacchino observes, independence was only achieved after the breakdown of plans for integration with Britain, as a kind of 'second-best' political solution (2002: 195), and by a Nationalist Party which had formerly been associated with Italian irredentism, and which was subsequently to lead the calls for Malta's entry into the

European Union. This outward focus applies as much to football as it does to politics, to the extent that Maltese support of other national teams – and, given its particular history, predominantly England and Italy – outstrips that of the home national team.

The support for England and Italy – itself partly determined by membership of one or other of the political *ethnies* – and foreign club sides demonstrates a more generalised Maltese regard for the foreign, inasmuch as this is associated with ‘European modernity’ (Mitchell 2002a: 114, 2002b). The obverse of this is a similarly generalised dismissal of the local as inherently doomed to failure – which in a footballing context is blamed on smallness and insularity, lack of organisation and commitment, and lack of resources and corruption. Such apparent fatalism might be recast as a form of post-colonial strategy of self-essentialisation (Spivak 1987), in which the responsibility, or ‘blame’, for the current state of affairs is temporarily wrested from the colonisers, before being re-presented as a political claim for restitution. This effectively renegotiates the political order of colonisation, by presenting the colonial subject as agents rather than victims of their own destiny, establishing a mutuality or ‘cultural intimacy’ (Herzfeld 2005) between coloniser and colonised. As such, it may be seen as a particular phase in the process of cultural decolonisation (Al-Ali 2000).

This mutuality of colonial history is evident in the double-edged development of Maltese football, which is rooted in tensions between the local and the colonial; between the different versions of the local – as determined by political partisanship – and between the Anglophile and the Italianate. This opening chapter examines these historical developments, tracing the emergence of the game in urban Malta, its position in the complex love/hate politics of the colonial era, and at the intersection of local and supra-local identities. It then moves on to examine this history in relation to infrastructural developments. From the earliest days of football on the islands – introduced by the British colonisers – one of the key issues was access to appropriate land. On a small island with relatively little fertile soil that is capable of supporting grass, with chronic water shortages and a population which steadily expanded throughout the twentieth century to make it the most densely populated area of Europe by the end of the millennium, the development of the footballing infrastructure has been a fraught process.

Early kick-offs

Global processes of military might and the promotion of Christian education brought football to Malta. Football was formalised in Britain in the 1860s under the F.A. Rules. Beginning in 1885, Malta became the 22nd country on earth to adopt the game, beating neighbouring Italy, who were quickly to leap-frog them in terms of quality and results. Football in Malta began in the district of Cospicua, known locally as Bormla: ‘the well of God’. From the time of the Knights (1530–1798), Bormla was both a harbour and dockyard; heavily fortified, the district provided sanctuary and rest to soldiers and sailors. As the

harbour threshold of Malta, the first to receive foreigners and adopt foreign customs, it was inevitable that football would start here. With football came also trade unionism, as the popular culture and politics of British proletarians were taken on by local workers (Zammit 1984). Bormla would become a stronghold of Maltese socialism – and of support for the Malta Labour Party (MLP). Today, with the dockyards struggling against international competition, it has become a place of nostalgia, with its fair share of poverty and crime.

The first game of football in Malta took place in November 1886 when the Jesuit St Ignatius English Boys school team (founded in 1877) played the Malta Athletic Club (MAC), a middle-class school football team formed in 1886.¹ The St Ignatius Club consisted of English Jesuits, while the Malta Athletic Club, from Valletta, was formed by Anglo-Maltese. The Bormla club St Andrews was, significantly, the first all-Maltese team, and was not as elite in its membership as the other two. It was followed by St Margherita, and then St Georges, both Bormla teams which united with St Andrews to become a single St Georges team, though the exact date of this amalgamation is a subject of controversy.² The St Georges team became an unofficial Maltese national team, playing (and beating) a variety of British military teams on the islands in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The first all-Maltese football fixture occurred in 1900, when St Georges played and beat Floriana, the latter founded in 1894. With their winnings they bought a silver cup, which they called the Floriana Cup. St Georges were also the first Maltese club to play abroad when, in 1914, they played the Racing Club in Tunis.

Football matches were initially held in fields close to the British military bases – the port areas of Marsa and Corradino, and the barracks at Mtarfa. The British inevitably influenced the style the game was played in, and over the three decades 1890 to 1920, football began to take the shape that we see today; rules and regulations governing aspects of the game were standardised and agreed upon. At the same time, Cup competitions began for the British services in Malta; the Army Cup and the Garrison Cup began in the 1891 to 1892 season, and later came the Mediterranean Cup in 1898 to 1899.

The Floriana Cup match of 1900 led to further fixtures between all-Maltese teams, and in the first decade of the twentieth century an all-Maltese football competition was repeatedly discussed, but in the absence of a governing body and an enclosed football ground the aim was frustrated. In late 1907, the colonial authorities gave a playing field to the students of the Lyceum College. An inaugural game against expatriates from the Eastern Telegraph Company led to the eventual establishment, three seasons later, of a Malta League Championship. A trophy was donated by the editor of the *Daily Malta Chronicle* and soon after, in 1910, a Malta Football Association (MFA) Committee was established at the university.

Initially, many teams signed up to play in the competition, but several dropped out until only five remained – Floriana, The Boys Empire League, The University, Sliema Wanderers and St Josephs Msida. Because there were so few teams, the committee decided to adopt a league system. Floriana and Sliema

Wanderers opened the league. However, the first game had to be stopped due to disputed penalty calls and other questionable actions; Sliema walked off the pitch. Despite this rather inauspicious beginning, games continued to be played and football's popularity grew. Three knock-out competitions – the MFA Cup, the Cousis Cup and the Cassar Cup – were played with teams outside the league system. The latter was contested between Maltese and service teams, which as anti-colonial politics emerged from the 1920s onwards, became increasingly tense. Eventually, it was discontinued in 1952, after service teams refused to participate. By 1920 the League had expanded, and high-scoring, one-sided games persuaded the MFA that it was time to organise a Second Division to give smaller clubs an opportunity to compete on more equal grounds. A defining moment for Maltese football occurred in April 1923 when a football team from Tunis visited Malta. This was the first foreign football club to play in Malta. While the visitors were a small team which Floriana, Sliema Wanderers and Pick Services XI were able to defeat, their visit signified that via football Malta was able to participate in global sporting affairs.

Football and the rise of national identity

As football was taking a hold in Malta, so too was anti-colonial politics; a struggle against colonisation that was largely conducted through petition, and by a shifting alliance of lawyers, priests and other educated professionals. It was precisely this class of people who were also involved in the early Maltese football teams, thus establishing a practice whereby local political actors – patrons, big-men – sought office within and through their sponsorship and leadership of football teams.

The first party political meeting in Malta was held in 1879, which established the political movement that was to become the Nationalist Party (*Partit Nazzjonalista* – PN). The early Nationalists became strongly pro-Italian, provoking the emergence of an opposing party of pro-British, but simultaneously indigenist, Maltese. This second political movement was to develop into the Malta Labour Party (MLP). During the early years of the twentieth century, the key political issue was language. The Nationalists understood the powerful social control they could exert by maintaining Italian as the principal language of church, state and legislature (Frendo 1979: 208) and saw a danger in the British presence in Malta, who they believed threatened not only to anglicise the state, but also to protestantise the deeply Roman Catholic local church (Sant 1992). Against them, the British authorities suggested the development of vernacular Maltese language and culture alongside English.

The debate intensified in the 1920s and 1930s with the issues of language and education to the forefront. The so-called Language Question saw Nationalists wishing to develop Italian and the Constitutional Party proposing the development of English and Maltese *pari passu* (Hull 1993). The Nationalists emphasised Maltese *italianità* – Italian-ness – with some even proposing unification with Italy. The Constitutional Party remained vehemently pro-British,

anti-clerical and anti-Italian. The Language Question was answered by the British suspending the constitution, and when the Second World War intervened, the pro-Italian argument lost its legitimacy in the wake of the Italian air force bombing of Malta.

During this phase of burgeoning anti-colonial opinion, football became another way of demonstrating both equality and opposition. Indeed, this is a central paradox of competitive football – that it simultaneously produces equality and hierarchy: equality in the sense that the game is considered a contest between equals; hierarchy because, despite this, one side or the other must win. Early games pitted the newly formed Maltese teams against the established British regimental teams. Beating the regiments was all-important to the early Maltese teams, and a number of regular fixtures and trophies were established which adopted the status of semi-representative matches. Support for the club sides became support for the Maltese against the British. The stakes were national(ist).

However, anti-British feeling was not unequivocal because the British, as well as being opponents, were also patrons. The anti-nationalist Constitutional Party, made up of Anglo-Maltese and generally non-professional elites, developed a curious alliance with the new industrial proletariat that centred on the dockyards – in favour of British hegemony, seen as an opportunity for Malta to participate in the wealth of Empire (Frendo 1979: 20). The establishment of the Bormla teams, consolidated as St Georges, shifted the footballing agenda from an earlier Nationalist to a newer Socialist/pro-British one. These were teams from the dockyards, catering for dockyard workers (Baldacchino 1989). British support was essential in their development, particularly to give them access to land which could be used as a pitch. Teams were allowed to compete on the British parade grounds, and on compacted sand pitches developed by the services. Later, land was donated by the colonial Governor, but the best pitches – particularly those with grass surfaces – were reserved for use by the British. By the 1920s, dependency on British patronage was reduced and local business interests saw the value in developing football pitches. However, the continued use of sand pitches, and the difficulty of cultivating grass in a hot and largely barren island, militated against the quality of the local game, as it still does today.

The polarisation of politics around the Language Question was therefore mirrored in the different trajectories for the development of early Maltese teams, and was also manifest in support for international football outside Malta. A key turning point in the entrenchment of pro-Italian and pro-English football support came in 1933, during the tense years leading up to the Second World War. The Nationalists had become increasingly associated with Mussolini's fascism, supported by and supporting an irredentist agenda that sought Malta's integration with Italy. The pro-British faction, inevitably, objected. In the midst of this political upheaval, an international match was scheduled in Rome between Italy and England. A tour from Malta was organised for England supporters. In the event, some 100 Maltese England supporters travelled to

Rome to cheer ‘their’ team. Because of the intense interest in Malta, radios were set up in the ubiquitous brass band clubs that are found throughout Maltese towns and villages, and in other social centres. Crowds gathered to listen to the commentary. In the dockyard town of Paola, a public address system was rigged up, and a table football game on the main square was used to demonstrate the movements of players and ball. As the first goal went to Italy, the assembled Nationalist crowds cheered, but as England equalised, the pro-British Constitutionalists retorted, mocking their political – and now footballing – opponents. This occasion consolidated the tradition of Maltese support for English and Italian teams, that has remained and superseded support for the Maltese national team itself.

Anthemic football

After the Second World War a more decidedly local national spirit emerged, that eventually led to the country’s genuine independence. The war was a time of great hardship. From 1940 to 1942 Malta was subject to a second ‘Great Siege’. As the island was blockaded by Axis fleets for many months, food became a scarce resource during a period now referred to as ‘the time of hunger’ (Montserrat 1973, Vella 1993). Simultaneously, relentless bombing left many Maltese homeless as well as hungry. The island came close to capitulation in 1942, but eventually the siege was lifted and, as a reward, Malta as a whole was awarded the George Cross – for gallantry. The rhetoric, both contemporary and since, has Maltese and British in joint defence of the island, unified by a single purpose and single effort. The reality of opinion, as ever, was more equivocal. Prior to the war, prominent nationalist opponents of the colonial regime were deported out of the way to Uganda, but even those who remained were often less than convinced about the purpose of their ordeal. If Britain had not been in Malta in the first place, then they would not have had to suffer alongside them. Malta was an important strategic centre, but only in the context of the British Mediterranean fleet and the Allies’ southern campaigns.

Opposition to the wartime rhetoric of unified defence alongside the British was again represented through football, in an event that has now become central to the narration of the nation. It features in school textbooks and is well known in all Maltese circles. On 25 March 1945, a Maltese XI representative team were to play against the Yugoslavs of Hadjuk Split in front of a Gzira stadium crowd of 25,000. Before the game, two anthems were played by the band of the Kings Own Regiment – the Yugoslav and the British ‘God Save The Queen’. The perversity of this, particularly following four years of intense Maltese suffering and hardship, was recognised by the crowd, which protested. The national anthem, *L-Innu Malti* (‘The Hymn to Malta’), was written in the 1920s by Malta’s national poet, Dun Karm (‘Father Carmel’). First performed in 1923, it was adopted as the national anthem in 1941, and was expected at this representative match. Its omission marked the beginnings of post-war nationalism.

Midway through the British anthem, the crowd spontaneously launched into *L-Innu Malti*, an event commemorated by Ruzar Briffa, another poet and close colleague of Dun Karm, in his poem *Jum ir-Rebh* ('The Day of Victory'):

The crowd suddenly awoke and cried 'I am Maltese'.
 Who dares to insult me? – who dares to laugh at me?
 The crowd sang all together – in order to be heard.
 The anthem of our beloved Malta – and the voice was victorious.
 Dozing off the past – this sleepy apathy. When our spirit was sleeping – in a
 foreign-occupied bed.
 And the soul of Vassalli [*the first person who wrote using the Maltese language*].
 And the soul of Vassalli got up from his tomb.
 And cried 'Now at last – I can rest in peace'.

By the late 1950s, both the Nationalists and the Malta Labour Party (which had replaced the Constitutional Party as one of the two main parties) were committed to Independence from Britain. This had been a hard-fought consensus, though, as the MLP had campaigned for and only narrowly lost a referendum proposing Malta's integration into the United Kingdom.³ In 1957, the first full Maltese international match was played, against Austria. The Austrians won 3–2, which was an auspicious start for a small nation. Some, however, were not unanimous in their support for the national team, as local allegiances and antagonisms continued to manifest themselves. The barracking of rival team players in the Malta side was such as to cause some observers consternation and appeal to fans of one club (Sliema Wanderers) not to get involved in such behaviour (DeCesare 1960). A decade later a massive Maltese crowd were damning in chants to their former political overlords. A 1971 World Cup qualifier against England, attracting probably the largest ever attendance for a match at the Empire Stadium of around 30,000, saw a form of nationalism manifested in one particular chant. Responding to ill-chosen comments in the British media which proclaimed before the game that the England side should not be troubled by a team of waiters, the crowd sporadically chanted, '*We are the waiters, you are the bastards.*' Fearing disorder, the British military authorities confined all service personnel to barracks during and after the match, which England won 1–0.⁴

Victor Tedesco Stadium, Hamrun, December 1996

The two First Division games played out in the winter sunshine as the year ended provided for a variety of entertainment, not all of it limited to the standard of football. The crowd of around 2,000 sat themselves down on one of the 14 concrete steps that constituted the terracing on one side of this newly constructed (and unfinished) football ground. Segregated into three areas, this terrace held rival fans at each side, and in between them was the VIP enclosure made special by virtue of its location in proximity to the centre of the field of play and by the presence of a dozen

wooden chairs placed there for journalists and the President of the MFA and his guest from UEFA.

Named after the benefactor of the ground, the former President of Hamrun Spartans, the ground's construction had drawn to a halt, and there was no deadline for its resumption. Behind one goal was a pile of two dozen sacks of sand and a low wall built from the ubiquitous limestone blocks from which most Maltese buildings are constructed. At the opposite end, the tiny space available between the goal posts and the perimeter wall was home to the lovingly tended wall garden of the groundsman, whose nearby shed doubled as the half-time snack bar. On the side opposite the terracing sat only the team managers and their substitutes, on two benches. Behind them were a few spectators who watched free of charge by virtue of their bedroom window being higher than the wall. Those who paid the admission fee – a modest Lm2⁵ (£4) – did not expect too much of a spectacle, but expressed their parochial loyalties with vociferous support. The two teams represented districts separated by only one mile. Almost exclusively male, the crowd watched as the overgrown grass produced a very slow game and either cheered or grew resentful as the goals began to go in.

As the afternoon wore on, the game increasingly took on the ramshackle structure of the ground upon which it was played. After a touchline run and cross, one player had gained so much momentum that he ran into the low wall that stood only three metres behind the goal. The limestone slabs showed no mercy and he was taken away on a stretcher. A little later, an Irish-born forward was sent off after a late challenge on a Tunisian-born opponent, and the match began to unravel. On one side, the team was managed by a former England international. He flew home two days later. On the other, the Bulgarian manager was struggling to keep his team in the game – a situation made worse by the dismissal of yet another player. With three goals conceded, their supporters were infuriated, and when the referee blew the whistle for half-time, they surged towards the referee and the opposing player whom they held responsible for the sending-off. The police, two-dozen strong and previously stood in a group smoking, moved in among the baying mob and arrested one man in his forties – a relative of the dismissed player!

When the game resumed, a new drama emerged, in which the fast and gifted winger of the winning team ostentatiously taunted and tormented the losing young full-back, in order to further enrage his supporters. At the end of the game, having lost by a five-goal margin and convinced that this loss was caused more by the opposing player's antics and a biased referee, a group of fans waited outside the ground, one wielding an iron bar. Police intervened to prevent injuries, and the official and player left unharmed but unwashed – there was no water available in the showers.

The structures of a footballing nation

The land around Marsa was instrumental to the growth of football in Malta. From the early nineteenth century, the British had used the area as their leisure oasis. Located on a plain between two creeks, the rainwater that collected on it provided for the best irrigated grassland in Malta – the ideal site for football pitches. In fact, the pitches marked out here were the only grass sport arenas in

Malta until 1983, when the national stadium was opened at Ta'Qali. The first recorded game at Marsa was played in 1892 between two British regimental teams. With the growth of the game, the Governor of Malta permitted a Cup competition on the site, which was played in early 1892. Such was its success that the competition was held annually, and attracted both British and Maltese spectators. The Maltese, however, only entered by invitation. Eventually Marsa became synonymous as the Army's sporting arena. The Navy, while using Marsa, eventually opened their own facilities in Corradino on the south bank of the Grand Harbour. Marsa was not enclosed until 1911 and, as a consequence, could house a number of games at any one time.

The Maltese soon realised that their playing the game of football depended on the British military allowing them to use their playing surfaces. Carmel Busuttill, regarded by most as Malta's greatest player, said when interviewed in 2002, 'We hated the British because we could see the facilities ... but were not allowed to play on them.' When Hibernians were drawn to play Manchester United in Europe in 1968 they had to ask the British Commander-in-Chief for permission to train on the grass of Marsa Sports Ground. It was not until the very end of British rule that these facilities were handed over to local clubs for a peppercorn rent.

It was inevitable that the Maltese would see the value of opening their own football grounds, and with the interest in Maltese football on the rise, new facilities emerged to accommodate the growing Maltese participation in football. In 1911, the first national ground was inaugurated in Pieta after the University lost their lease for the Lyceum ground at Marsa (the colonial authorities terminated the lease). However, the ground at Pieta had the disadvantage of having a slope. Despite this, the first-ever Cup Final was played here in May 1911 between Floriana and Valletta United. Soon afterwards (still in 1911) the Malta Athletic Club obtained a short lease for grounds at Marsa, which would become known as Mile End. The arena was not enclosed and matches were played with a rope around the perimeter to keep the huge crowds at bay. A small enclosure was eventually constructed, which allowed those with money the comforts of segregation and shelter from the elements. This grass, however, was only used for one season, after which the Malta Athletic Club surrendered the lease.

New grounds were opened over the next few decades and, while none had turf, they were enclosed and easily controlled the large numbers of – often unruly – spectators, who flocked to watch the Maltese play football. Meanwhile other parts of Marsa were developed in the early 1960s, and following reconstruction by the Royal Engineers it was able to accommodate three turf pitches, one of which was enclosed in the newly built athletic stadium. Further sporting facilities including two grass rugby pitches, two hockey pitches and an athletics track were built later. Land adjacent to the athletic stadium was developed into cricket pitches.

Footballing liberos

Other football pitches the Maltese played on were a result of paternalism or entrepreneurialism. In 1944, the Governor General Sir Edmund Schreiber proposed to build recreational facilities on the islands. A Council of Public Sports was established, but the initiative amounted to very little. One prominent Maltese citizen, however, by the name of Captain Serafino Xuereb, donated a piece of land near Rabat. The Council for Recreational Facilities agreed to his request for assistance and he was thus able to convert lands that had previously been rubble into a playable sports surface. As Honorary President of Hibernians FC, Xuereb was also a patron of local sports, and the sports ground he patronised was fitted out with a water supply paid for out of his own pocket. He named the ground in honour of Edmund Schreiber. An inaugural football match took place in 1946, though the absence of grass meant it could never host senior games.

In 1922, Field Marshal Lord Plummer opened the Empire Sports Ground in Gzira, which became the subject of many disagreements, and at one time caused three teams to boycott the league. However, the MFA resolved the issue as teams accepted a compromise. The decision was that competitive games would be played at the Empire Stadium, while Mile End would still be used for friendly matches. The Empire Stadium, while permitting the Maltese to play a game without requesting permission from the British, opened itself up to domestic problems. The stadium was privately owned by Marquis Testaferrata and leased to Carmelo 'Meme' Scicluna, who funded the construction of the stadium in imitation of Wembley Stadium. An astute entrepreneur, who also brought European circuses annually to the Empire Stadium, Scicluna began a Christmas tournament in 1926, which lasted until the mid-1960s. Funding the travel and wages, he brought teams from Tunisia, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia to play exhibition games against Maltese teams. Some of the best teams of the era from middle Europe were to visit Malta and play in team competitions. Hadjuk Split visited four times; the visit of SK Austria saw a team of 12 internationals on the Gzira pitch. Tottenham Hotspur arrived in 1929, the first English club side to visit Malta. Crowds of 25,000 were not uncommon and Scicluna made handsome profits through gate money. The tournament became known, in popular memory, as 'the summer of Scicluna' – *Is-sajf ta' Scicluna* – due to the unseasonably warm weather that greeted the visiting teams one year. The occasions provided a chance for Maltese to see different football cultures and styles; and for Scicluna, the joy was collecting the profits from admission charges.

As well as these display matches, Scicluna's control of the Empire Stadium enabled him to control the domestic competition fixture lists. His consequent ability to ensure that the top teams did not meet in the early rounds of domestic Cup competitions meant that the latter stages of the Cup Final were invariably contested by the clubs with the biggest followings, meaning bumper pay days for the stadium owner.

Party politics and football development

Until 1960 football in Malta came under the jurisdiction of the English Football Association. During this time the MFA consisted of Maltese people chosen more for their family ancestry and its perceived genetically transmitted integrity than for their administrative ability or even interest in the sport. In pre-war decades the President of the MFA would invariably be a local man of status connected to the game and elected to the Council; the positions of both MFA President and Secretary were honorary and unpaid. Those in these positions of power replicated domestic football power, and were almost invariably drawn from either Sliema Wanderers' or Floriana's Committee. This was to change when both nation and FA gained independence in the 1960s.

Between 1951 and 1961 Eugenio Bonello, Secretary of the MFA, negotiated access for Malta to join both UEFA and FIFA. The MFA President between 1968 and 1982 was Jo-Jo Mifsud-Bonnici who proved to be an excellent administrator. Mifsud-Bonnici put Malta on the footballing map through his relationship with an Italian professor of chemistry, Artemio Franchi, who also happened to be Vice-president of UEFA. The latter appointed 'J-J' on to UEFA's Disciplinary Commission. Knowing little about football, 'J-J's' involvement in the game was a product of his high-standing family locally and his status as a lawyer. This combination of assumed taste, integrity and implicit wealth saw him asked to represent St Georges of Bormla in MFA dealings.

The independence constitution was granted in 1964 to a Nationalist government, which was replaced in 1971 by the MLP. Labour were returned to power in 1976, creating a new Ministry of Work and Sport. The Minister's inauguration speech stated that:

Special encouragement will be given to youths to participate actively in sports. Through sport, man benefits both physically and morally. Sport helps physical and moral development and keeps one away from negative influences of modern society. Therefore priority will be given to the erection and addition of sport facilities in all districts catering for the young as well as citizens of all ages.

(Ministry of Work and Sport 1976: 3)

The 1970s were dominated by controversy over the MLP government's relationship with the British. Although the country was independent in 1964, it stayed within the British Commonwealth until the MLP withdrew in 1973, establishing Malta as a Republic. Similarly, the British forces were permitted to stay in Malta after independence, paying rent for access to the docks and barracks. Having now determinedly turned against the British, the MLP began a campaign to increase the rents, which eventually led to the British withdrawal in 1979. This phase of Maltese politics was dominated by the sometimes controversial figure of Dom Mintoff, Labour leader and Prime Minister from 1971 to 1982.

The departure of the British produced political controversy over the sports facilities formerly controlled by the British. The grounds in Marsa, Luqa, Corradino, St Andrews, Pembroke and Mtfara were immediately turned over to the government. One of Mintoff's political allies, however, was to alter the nature of top-level football in Malta between 1980 and 1982. Appointed as Minister of Public Works, and MP for Paola, Lorry Sant became embroiled in a bitter dispute with the head of the Malta Football Association, Dr Giuseppe (Jo-Jo) Mifsud-Bonnici, the MFA president known for his hard-line Nationalist ideas (his brother was President of Malta in the late 1990s). The affair developed into a battle of personalities between the two and was only resolved when Dr Mifsud-Bonnici was finally replaced as MFA President by Dr George Abela (also Vice-President of the Malta Labour Party). The Minister was seeking to emulate socialist countries that had sought to use sport to build a better (i.e. socialist) society. To this end he promoted sport, primarily football, and built two small football pitches in the Labour districts of Tarxien and Zurrieq and, at the same time, took over the properties of the British military to facilitate the sporting practice of the Maltese. In fact, the government took all football grounds in Malta, which left the MFA with only the privately owned stadium at Gzira. A conflict with the MFA was inevitable.

In their pursuit of socialist internationalism, and to curb the influence of the Nationalist opposition, the MLP banned the use of the word 'Malta' in official contexts, particularly those which would cause most embarrassment to the Nationalists. As a consequence, the MFA was renamed the 'Main Football Association', making Malta the only FIFA nation that did not have the name of its country before 'Football Association'. Both UEFA and FIFA were aware of the dispute and permitted registration under this title.

This was part of a concerted campaign to discredit the MFA. In November 1979, an international game between Malta and Turkey was nearly abandoned because of missiles being thrown on to the pitch from both the terraces and the mobs outside the Gzira Stadium. While Malta were losing this fixture against a nation defined as an enemy since 1565, the true context of the missile throwing has never been written about. Our interviews in the 1990s with some of the protagonists suggest that this was state-sponsored hooliganism, and that the actions were politically inspired with the approval of sections of the Labour government, who were seeking to get the game abandoned and, thereby, embarrass the Nationalist Maltese Football Association in front of its UEFA friends.

As Minister for Sport, Lorry Sant effectively hijacked Maltese football, and established his own series of exhibition games involving overseas visiting teams. The Minister invited English club sides Nottingham Forest and Coventry City to play fixtures against Maltese teams, against all protocols of the MFA and FIFA. He also invited Works teams from Europe to play the Maltese National team. One such team of German amateurs were hosted at one of the plushiest of Maltese hotels, and received a post-match reception fit for a king. The game saw a crowd of 35 people.

In the midst of this dispute with the MFA, the Labour government decided

to build a new National stadium. Eventually opened in 1981, the stadium was constructed, in part, by the Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Sport. The Minister took the glory for the stadium, but it was the Nationalist MP and Sliema Wanderers football club President, George Bonello Depuis, who was to claim that the stadium was built at his suggestion. Even more intrigue arrived with the widespread belief that the funding came in part from the coffers of Colonel Gadaffi of Libya.

With a capacity for 30,000 spectators, and a pristine turf surface, the Ta'Qali stadium was an improvement on the smaller dirt pitch at Gzira, but the MFA under Mifsud-Bonnici were not prepared to move to the Minister's new stadium. This impasse was broken when Mifsud-Bonnici was voted out of the MFA by local football clubs in 1982. His replacement, Dr George Abela, was a one-time prospective Labour MP and, therefore agreeable to the Labour government. Popular with people on both sides of the political debate, Abela was an excellent figurehead and was responsible for a boom in local football. He eventually left the Presidency when appointed Vice-President of the MLP.⁶

On the face of it, moving football from the shabby, sandy Gzira site to the new modern terraces and plush turf of Ta'Qali should have been universally welcomed by fans and clubs alike. However, the move has been blamed for exacerbating – if not actually causing – a widespread decline in support for Maltese football. Attendance at matches, both domestic and international, has dropped considerably in recent decades. In the 1970s crowds of 15,000 to 20,000 would enter Gzira Stadium hours before kick-off when the opposition were famous foreign teams. As recently as 1988 a Malta vs. Spain fixture could attract 25,000; the same game in 1996 attracted only 6,000. There are many reasons for this, but the move to Ta'Qali clearly did not help. Whereas it used to be possible to walk to the stadium from many of Malta's more densely populated areas, it is now necessary to have a car, or to rely on the rather infrequent bus services. The new stadium is also more expensive, while tickets to the Gzira stadium were easily affordable. Now attending a football match at Ta'Qali is something of a treat. Furthermore, with televised football from top European games available most nights on terrestrial TV, there is undeniably a feeling that the reduction in interest has been caused by a perceived decline in the quality of football played by the Maltese.

Ta'Qali has been criticised on another level. Although the grass pitch is kept healthy, it is not properly cut:

Grass is sacred out here, that's why they let it grow so high and are reluctant to cut it because the thicker it is the less chance of it getting damaged. But, it slows the game down so when our teams play in Europe we're miles behind the speed of the game.

(Local Club Coach)

The standard of Malta's international game has varied. Indeed, since independence in 1964, there have been no particular footballing glories. The early 1980s

saw draws with Scotland, Portugal and Hungary, and narrow home defeats by Germany and Italy. In 1994 Malta beat Belgium 1–0 in a friendly. However, in 1995 Malta was beaten by Luxembourg in the European Championship qualifiers and twice by Iceland a year later. With a population similar to that of Malta, such defeats were taken badly by football fans.⁷

For the good of the game? The MFA

At one time football was considered a milieu that personified a sense of national unity. When the MFA President was the popular George Abela the Maltese game seemed to progress. George Abela was Qormi-born and a staunch Labourite, who married into a staunch Nationalist family. With these twin connections, he was capable of taking the MFA through the politically turbulent years of the mid-1980s and into the new Nationalist era that began with the end of the 16-year Labour hegemony in 1987. Aside from his lawyer credentials, he was, in the eyes of many, by familial ties, moderate and conciliatory. He lost out on being elected to the UEFA Executive in 1990 by one vote, but won much admiration in UEFA for the hard work he put into the Chair of the Referees' Sub-committee. It was through Abela that small nations, such as Malta and Cyprus, were able to obtain positions on a variety of UEFA committees. Joe Mifsud, who was Vice-president of the MFA under Abela, took over the Presidency in 1992 and has remained the incumbent ever since. The office of MFA President was traditionally held for two years and the incumbent then faced re-election. This procedure was changed under Mifsud, who made a normal term three years.

The MFA is by far the strongest national sports association in Malta. In 2004 it had 7,469 players registered as amateur and non-amateur. It also had 202 coaches in four different classes and 86 referees. The MFA is composed of 50 member clubs and seven other member associations, which in turn organise football competitions for the clubs and teams affiliated to them. These member associations are:

- the Gozo FA, which is a regional association and which organises football competitions on the island of Gozo;
- the Inter Amateur Soccer Competition, which organises competitions for amateur players;
- the Government/Parastatal Football Association;
- the Hotel and Restaurants Sports Association;
- the Industries Soccer Association, which organises football competitions between players coming from the same working environment. In such scenarios a variety of occupations provide teams for an entity known as the Swan League. Teams of lawyers or those from factories or bars turn out and play as non-paid amateurs; albeit, in the Malta context, when pride is at stake one can find players drawn from the Premier League 'guesting' (usually for a financial kick-back for the Post Office, government departments or hotel teams);

- the District Football Association, which organises competitions on a district level;
- the Youth Football Association, which caters for players under 17 years of age.

The MFA has sole right to organise football at a national level, and of having the right of representation, both at national and international levels. The MFA's stated aims are 'promoting and developing the game of football in the Republic of Malta to prevent any discrimination and to prevent the introduction of improper methods of practices in the game'. This has proved to be quite a task. Not all who heed this statement would consider the governing body to be up to the task.⁸

The crucial power broker is the Executive Committee, which is composed of the officers of the Association, and nine other members as follows:

- two from the Premier Clubs;
- two from the First Division Clubs;
- one from the Second Division Clubs;
- one from the Third Division Clubs;
- one from the Youth FA;
- two from the other member associations.

While the officers of the Association do not represent any particular member club or a member association, the other members of the Executive Committee must represent a member club or a member association on the Council of the MFA, which is the next highest authority after the General Meeting.

The MFA Council is composed of representatives of the member clubs. All the clubs in the Premier and First Division are entitled to have a representative with full voting powers, while the Second and Third Division clubs are entitled to have ten representatives from each Division. Representatives of each of the member associations have at least one representative with full voting powers. Although not members of the MFA, both the Malta Football Referees Association and the Malta Football Coaches Association have the right to send one representative, each with full voting powers. The Council is empowered to select persons to fill a statutory position or a place in a committee established by the Statute, or by the Regulations or by the Council itself. The Council has the right to formulate the policy of the Association and to enact the necessary regulations.

The government of the Board consists of the Council, the Executive Committee, the Protests Board, the Control and Disciplinary Board, the Referee's Board, the Players' and Coaches' Complaints Board, the Players' Status Committee, the Arbitration Board, the Permanent Board of Inquiry, and the Appeals Board. Issues are determined by a show of hands; the Chairman can, however, at his discretion accept a request for secret ballot. All Premier and First Division clubs have representatives in the Council. Second and Third

Division clubs have ten members from each division, elected prior to the Annual General Meeting. In addition, there are two representatives of the Gozo Football Association, two from the Amateur and Employees Football Associations, two from the Inter Amateur Soccer Competition, two from the Industrial Soccer Association, two from the Government/Parastatal Football League, one from the Hotels and Restaurant Sports Association, one from the recently recognised Ladies Football Association and one representative of the District Football Association. Well-intentioned volunteers all, such people may well be rewarded for their good deeds. The power to award lies with the President of the MFA.

The history of Maltese football, like the history of Malta itself, is dominated by politics and the endemic split between Nationalist and Labour. This polarity has historically manifest itself in a distinction between pro-Italian and pro-British factions, which have translated themselves into support for footballing powers outside of Malta itself. This political bifurcation has created the conditions in which support for the national Maltese team is an irrelevancy. As a state without a nation, the powerful symbolism of national identity that is afforded by a national football team is diluted by the indeterminacy of that identity. Not so when it comes to local football support, which despite the decline of national football has remained strong. It is to this that we turn next, to explore the various lines of conflict that cross-cut the domestic football scene, creating powerful and deep-seated local antagonisms.

2 New tactics

Producing difference

Valletta versus Birkirkara (October 1998)

The last time these two sides met was the decider and the final game of the 1997/1998 season. Spectators witnessed a 1–0 victory for Valletta, who thus retained the title, to the wild delight of their supporters. Scores were also settled off the field of play. Hours before the game, cavalcades of Valletta supporters drove through Birkirkara on their way to the national stadium abusing residents. After the match, an exchange of bottle throwing took place outside the McDonald's burger outlet located beneath the Birkirkara supporters' clubhouse. Shotguns were fired into the air by locals to warn off the visiting aggressors. Police made dozens of arrests, mostly Valletta fans who had taken this opportunity to taunt and confront their challengers, who had yet to win local honour in their 50-year footballing history.

A couple of months later, Birkirkara won the Super Five Trophy, a domestic knock-out tournament played over seven days and sponsored by the National Lottery. Birkirkara could now, at last, do what was crucial in Maltese footballing philosophy, namely take a cup back to their village. Their rivals, however, did not regard this victory in the same right as the Championship or the FA Trophy. The inevitable murmurs, that accompanied football victories in Malta, suggested that the success was owed more to the profits from Birkirkara's President's pharmaceutical-importing industry, given to rival players as a reward to lose the game, than to the footballing ability of the victors.

This October evening a crowd of around 8,000 entered Ta'Qali Stadium, having queued adjacent to a toppled-over construction crane. The day before a 43-year-old Italian worker had died instantly when this mechanism fell as he contributed to the refitting of the stadium roof. This sombre sight was a contrast to the rival fans, in full voice inside the ground, who waited patiently in queues to enter the stadium in between two sleeping dogs and 20 feral cats, who had made the VIP car-park their home. The supporters' terrace talk reported the supposed political tensions of the Birkirkara dressing-room. The electoral victory of the Nationalists, at the expense of the two-year-old Labour Administration a month previously, had seen a historic 3 per cent electoral swing (actually 3,000 voters), which gave the winning party a majority in Parliament. This had created a few local difficulties in Birkirkara: the out-going Prime Minister was from there, as was his successor. The Birkirkara President was a

well-known Nationalist, as were some of his players, one of whom had suggested the team enter the field wearing a variety of wigs as a way of ridiculing the former Prime Minister's toupee. The Labour voters in the team were not impressed by the idea and, apparently, all was not well with team morale.

What united fans and players, however, was the presence of football rivals, and the ensuing violence was locality based, having no obvious political undertones. As the game began, the Birkirkara fans chanted to a tune appropriated from the annual Valletta carnival; a direct insult that provoked whistles of derision from the Valletta fans. Other tunes were drawn from the brass band marches that accompany Maltese village feasts (*festi*, sing. *festa*). The musical appropriation continued, with Birkirkara fans chanting 'We are the Stripes and nobody can beat us' to another 'Valletta' tune; and then 'The Stripes' to the tune of the popular English 'Vindaloo Song'. The straightforward chant of 'Fuck You Valletta' stated in a few words what many Birkirkara fans thought of their prime footballing rivals.

On the pitch a sensation was occurring. After 37 minutes, the champions were 1–0 down, seven minutes later it was 3–0. In their history, Birkirkara had only ever beaten Valletta once before – by an 8–0 score line – a few seasons earlier. As the Valletta fans booed their own team off the pitch at half-time, the joyous rivals sang '1–2–3-boom!' Amid the growing tension, two of the four mounted police decided to ride their beasts slowly past the irate ranks in the Valletta enclosure. Within 40 seconds of the second half, a Valletta player was dismissed for tripping up an opponent. The player left the pitch to cruel chants from rivals of 'Druggi', reminding him of his guilt the previous season at being found taking banned substances. The yellow cards numbered ten and, while Valletta fans moaned quietly about their Bulgarian coach, the Birkirkara fans sang the Liverpool FC anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. The Valletta fans then complained to each other about their three foreign players who, in their opinion, were only there for the money and cared nothing for the club and its history. Birkirkara then scored a fourth goal following an eight-man move accompanied by taunts of 'Olé' on each pass. This was too humiliating for the Valletta fans to watch and resulted in the mass departure of disconsolate and defeated fans, which merely provoked sarcastic chants of 'Cheerio!' and mock waving from the victors' enclosure.

The final third of the game petered out. What remained of the Valletta fans suffered their opponents deriding them by humming the Death March and taunts of 'They're going out, they're leaving their team'. Police then intervened as a scuffle began among the Valletta fans when one individual took exception to insults made by a fellow fan against a player, who happened to be his relative. As this subsided a penalty was awarded to Valletta from which they scored. The most vociferous acclaim for the goal arose from the sarcastic cheering of Birkirkara fans. Moments later a Birkirkara substitution replaced a local-born player with an Argentinean. As the former walked to the dug-out, he passed the Valletta enclosure wherein two men, both in their forties, informed him of the morality of his mother and the sexual preferences of his sister.

The intimacy of nations

In his now classic account of nationalism, Benedict Anderson argued that national identity works by promoting an 'imagined community' that unifies the spatially, temporally and often culturally diverse populations that fall within the boundary of any one state, inspiring a 'deep horizontal comradeship' among them (1983: 16). This community is imagined, he tells us, because members of a nation will never know most of their fellow nationals. While this is true of larger nations – and even probably true of smaller nations such as Malta – there is an important difference between the model of 'imagined community' as it applies to large nations, and its characteristics in smaller nations. In the case of Malta, although people may never meet all their compatriots, they can nevertheless envisage doing so, and frequently do. The rhetoric of the small nation is that 'we all know each other'. Anderson's argument hinges on the development of the public sphere, and particularly the role of print capitalism in its development. Broadly speaking, his argument is that print capitalism – and the massification of print media – enabled people to think of themselves as being part of a wider community, through the mass dissemination of national ideology. The experience of sitting down to read a national newspaper, and knowing that thousands, at times millions, of other people are also sitting down to read the same newspaper at the same time is, for Anderson, a significant cognitive leap that lends itself to imagining the nation as a community. Like other larger nations, Malta also has a well-developed print public sphere, not to mention a equally vibrant and expanding electronic media (Chircop 1994).

The Maltese public sphere is less attenuated than that in larger nations. Rather than distant personalities who one only knows through mass media, public figures in Malta are more intimately known. They might be neighbours, friends, patrons – people with whom one can develop, or at least envisage developing, personal relationships. Likewise the people about whom media articles are written – the Maltese populace – are actual or potential neighbours rather than conceptual or imagined members of a shared community. Unlike other larger nations, then, the community of Maltese nationhood is based on a recognition that a genuine personal knowledge of many, if not all, of one's compatriots is at least theoretically possible. This is an important consideration, for it raises questions about the relationship between similarity and difference, unity and diversity within the Maltese nation.

As a number of scholars have observed, Anderson among them, the nation-states of Europe began life initially as political units which were then charged with the task of producing cultural unity – states which produced nations, rather than vice versa (see also Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990, Eriksen 1993, Calhoun 1997, McCrone 1998). As D'Azelio is famously alleged to have stated following the unification of Italy in 1870, 'We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians' (cited in Calhoun 1997). This clearly rails against received wisdom about the nature of nations, and indeed against the rhetoric of nations, which tend to

regard themselves as eternal, primordial units with deep historical roots. It also – more importantly for our argument here – assumes a kind of logic whereby the unity of the nation is premised on a prior disunity; homogeneity is premised on a priori heterogeneity.

As in other nation-states, the initial moves in Malta to unify the nation were primarily urban and elite in their origins. However, rather than a singular elite uniting a diverse rural or semi-rural populace, Malta saw the process of nation-building – and the period during the late 1800s when the idea of nationhood came to the fore – dividing the elite, and consequently the wider populace, between two models of nationhood (see Frendo 1979); or two political *ethnies* (Baldacchino 2002). Rather than uniting a divided society, then, and producing (imagined) homogeneity out of a heterogeneous reality, the development of Maltese nationhood worked in the opposite direction. It produced division and heterogeneity from a position which – given the intimate nature of Maltese public life – might be argued to have been more homogeneous. It produced imagined disunity out of genuine community. This disunity persisted throughout the twentieth century in vehement – at times violent – struggles between the Nationalist and Labour movements (see Koster 1984, Frendo 1989, Hull 1993). This schism mapped on to other fault-lines within Maltese society – between places, patron saints and band clubs – contributing to the antagonism and competition between them.

Central to this inter-parochial antagonism is the saints' feast, or *fešta*. There are 65 parishes in Malta, each of which is dedicated to a patron saint, and most of which house devotions to secondary saints. Each parish, therefore, celebrates at least one *fešta* each year. Many of these *festi* directly compete with one another to produce the best *fešta* event, with the most innovative processions, street decorations, brass band marches, fireworks, and other paraphernalia of *fešta* ritualisation. *Festa partiti* – competing devotional *fešta* factions – organise these antagonistic (at times violently so) ritual events, and are political as well as religious factions, such that *fešta* contest is also political contest (see Boissevain 1965, 1993, Mitchell 2002a).

The homology of *fešta*, locality and politics also informs footballing antagonisms. Not only does the geography of footballing conflict conform to the political geography of the nation, in which the different places become characterised by support for political patrons within either the PN or MLP, so too does it correspond to the Church's parochial structure. When football began, and the MFA implemented the one club for each district scheme, the districts were defined by the parishes of the Catholic Church, not government. The MFA used the boundaries imposed by the Church to develop the game, and the situation has remained so ever since. This means that the structure of *fešta* antagonisms maps directly on to that of football competition, not only intensifying the conflict between competing districts/parishes, but also promoting the widespread importation of competitive idioms and insults from the field of the *fešta* into football.

A number of analysts of nationalism and national identity have pointed to

the central role of ritual in the production and dissemination of the nation, and the promotion of imagined community (Lane 1981, Kertzer 1988, Connerton 1989). By bringing the population together in symbolic activity, the nation is reinforced. But ritual also plays a part in disunity. As Baumann (1992) has argued, we should be aware that ritual activity is not always self-focused, but may also be aimed at communicating messages to 'others' – to opponents. In such a small island with its dense network of personal relationships, there has developed an ethos of communicating with 'others' that applies to national politics and local religious feasts, and transfers itself well to football. The word *tmieghek* is used to describe this idiom, best translated as both the pleasure of rubbing the nose of the defeated further into the dirt, and how victory is not as important as the chance it offers to denigrate one's opponent. It is both a metaphorical and an actually realised state, which describes the well-established manifestations of ritualised denigration of defeated opponents. For example, in politics in 1996 the Labour Party won the election, thereby deposing the PN leader, Eddie Fenech-Adami. The Maltese word, *fenek*, means rabbit. As a consequence of the victory, the Labour-controlled radio station played endless jingles of 'Run Rabbit Run', and effigies of rabbits, with the suggestion of their cowardice, were part of post-election cartoon and jokes. Two years later, the 1998 election victory of the Nationalists saw three days of celebration for the victors who drove in cavalcades up to 100 in number, both rejoicing with fellow voters and more importantly abusing the populace of districts that were renowned Labour strongholds. This kind of manifestation is built into the structure of the Catholic Church's patrons' feasts – the day following the feast day is known as *xalata*, and involves an evacuation of the parish on buses and trucks that tour the island, visiting beaches and taunting the inhabitants of the places they pass through. Most popular with people from the south of Malta, which is known as the heartland of Labour Party support, the *xalata* will select its route carefully to allow maximum abuse to be showered on the citizens of the Nationalist north. This process is repeated after sporting – particularly footballing – victories, which see noisy and lengthy cavalcades processing through the streets of the vanquished opponent.

In the football ground itself, the taunts and insults are also often couched in a religious idiom. Thus, as illustrated further below, the football terraces appropriate the tunes of the band marches played during feast processions and add their own lyrics which include religious insults and boasts. For those who want to annoy rivals, the most common method is to insult the saint that is associated with the town. Hence Valletta supporters' shouts of 'Hello! Fuck Saint Gajetan' antagonise the residents of Hamrun, who do not appreciate the slur on their patron saint. Insults then move beyond the saint to its statue, which is held in the church throughout the year and taken out in procession during the annual feast (see Mitchell 1998: 78–80). The quality of the statue is considered a sign of the wealth and respectability of a parish, so statue-based *tmieghek* focuses on the materials the statues are made of: 'Bronze and Iron? Saint Gajetan – Chicken Wire!' These political and religious idioms are

complemented by the internationally more familiar gynaecological referents. Insults can be directed personally at a specific player which may have a very personal message or even make reference to his family members. It is not uncommon for a player in this stadium so taunted to visit the home of the accuser who, having been identified by rival supporters and his whereabouts located, will usually have the error of his ways pointed out to him.

Football provides for images of destruction and permits personalised comments. In the former instance, the term *Kissimihom* (we destroyed them) is a much-used boast of the victors over the vanquished. But not all abuse is directed outside the club. Humiliation may contain sexual imageries, hence *red-danjninhom* (suck it). Those known to have been adopted or be illegitimate are asked *min hu missierek* (who is your father?). A variety of insults have strong sexual connotations. A player can receive accusations of *poggut* (living with a partner outside marriage), or hear *muqran* or *Kurmut* directed at him (suggesting a cuckolded man), whereas *f'ghoxx Kemm ghandkhom* suggests that the player has sex with his relatives. Rumours, for example, that a current player is seeking a move, usually provoke abuse on a variety of topics from his own supporters. A completed move, particularly if to a hated opposition club, produces, upon the player's return, chants of *traditur* (traitor), *Guda* (Judas) and *Gakbin* (Jacobin – turncoat). A player of short stature receives comments of *nanu* (dwarf) or is told *qum bil-wieqfa* (stand up). Those with irregular teeth receive comments of *bus-nienu* (teethy), large noses provoke the predictable 'Pinocchio', and those with long hair receive calls of *pufta* (homosexual).

The stadium is policed by the Special Assignment Group (SAG), who in 2000 implemented a policy of rejecting anyone who shouted, cursed or was seen gesturing. Such a policy is, however, arbitrary and even discriminatory. When the perpetrators are 5,000 fans of Valletta, the police are usually nowhere to be seen. When the perpetrators are a few hundred-strong from a small district they rigorously exercise such a responsibility. The crucial criterion seems to be the whim of the Match Commander.

In late twentieth-century football two dozen players of African origin were evident in the Malta leagues. One, George Lawrence, a black British player who played for the successful Hibernians in the mid-1990s, received from rival fans insults of *xadina* (monkey) or *itfghulu banana* (give him a banana). In the late 1990s the Hibernians attained the collective accolade of *tas-suwed* (the blacks), on account of six black players at one time being on its books. Those suspected of doping receive chants of *drogi* (drugs): the more renowned and informed the opposition players, the more abuse they are likely to attract. The more prominent chants at the football ground include references to perceived corruption (see Chapter 4). When a player fails to make a particular play – misses a tackle, misses a goal or a save – the calls come: *Mafja* ('Mafia') or *Hallelin* ('thieves') or *Bil-guh* ('hungry', therefore easily 'bought').

Early Maltese antagonisms

St Georges Bormla and Floriana developed the earliest Maltese footballing rivalry, following the former's 1–0 victory in 1900. Like most other games in the early years, it was played for a wager – of five pounds and ten shillings – which St Georges spent on the commemorative Floriana Cup, as an insult – or *tmieghek* – to Floriana. The victory provoked a succession of similar challenge matches between the teams over the next eight years, of which Floriana won a series of victories, before St Georges finally regained the honours in 1908. Their next defeat of Floriana took another 29 years to secure, and while Floriana went on to achieve great success in local football, St Georges virtually disappeared from the scene. Their one league championship was achieved in a year when Floriana did not compete. After a League and Cup double in 1917, St Georges managed only three Cup wins in the next 20 years. Extensive bomb damage courtesy of the Axis forces during the Second World War saw many Bormla residents evacuated, never to return. Today St Georges is a Division Two side with a small following drawn from a district renowned for its cheap housing and endemic drug use among its disaffected youth. For Floriana, a new and longer-lasting opponent than St Georges was to appear, and who went by the name of Sliema Wanderers.

Football rivalries provide for long memories in Malta. Some originate in arrangements beyond the rules of the game, but in search of parochial pride. In 1912, Victoriosa Melita became the first side to beat both St Georges and Senglea Shamrocks, and finished fourth in a 12-club league. They could thus claim bragging rights in the Cottonera¹ dockyard area. In consecutive seasons between 1913 and 1917 the Birgu² team lost every league game including one in 1914 against St Georges. The Birgu team had allowed their opponents to win, thereby awarding them enough points to ensure they leap-frogged Hamrun Spartans to win the League championship. The agreement that ideally would have seen a 1–0 St Georges victory actually saw them score five times. The five-goal victory should have put St Georges in an impregnable position in the league, but when Hamrun went on to beat Birgu 15–0, they led on goal difference. The MFA annulled the game, awarding Hamrun a 2–0 victory, thereby giving them an identical goal average to St Georges. The Birgu goalkeeper, Cikku Grima, received chants from the Bormla fans of '*Hamas Cikk*' (Five for Cikku), and was reputedly prevented from returning to his job at the dockyard the following Monday. Some 90 years later, references to '*Hamas Cikk*' were shouted by the crowd watching a match between Birgu and Bormla.

Mummy's boys and the Irish: Sliema–Floriana rivalry

The first fixture of the newly established football league in 1910 featured Sliema and Floriana in front of a crowd of 5,000. The event was a shambles. A disputed goal saw the Sliema team walk off the pitch, and the match abandoned. Following weeks of argument the game was replayed, producing a Floriana victory. The

latter went on to win the first ever championship and thereby sowed the seeds of rivalry with Sliema for the next 50 years. The two did not have matters all to themselves however. The title went twice to Hamrun, once to Valletta and once each to St Georges and the Kings Own Maltese Regiment. However, two teams dominated. The years 1920 to 1940 saw 11 championships go to Sliema and nine to Floriana. Games between the two sides were memorable for the levels of disorder on and off the pitch, as Malta's foremost football historian explains: 'It soon became customary for the players to leave the field for the least provocation, or for the supporters to invade the ground whenever they fancied' (Baldacchino 1995).

The district of Floriana is a product of the seventeenth-century expansion of the Valletta fortifications. The district was built by the Italian military architect Pietro Paula Floriani whose Floriana Lines were meant as a place of refuge for those living outside the walled cities of Valletta and Mdina. The land behind them was considered a place for the Knights of Malta to enjoy recreation. Floriana was, primarily, an open space between fortifications, but as the original aim of the fortifications was made obsolete by military technology, the area developed into a residential hamlet. Completed in the first half of the eighteenth century, an urban centre was added later at the request of Grand Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena who commissioned French architect Francois de Mondion to design a centre which bore the title Borgo Vilhena. With the arrival of the British, the town soon hosted a barracks, a hospital and a parade ground.

Football was first played in Floriana in 1894, with Floriana FC being created for the St Georges challenge match of 1900 and the Colonial Club forming a team in 1903 to play games against regimental teams. The 1900 match against St Georges was ceded to the Bormla team after Floriana walked off the pitch, and the police were required to intervene to restore order. In 1904/1905, Floriana played three games against the Irish Fusiliers stationed in Floriana. Shortly to be transferred to India, at the end of the final game the Irish donated their team shirts to the local players. Discarding their red and green shirts, Floriana have since played in green and white stripes, and adopted the name *tal-Irish*.

From 1910 onwards, Floriana established the island's most enduring footballing rivalry – with Sliema. Their first-ever fixture, in 1910, ended with a pitch invasion and a mass brawl. The two sides attracted support from all over the island and, as a consequence, disputes and fights occurred on buses, both before and after matches. Floriana's first championship victory was decided in the same week as their patron saint St Publius' feast (13 April), prompting claims that it was ordained by God.

Floriana produced the first 'footballing legend' in Malta. The local-born Ruggeriu Friggieri (*'iz-Zibga'*) is considered by many football commentators to be one of the best players Malta has ever produced. Beginning his career with Floriana in 1902, aged 16, this short, but strong, fullback was crucial to Floriana's three consecutive championships, achieved without dropping a single point or conceding a single goal. Posted with the Army Service Corps to Egypt in 1918,

his reputation followed him to the Middle East. Later he was to play for Naples in Italy, where he was nicknamed the 'Maltese Devil'. In 1922, having returned to Floriana, a dispute with the club committee saw him leave to join Sliema. This move to the great enemy meant him concealing his face whenever passing through Floriana for fear of his former supporters. Returning to his home-town club saw him welcomed back as a hero, and he was to resume his career for the *tal-Irish* before a sudden and untimely death.

With a total of 95 trophies in their history Floriana is Malta's most successful football club, followed closely by Sliema. The Sliema–Floriana rivalry became known as the 'Old Firm', alluding to the Celtic–Rangers antagonism in Glasgow. Unlike Glasgow, the Maltese rivalry did not reflect a denominational conflict. All the players and fans were Roman Catholic and in 1950 a fixture between Sliema and Floriana saw the first-ever attendance at a match by the Maltese Archbishop. The apparent religious unity, however, did not mask deep-seated local and parochial rivalry that ran along the fault-lines caused by attachment to particular patron saints. The Archbishop witnessed a brawl on the pitch that spread to the terraces and ended with the game being abandoned. Six years later the same fixture saw the authorities use the attendant fire engines' hose-pipes in an attempt to extinguish the brawling on the terraces.

At times the Old Firm games attracted crowds of more than 20,000 to the Gzira Stadium. Both teams drew support from beyond their locality – in Floriana's case from the villages of Zebbug, Siggiewi and Kirkop. Sliema attracted fans from Qormi and Mellieha. The rivalry affected players both on and off the pitch. International fixtures saw rival fans, while ostensibly supporting their national team, abusing players selected from among their deadly rivals.

At another level, the rivalry took on both pictorial and poetic form. Cartoons and posters were drawn and displayed that denigrated rivals. During the games both sets of fans had renditions of *Il-Gigolet*, sung to the tune of *La Danza delle Libellule*, taken from the operetta *Gigolette*. The words reveal an awareness of social class antagonism that fuelled the Sliema–Floriana conflict and, as in other parts of the Mediterranean, manifests itself in the derogation of elite masculinity (see Pitt-Rivers 1954, Mitchell 1996). The fans and team from Sliema, an area regarded as solidly bourgeois, were berated by the Florianese, who regarded them as feminine and effete when compared to their own proletarian masculinity. *Il-Gigolet* went as follows:

The match has started, it has barely begun, what skill!
When the ball ... bum ... Bum ... was struck with skill,

Here *tal-mama* [mummy's boys] started to cry
And all the young men could not hold back their tears.
Here one has to see the Sliema supporters
Pulling their hair as they left for home, crying
For Floriana have broken 'the shilling'³ in two
It was bad luck that against us you emerged as losers

The Irish are always as strong as iron
 Come what may, good or bad
 So go and find some wounded
 And take them with you to Ghar-id-Dud [a fashionable Sliema promenade]
 Or take him home where it is better there
 Fools! Go and hide from the public.

The Sliema response made equal use of locality, landmarks and ideas of fair play. Their version argued the following:

The match has started and already a goal has been scored
 The ball has passed between the two posts
 Already the sullen look is upon their faces
 You have hidden the coffins you brought with you at Pietà [a cemetery between Floriana and the Empire Stadium]
 So cheer up you boys *tal-gazaza* [baby's dummy]
 Because a fiasco has occurred in Floriana
 They have lost the cup as well as their wallets
 We have the right to shout . . . Goal! Goal! Goal!
 The *qaghqa* [circular bread] has surely been broken, truly broken
 They have lost their honour
 If you play us fairly, you will never beat us.
 And you will die of sorrow

Pity! What Floriana has been reduced to
 The whole team finished and dead. The coffins thrown away
 You have gone into hiding
 Fools! Go and bury yourselves, all of you.

The references in the Floriana version need some explaining. Throughout Malta, Sliema provokes a derogatory response from just about everyone not born or resident there. They are popularly known as *tal-pépé* – which means ‘snooty’ or ‘stuck up’ and has a number of different connotations. It derives from *tal-Papa*, meaning ‘of the Pope’, but also has phallic connotations: *pépé* is sometimes used to refer to the penis. The Sliemese – *Slimiz* – then are both too closely associated with religious authority, and therefore somewhat unworldly and naive, and both sexually and morally suspect. As *tal-mama*, they are ‘mummy’s boys’ – as *tal-pépé* they are, behind their respectability, depraved. As one Floriana commentator put it: ‘Fur coat, no knickers – that’s the *Slimiz*.’ Together, *tal-mama* and *tal-pépé* also signal the use of the terms ‘mama’ and ‘papa’ to refer to parents, rather than the colloquial ‘ma’ and ‘pa’. In doing so, they also signal the *Slimiz* preference for speaking English rather than Maltese – and often an elite and rather antiquated English. Historically, there was a logic to this, as Sliema had a high rate of mixed Maltese-British marriages and was therefore an important centre of support for the pro-British

Constitutional Party. The links with Britain, however, were also reflected in football.

The watchword of Floriana is unity. Not fragmented by the divisions of other Maltese towns and villages, Floriana consists of one parish, with one patron – St Publius – one *fešta* committee and one band club. Many believe such unity of purpose goes some way towards accounting for the town's footballing success. In conversation with football historians and long-term residents, recurring themes appeared which stressed the significance of local political wisdom, entrepreneurial ability and the presence of the military parade ground. These factors combined to produce a very successful football club. With its gardens, harbour views and open spaces Floriana was and remains an attractive place to live. The British military housed both barracks and administrative offices there and the parade ground they built was for decades the largest regular playing surface on the island. When not used for military purposes the same space was taken over by local youths who would emulate the game played by the colonists. Following the departure of the military in 1979 the parade ground was renamed the Independence Arena and has since become the official training ground of Floriana FC. The religious affiliation remains strong despite a severe test of belief when a championship decider in 1995 saw Floriana lose to Hibs on the feast of St Publius. They have never since played on the day of the feast.

Amid this apparent unity, however, was a *de facto* socio-geographical division within Floriana. One district named the Balzonetta housed the cafés, bars and strip-joints that served the off-duty military personnel. The other half of town – which actually housed the barracks – was considered more refined. Balzonetta was characterised by a concentration of astute, capable and forward-thinking entrepreneurs, who were able to transfer their business skills to football.

In the 1950s the football team won the championship four times in a row, a feat only equalled by Valletta 40 years later. For Floriana fans, the achievement was a moral victory attained in the absence of political favours. Their town has never produced a prime minister or indeed a minister in any government who could have been the source of patronage. In the absence of any rich patron the club survives as a top team by virtue of an excellent youth set-up which saw them win the under-16s championship five times in six years between 1994 and 2000 and the under-18s title in consecutive years from 1997 to 2000.

The Sliema Wanderers FC was created in late 1908, when two Sliema residents decided to form a youth football team to add to the five others already in existence in Sliema. The club was nicknamed the Wanderers, due to one of its originators' fascination with the then English FA Cup winners, Wolverhampton Wanderers. The original kit of yellow shirts and black shorts was changed the following season to dark- and sky-blue stripes, colours chosen to signify the blue sea which encircled Sliema with the Azure sash of the Madonna, to whom the town of Sliema had been dedicated from time immemorial. Winning their first honour in 1918 (the Cousis Shield), Sliema became champions for the first time in 1921. By 1924 they had won the championship and three other Cups, a

record repeated in the 1950s and mid-1960s when Sir Stanley Rous, the FIFA President, presented the Johnny Walker Cup to their skipper.

A one-time sparsely populated fishing village, Sliema became the preferred summer bathing resort for the Maltese middle class and the residence of many a colonial family. The young men who were to play in the early Sliema teams were often drawn from British families who were from both military and civilian backgrounds. The latter were often referred to as 'Exiles', a name given themselves by employees of the Eastern Telephone Company. These and military personnel would 'guest' for Sliema, in defiance of an agreement that Maltese teams would play only Maltese players. Sliema were therefore renowned for the use of foreigners, and the success they enjoyed was attributed by opponents to their unwillingness to abide by the agreement. Sliema had the further advantage of being geographically close to the national stadium at Gzira, where all matches were played until 1980. Sliema teams of various decades were often to be found training at the stadium with the blessing of Meme Scicluna, the local entrepreneur (and Sliema fan) who rented the stadium from the owners. Furthermore, the working-class district in which the ground is located was the breeding ground of dozens of footballers who would train with and be signed up by Sliema. As a consequence Sliema were never considered a team which produced or displayed local born talent, but rather were associated with the mercenary 'Exiles' and the neighbouring Gzira proletariat.

As such, Sliema were associated with a colonial ethos – not only in their links with the British but also in their de facto proprietorship of Gzira and its inhabitants. The middle class has been significant in the club's history. Its biggest benefactor was Joe Gasan, a car importer and owner of the first-ever fleet of buses. In the 1990s his son was a director of the club. Former club presidents have included local entrepreneurs and Nationalist politicians. The town became staunchly Nationalist following the demise of the Constitutional Party in the 1970s. The notary and former Cabinet Minister George Bonnello-Dupuis was President for 25 years between 1970 and 1998. He was vehemently opposed to Dom Mintoff's Labour government of 1971 to 1987.

Although associated with the Nationalist bourgeoisie, Sliema is not exclusively middle class. Some of its most devoted fans are drawn from a working-class district known as 'Lazy Corner', which also houses an unofficial supporters' club bar. In comparison to their rivals, the Sliema fans are well-behaved. They do not go out of their way to antagonise or provoke, and so ignored the Floriana fans in their cavalcades who for decades would annually drive past the official Sliema Wanderers social club taunting their long-standing opponents after a victory.

The Lions rampant: Floriana–Valletta rivalry

The Floriana–Sliema rivalry was both preceded and succeeded by that of Floriana–Valletta. This antagonism between two towns only half a mile apart continues to this day, even though Birkirkara have to a certain extent super-

seded Floriana as Valletta's *bête noire*. Floriana cannot compete with Valletta in terms of the number of fans they attract but have proven to be a thorn in the side of their near neighbours on the pitch. Thus in the 1990s, Floriana fans could gloat: 'They beat us every four years' and 'They hate to win the championship without beating us'.

Unlike their Sliema rivals, Floriana had a reputation for antagonism that coloured not only football fixtures. A notable incident occurred in Floriana in 1922 when a gang of locals awaited the return from the stadium of Valletta fans following their Cup Final victory. A trolleybus containing the most vociferous Valletta fans was pulled off its rails in the ambush, overturned and stoned. A number of serious injuries were sustained, and the police began a policy of rerouting Valletta fans to avoid their ever having to travel along the main street of Floriana. The fans have been subject to this procedure ever since.

Although Floriana fans boast that they are more astute than those from Valletta, they know that, when it comes to a fight, they are weaker. They also know that football-related violence has a long and venerable tradition. As a consequence, even to this day the football club committee requests the presence of police officers at all fixtures, including under-16s games, due to the unpredictability and volatility of touch-line parents.

While Valletta can trace its origins as a football club to 1904 it was only in post-war decades that it came to the fore as a footballing force. Founded by residents emulating the servicemen found in the Valletta barracks and no doubt inspired by envy of the nearby Floriana team, Valletta soon found success and were champions in 1944, winning the double in 1945. This success was largely a product of a team consisting of ex-servicemen and former Sliema players allowed to play in the absence of transfer regulations and restrictions. Funded mainly from the fund-raising efforts of their many and fanatical fans, Valletta remained a strong team throughout the 1950s. Until the 1960s Valletta remained in the shadow of Floriana but a change of committee brought success in the 1970s, and raised the profile of the club to become the biggest on the island.

Without a doubt the most passionate fans on the island are those that follow the 'white lions', better known these days as the 'Citizens' or *tas-City*. When away from football, the people of Valletta – known as *Il-Beltin* (of the city) – are locked in intra-city rivalries between two main parishes, St Paul's and St Dominic's and their respective feasts; two main neighbourhoods, *L-Arcipierku* and the *Due Balli*; two brass band clubs, La Valette and Kings Own; all of which map on to a party political division between Nationalist partisans and Labour Party supporters (see Mitchell 1998, 2002a). Football, however, brings the *Beltin* together.

Valletta fans are masters of *tmieghek*. Not content with winning championship after championship, they use every opportunity to remind their rivals of their superiority. Every Valletta victory over Floriana requires a provocative motor cavalcade through the streets of the vanquished town, with horns blowing and fireworks thrown from the moving vehicles. More subtle

provocation comes as the result of Floriana's government housing projects being used to rehouse Valletta residents, who repay their new hosts by playing the club's anthemic cassette collection 'Forza Valletta City' at high volume. Fans of Valletta have used the most joyful of non-footballing occasions to annoy their neighbours. In 1998 the Carnival Grande Defilé held in St Anne's Square in Floriana occurred a mere two days after the confirmation of Valletta retaining the championship. The National Festivities Committee commissioned a brass band to play at the occasion which did so without incident until, when in proximity to the supporters' club bar of Floriana, the band maestro, who happened to be a fanatical fan of Valletta, ordered the band to strike up a rendition of 'Forza Valletta City'. In the ensuing mass brawl the band was supported by Valletta people present in their capacity as Carnival organisers. A dozen arrests were made.

From a pre-war population of 24,000 the peninsula that is Valletta today is home to 9,000 proud and parochial citizens. The depopulation is due to a combination of those evacuating never to return during the Second World War, and decades of slum clearance and housing development. Inhabitants of *L-Arcipierku*, the *Due Balli* and the *Mandragg* – low-lying and low-status neighbourhoods – regard themselves as 'tough-guys' with a kind of 'diamond in the rough' ethos (see Mitchell 1998). The long-standing association of Valletta with the docks, visiting sailors, the willingness of the locals to act as ships' chandlers and merchants, and the presence for 100 years of a red-light district serving the British forces known affectionately to them as 'the gut' has stigmatised the Valletta residents in the eyes of their detractors as a people who would do anything for money including acting as pimps and selling their bodies. The association with prostitution and high-density multiple-occupancy housing schemes provides a rich vein of ribald mocking from Valletta's football opponents. Generations of rivals have asked, *Min hu Missierkom il-Beltin?* – 'Who is your father, people of Valletta?'

The Valletta fans' propensity to disorder and violence resulted in them referring to themselves in the 1960s and 1970s as *tal-Palestin* – the Palestinians. Rival fans chanted *tal-Palestrina ghal go-latrina* – 'Palestine is a toilet', indicating what much of the island's population thinks of the capital city and its residents. The tough reputation enjoyed by the fans of Valletta permits them to promenade around most of the island, but the place they enjoy annoying most is Floriana, with insults to St Publius abounding. Contestation also focuses on the clubs' emblems, because both teams claim the rights over the symbol of the Lion Rampant. Both club badges feature the emblem. St Anne's Square in Floriana is home to a statue of a lion, which the locals are very proud of, and inevitably Valletta fans deface the lion on the occasion of their championship victories. Six Valletta men were arrested and charged with indecent exposure after urinating on it in 1999 as part of the victory celebrations.

While the footballing antagonisms discussed so far are oriented around parochial rivalries, couched in idioms drawn largely from *festa* and more general

issues of respectability and reputation, a more directly political form of competitive antagonism emerged from the 1970s onward. The next chapter begins with this political phase of footballing antagonism, before bringing the story up to the present, with the entrenched duality of the 'traditionalist' Valletta and *arriviste* 'modernisers' Birkirkara.

3 Football and politics

Traditions and modernities

Empire Stadium, Gzira, October 1979

Compacted sandstone, not grass, provided the surface on which this European Championship qualifier was played. Although not officially permitted under UEFA regulations, this organisation turned a blind eye to Malta's absence of a grass pitch as it had done since Malta joined both this Federation in 1960 and FIFA the year previously. The ramshackle stadium hosting the game built in 1922, and privately owned, but leased to the Malta FA, had seen better days. Located in the heart of a densely populated area, the stadium had seen some great games and had regularly held crowds of over 20,000. British engineers had built a greyhound-race-track around the pitch in emulation of the Wembley Stadium in London, and the ground was known as the Empire Stadium. Greyhound racing never actually happened here. The track circumference was 40 yards short of the internationally recognised measurement. Surrounding apartments and their occupants enjoying the game free from their windows and roofs. The ubiquitous extended TV aerials dominated the skyline.

What emperors there were sat in the few hundred seats provided in the grandstand. Here officials of UEFA sat with government ministers. To their left were around 20 Turkey supporters, one waiving a large national flag. The scheduled 3.00 p.m. kick-off passed without any sign of a start, the Malta team squad arriving at the ground 15 minutes late because torrential rain had caused flooding which delayed their journey from their hotel. The same rain had produced huge puddles across the pitch and behind one goal post lay a puddle at least a foot in depth and ten yards wide. Standing between the changing room and pitch, this little pond presented the players with their first obstacle. The Turks negotiated it well, most merely getting soaked to their ankles. The Maltese who followed them ran out purposefully, only for one to trip and fall headlong into the water. Soaked to the skin, he tried to retain his dignity as the crowd laughed at both his misfortune and what was to become, because of the water and the pitch, a farce of a match.

A scrappy contest played in teeming rain saw Turkey 2–0 ahead by half-time. Illicit (and illegal) bets were being taken in the usual corner of the ground for those in the know. Emulating the adults, young boys from poor backgrounds tried to make money as they heaved heavy baskets of small bags containing karawett (nuts). One

dominant hoarding advertised Pepsi-Cola; another sign erected in the popular enclosure questioned the need to use bad language. The police stood in a group, smoking and watching the match, and ignored those who had climbed onto a corrugated-iron roof at one side to get a better view.

Towards half-time chants of 'Dragut, Dragut' reminded the Turks of Maltese disdain for the Turkish general's part in the 1565 Great Siege. At half-time a few dozen locals, taking exception to the presence of the Turkish flag, grabbed it from a flag-pole and threw it on to the pitch. Returning for the second half, the visiting players were met with a hail of stones thrown by a Maltese mob outside of the stadium. After ten minutes, the police moved into one section of the crowd, their presence succeeded in keeping missiles to a minimum for the next 45 minutes. One stone hit the foot of the linesman who complained to the referee. The match was allowed to continue and the score line remained at 2–0. Both teams were booed off the pitch.

No love is lost between the Maltese and the Turks. This enmity goes back to the Middle Ages when the Turks would plunder the islands and take the Maltese away to use as slaves. The Maltese always believed their teams suffered whenever a Turkish referee controlled European games involving Maltese teams. But this was more than a hatred grounded in antiquity. The mob throwing the missiles comprised the front line of the Labour Party activities. Their dispute was not about football, but about ownership and control. Their opponents on this occasion were not the Turks, but the Nationalist voting figures who ran the Malta Football Association.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, party politics increasingly entrenched itself in every area of Maltese social life. The politics of the 1980s became an increasingly dangerous game, with riots and shootings commonplace in the lead-up to general elections. There were also accusations of gross abuse of power by the Labour government (1971–1987), which had begun with a reformist agenda, but increasingly bought into a cold war socialist internationalism which demanded a command economy and a polity centralised in the charismatic figure of Dom Mintoff (Boissevain 1994). Mintoff dominated the political scene from the 1950s until the 1980s, and even proved influential as a back-bencher when in 1998 he refused to support the Labour government (elected in 1996), provoking crisis and an early election in which the MLP ceded power to the PN. Under Mintoff and his successor, Karmenu Mifsud-Bonnici, ministerial positions became effective political fiefdoms, none more so than that of Lorry Sant in the Ministry of Works, Sport and Housing. His patronage was to influence the development of Maltese domestic football as it had the national infrastructure, through the building of Ta'Qali (see Chapter 1).

Following the Nationalist victory in 1987, and the subsequent fall of state socialism across much of East and Central Europe, the MLP's hard-line policy was replaced by a more centrist approach, and the Nationalist governments' inexorable trajectory towards Malta's EU accession brought with it a new political concern – with questions of identity, tradition, modernity and respectability. The Nationalists have been in power since 1987, except for the

two-year MLP administration of 1996 to 1998. This period has seen an expansion of private enterprise benefiting from the deregulated economy, itself buoyed by EU pre-accession funding. An increase in consumption has been fuelled by – and has fuelled – an expanded and liberalised financial credit market, leading to a new perceived affluence and the emergence of new classes of status-driven consumers.

With such modernisation has come an inevitable counter-stream of public concern for tradition, heritage and identity; and it is this tension between on the one hand an increasingly confident and ‘flashy’ *nouveau riche*, and on the other hand a more earthy and traditional ‘authenticity’ that has come to inform the footballing antagonisms of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, where the earlier clashes – between Valletta City and Hibs or Hamrun – were manifestations of the party political polarity of PN–MLP, the more recent antagonisms between Valletta and Birkirkara are primarily about status, longevity, and claims to authentic tradition against a superficial and inauthentic ‘flashiness’.

Hibs and Hamrun: football and politics

Hibernians of Paola emerged as a footballing force in the 1970s under the patronage of Lorry Sant. An important industrial district, Paola suffers from its proximity to Malta’s largest burial ground and is home to Malta’s largest correctional facility. Inevitably, rivals focus on these features, suggesting that Hibs players and fans should either lock themselves away or retreat, as corpses, to the cemetery. Joining the League after the war, Hibs had by 1968 become the main rivals to the then dominant Hamrun. A first championship victory in 1959 saw them join Floriana as Malta’s first-ever representatives in European competition.

Precisely when the club was formed is a grey area. The Constitutional Club in the town had a team in 1922 which won the Amateur League Championship in 1932 and then applied to join the MFA as a full League member. However, because they were considered to represent a political party they were refused. A name change followed – to Hibernians. Nobody is certain why this name was chosen. This stronghold of the Labour vote has produced a club which at various times has won the affections of Maltese fans who have tired of the Floriana–Sliema dominance. Despite often gallant performances Hibs were unable to win trophies in their early days due in no small part to the shenanigans of the MFA council, which mainly consisted of the well-to-do patrons of the Old Firm who took it for granted that footballing success was the preserve of their teams alone. In 1931 when a Championship looked likely for Hibs, the MFA interrupted the League programme to play the Cassar Cup, thus spoiling their chances. Even when they finished top of the League, Hibs lost out one year to Floriana who were accorded a special status and given the title. In 1933 Hibs ended the season on equal points with Sliema, so a League decider was arranged by the MFA, but the date chosen coincided with the Hibs’ best player being posted overseas with his Army regiment. Their request

for a change of date was refused so the Hibs refused to play the match, thereby awarding the title to Sliema. The fight of the Hibs against these political and personal odds provoked widespread sympathy for them among the footballing neutrals.

In 1936 to 1937 all Maltese clubs registered financial losses due to paying players' wages, despite the avowed amateurism of the league. As a consequence of this, Hibs were disbanded when, facing accusations of massive debts, they refused to open their books to officials of the MFA. The issue was prejudicial. The Lm400 debt of Sliema was far higher than that of Hibs, but the MFA was dominated by fans of Sliema and Floriana. The issue dragged on in the courts and was decided in favour of Hibs in 1945. While Hibs fought this disqualification, it was not until 1945 that they were readmitted. In the meantime the other clubs signed their best players.

Tragedy and turbulence are no strangers to Hibernians. In 1952 a truck, loaded with fireworks for anticipated Hibernian celebrations, exploded after the match and killed two 20-year-olds. The Pace Grasso playing field today stands in honour of the two deceased. Some five years later, a fire engine and its fire hose were needed to control Hibs fans following disorder during the game against Sliema. The direction of the hose, however, was somewhat arbitrary and ended up soaking all those from the VIP section.

The Hibs won the Championship for the first time in 1961, and again in 1966. Through this first success, they became the first Maltese team to enter European competition, only to lose 5–0 to Servette of Switzerland. The second championship victory saw them drawn against Manchester United. Led by their priest-coach, Fr Hilary, Hibs sustained a 4–0 defeat in Manchester, but produced a credible 0–0 draw on the return fixture in Malta. In 1969 Hibs held Real Madrid to a 0–0 draw in Malta. Three championship victories in 1979, 1981 and 1982 were achieved by probably the best team the club has ever had and, in the 1982 to 1983 season, they went 37 games undefeated. The appointment of former Arsenal captain and England international Brian Talbot as Manager in 1992 saw a championship victory in 1994 and two more in the mid-1990s.

Labour politics forever impinge on Hibernians. During the 1960s and 1970s, Hibs' players used to pick on Freddie Mizzi before the Hibs vs. Sliema match, because they said he was supposed to play for Floriana and not for the Paolists. This was so because all Hibs players supported Labour, while Mizzi was a credited member of the Nationalist Party. Up until 2000 the Hibs chose their coach carefully, to avoid political embarrassment.

The Labour government of the late 1970s and early 1980s leased the Corradino Stadium to Hibs. The government made drastic improvements in the sports facilities of Paola, and later all the Corradino sports complexes were given free to Hibs on encroachment terms – a peppercorn rent, but with no entitlements, an arrangement favoured by Lorry Sant throughout Malta. After Sant and his government lost the election and the Nationalists were elected, a Sliema Wanderers supporter became the Minister of Sports. In

time-honoured style an artificial turf pitch was built for Sliema using government funds.¹

At times of heightened political tension in the early 1980s, the Hibs' following would include contingents of young men from the southern village and Labour stronghold of Zetjun. In the absence of a decent village team, the Zetjun enforcers – well known for their participation in acts of political violence – attached themselves to Hibs, the nearest big club and the one with the most obvious Labour sympathies. Famed for the toughness of its young men the village is infamous in Maltese political history for an occasion when the inhabitants attacked a Nationalist rally in 1986. Not only was the rally routed but the Nationalist leader was days later prevented by force from entering the village church to attend a wedding. Fighting the predominantly Nationalist-sympathising Valletta fans was considered the duty of the Hibs fans and, in the political and masculine mythologies that exist, the men of Zetjun are the only ones who scare Valletta. In a footballing culture where a motor calvacade through the village or town of a vanquished opponent is the ultimate celebration – the ultimate *tmieghek* – Valletta, with plenty of opportunity, has never taken a calvacade through Zetjun.

Given the depth of association between Hibs and the MLP, it was inevitable that the club would develop an antagonistic rivalry with Sliema Wanderers, the club from the predominantly Nationalist bourgeois seaside suburb. Sliema Wanderers' President in the 1980s was George Bonello DuPuis, a veteran Nationalist MP and Party Treasurer. In 1983 Hibernians defeated Sliema in the final match of the season, and Sliema were relegated from the Premier League for the first time in their history. After the final whistle, a large section of the Hibs' fans started chanting anti-Nationalist and pro-Labour songs to celebrate their rivals' downfall. In an era when party political polarity dominated all areas of Maltese life, footballing and political rivalries became interchangeable.

A new force in Maltese football appeared in the early 1980s in the shape of the Hamrun Spartans. Between 1983 and 1991 the club won 23 trophies, achieving more in nine years than the previous 50. Their victories were witnessed by a vociferous and often violent following, particularly when the opposition were Valletta. The Spartans team has served to unify a town that is otherwise riven between devotion to different saints, with different band clubs and different political parties. Originally known as *Ta Braksja*, the town was given the name St Joseph in 1620, when the Archbishop declared a devotion to St Joseph the Worker, and built a chapel dedicated to him. When, in 1881, the Curia declared that the parish of Hamrun be dedicated to St Gaeton, this created a devotional schism that was subsequently replicated in conflict between brass band clubs. A band club for music enthusiasts was begun at St Joseph's Church in Hamrun in 1889, but in 1906 a dispute between the musicians and their musical director produced a split, which saw a new band club formed at the church of St Gaeton. The new club never looked back and, today, is considered the most dynamic band club in Malta. It

was to branch out into sport (particularly table tennis and billiards) and carnival activities.

Despite the dual devotional set-up, Hamrun has only one *fešta* – of St Gaeton – but the *fešta* itself is characterised by inter-band club rivalries. The bands and their supporters frequently fight during the *fešta*, each choosing deliberately provocative routes through the town to cross-cut each other's route, or march past each other's clubhouses. As with many such intra-parish rivalries in Malta, the conflict between the band clubs corresponded to rival political factions. The football club, though, acts as a unifying force, so much so that Spartans Chairman Victor Tedesco adopted the role of mediating between the band clubs during the turbulent 1980s. He was committed to professionalising the team, and built a dedicated stadium – Victor Tedesco Stadium – in the town, which became a great source of pride for local people. Significantly he was the only individual whom both parties agreed to accept as a mediator, and in 1988 both band clubs played music together in celebration of the Spartans' second successive championship. The football club has brought friendship to the district and does attract a devoted following. Tedesco, when interviewed, has stated that, regardless of the honours won by the football club, his greatest satisfaction was that he contributed to the peace and unity of the district. With his demise in status, though, the tensions re-emerged and by the late 1990s the conflict had become so severe at *fešta* time that the parish priest was forced to cancel band marches to preserve the peace.

Established in 1907, the Hamrun Spartans club is considered relatively free of the politics which infuses all other areas of Maltese life, and many of its football clubs. In 1945 Hamrun Liberty (a team so named because it met at the Liberty bar) began to attract hundreds of local followers. Invited to play top-level football, they accepted and changed their name to Hamrun Spartans. Playing their first competitive matches months later, they wore a strip of red shirts with black cuffs and collars, donated by a local tailor. The primary rival of Hamrun is the nearby harbour village of Marsa, though for Marsa inhabitants this rivalry is channelled through the sporting medium of feast-day rowing regattas, which see all harbour towns (but not Hamrun) provide crews to row for the honour of their home town. Marsa victories require their supporters to pass through Hamrun on their way home in order to insult the inhabitants, even though they have not provided a crew for the regatta.

Although not politically partisan, the success of the Spartans is attributable in no small part to political patronage and individual entrepreneurship. In the Labour-dominated 1970s, a pragmatic electorate replaced the former Nationalist club president with a man with Labour sympathies. In 1984 the Labour government donated land to the club for them to build their own stadium, which they began in 1988. By that date, the Labour government had been replaced by the Nationalists, and the new regime gave more land – not this time to Hamrun Spartans but to Hamrun Liberty Sports Club. Adjacent to the Labour-sponsored Spartans' ground, Liberty built a club which now houses basketball, the local variety of bowls known as *bocci*, and an amateur football club.

This symbolic war of politics-by-sporting-patronage is not untypical, and demonstrates starkly the relationship between political cleavages and football rivalries.

The 1980s and 1990s was dominated by rivalry between Hamrun and Valletta. Hamrun fans particularly remember when, beating their rivals on 1 April 1990, they spoiled the championship celebrations which Valletta had hoped would not be tarnished by a single defeat. Two years later in a FA Trophy Final, Hamrun beat Valletta again, against all expectations. Under Tedesco, Hamrun won four championships, six FA Trophies and five Super Cups.

Hamrun, however, gained a reputation for deceit, particularly after their 1982 championship. It was widely believed that Hibs had the best team that year, followed closely by Sliema, but every time Hibs and Sliema played Hamrun they underperformed, assisted it was thought by financial incentives emanating from within the victorious club. Having made the club successful, Tedesco led the club into financial trouble in 1998, having borrowed Lm250,000 (c. £500,000) from a loan company which he was unable to repay. As a consequence, the club was unable to repay transfer fees and the MFA forbade them from buying any more players. Tedesco's successor Martin Zammit was then expected to act as saviour, particularly as he was personal secretary to a Labour Party minister. Unfortunately, two months after Zammit became President, the Labour government were voted out of office and he was out of a job – both for the Labour Party and for Spartans. His successor was in the hot seat only months before suffering serious injuries in a road accident. Thus for all their attempts to join the big boys of Maltese football, Hamrun have never really succeeded, and were regarded by their opponents as somewhat naive and pretentious in their ambitions.

Hamrun and Valletta: sailors' sons and knife carriers

The antagonism between Hamrun and Valletta goes back to the 1920s when league matches were played at the Mile End Stadium in Hamrun. The resentment of the locals to their village being invaded by the Valletta fans saw many a brawl in the streets leading to the ground and in the village's main square. By the 1980s, Hamrun were vociferous in their insults to Valletta, in particular, the accusation '*tfal tal-bahrin*' (bastard sailors' sons). In return, Hamrun players walking along Republic Street, Valletta, were occasionally spat on by local fans. By the mid-1980s police barred Valletta fans returning from Ta'Qali from travelling through Hamrun. Indeed, the Hamrun President, Victor Tedesco, in an attempt to diffuse this tension, invited the Valletta team and players to visit the Hamrun Stadium. In return, Tedesco was to receive the Bennett Trophy, awarded by a committee chaired by Judge Cremona and local-born broadcaster Lewis Portelli for such a sporting act. In 1990, with Valletta certain to win the League, the final match of the season saw them playing Hamrun. The latter scored in the dying seconds to win the game and, as a consequence, Valletta fans invaded the pitch and fought their

jubilant rivals. The presentation of the trophy was delayed until later in the day, but even today, some ten years later, Valletta fans complain that Hamrun ruined their day.

The team and fans received chants which liken their attempts to be a big club as cow-like – *tal baqra* – by use of a wonderful metaphor which one fan explained: ‘Cows are sincere but gullible. Their big eyes make them see things bigger than they actually are.’ The same rivals would delight in accusing the Hamrun fans of being *tal-werwer*, which translates as ‘trouble-makers’, and *tas-sikkina* – ‘knife carriers’. As one native of Hamrun explained: ‘Until the mid-1940s the stereotypical opinion was that Hamrun men all worked in the docks and in their spare time gambled and fought each other.’

Happy Cows: Stripes champions – April 2000

The final game of the 1996/1997 season saw Valletta beat Birkirkara and, therefore, win the League. The following season, Birkirkara beat Valletta three times, but failed to win any domestic honours. By 1999 Valletta were once again champions and, on being so proclaimed, thousands of their fans drove along Valley Road, Birkirkara, insulting locals in their post-match jubilation. The locals bombarded the vehicles of their tormentors with bottles and glasses, and some fired shotguns into the air to warn off the aggressors.

To sustain interest in the domestic League, a new format had been agreed between the Premier League and the MFA for the 1999 to 2000 season. There were to be two rounds of matches following the first round, and all clubs had their points halved, followed by a Championship Pool and a Relegation Pool, which would split the League in two. The system was intended to sustain interest to the end and thus pull in crowds to Ta'Qali. The MFA President claimed, at the end of the season, that the format had been a success. In 132 games over the season, crowds had increased over the previous year by 4,000. It was a League system unique to Malta, and one could argue that the rivalry it sustained between Birkirkara and Valletta saved domestic football in the year 2000 from ennui. Valletta had not beaten Birkirkara for two years (for a total of six matches), but had won the Championships despite this. The previous season, Birkirkara had finished as runners-up to Valletta (as they had done for the two previous seasons), and had to be content with winning the Lowenbrau Cup and the Super 5 Cup.

The 1999 to 2000 championship was basically a two-horse race between Valletta and Birkirkara. At the turn of the year the odds were on Valletta finishing first. A game between the two in January ended with four players sent off – two from each side – and a Birkirkara victory, thereby establishing a seven-point margin between the two. By late April, the deciding games were being played and the championship came to Birkirkara when Hibernians, who had lost the previous five League games, beat Valletta 2–1 on Easter Sunday, thereby making the one point Birkirkara needed next day against Floriana to confirm the title unnecessary. Minus three first-team regulars, Hibernians played their best game of the season to win with a penalty three minutes from time. Valletta fans expected that Floriana would roll over and allow Birkirkara a

victory, thereby preventing Valletta from equalling Floriana's record of four consecutive championships. When fans of Birkirkara realised they could not be caught by Valletta, celebrations began in Valley Road on the Saturday evening. Uniformed police patrolled the one-mile stretch all night and broadcast on local media the route that Valletta fans must travel to the stadium for the 5.00 p.m. final game of the season the following day, which happened to be between Valetta and Birkirkara. Police warned those attending that they would search all spectators entering, and offensive and abusive behaviour would not be tolerated in or around the stadium.

Two weeks previously, Birkirkara had beaten Sliema 2–0. The latter were six points behind and were serious challengers for the championship. The furious Sliema President lambasted his players publicly after the game, stating his disgust at a 'gift-wrapped' defeat, adding, 'the team totally disobeyed the coach's instructions. Not one shot or goal in 90 minutes from the most in-form team in the division and three consecutive victories.' He was also critical of the referee, who allowed a Birkirkara free kick to be taken while he was booking a Sliema player. Further anger over the championship victory of Birkirkara came from the Valletta quarter, where their supporters alleged that the 2–1 defeat by Hibs had made some of the latter players rich. Allegations abounded that one Hibs player was offered Lm4,000 to throw the game. He refused – not out of morality but because of financial acumen – Birkirkara had paid him more to play well and win the game. A Valletta player was rumoured to have been promised Lm20,000 from Birkirkara if the latter won the league. The same player in a furious argument assaulted his coach and threw the club Chairman out of the dressing room a few months later. The latter threatened the club with his resignation as a consequence.

The Birkirkara defile began in Valley Road mid-morning Sunday and ended around 1.00 a.m. on Monday. The local media provided saturation coverage. On the Friday before the Sunday game, Smash TV interviewed players and officials of Birkirkara. On the day of the game, one TV station and three radio stations dedicated live time to the celebratory journey to the stadium and the game itself. The public broadcasting service began broadcasting the day's event from 9.30 a.m. By 2.00 p.m., some 5,000 fans of the Stripes were in the vicinity of Ta'Qali in a flotilla of vehicles, singing, dancing and drinking. Articulated lorries were bedecked with effigies, stereo systems and celebrants. Unroadworthy cars, painted with yellow and red stripes, followed the procession. Insults to Valletta were painted on vehicles and chanted by the revellers. The late arrival of thousands seeking to enter the stadium meant that the threatened police searches were abandoned in the crush, and thus many entered holding beer bottles, while others randomly set off petards.

The game ended in a 5–1 victory for Birkirkara in front of over 8,000 ecstatic fans. It was Birkirkara's biggest-ever win over Valletta. The 3,000 Valletta fans played their part, chanting repeatedly 'Birkirkara Xejin' (nothing), reminding the jubilant rivals of their 50 years of non-achievement. A banner reading 'Lhaqtu l'Bormla' demeaned their one championship victory by reminding them that their victory was now equal to that of football no-hopers Cospicua, who had won the league once in 1917. When a truck with a PA system travelled on the pitch perimeter and passed the Valletta enclosure on its way to the Birkirkara fans, it was pelted with

bottles. The songs of Birkirkara were met with shouts of 'Imitators' and 'Invent your own'. Even the victory celebrations of the Birkirkara team replicated those of Valletta the previous season – crawling in a line, imitating a dying fly, synchronised diving. The Valletta fans left the ground desultory and angry; their mood became more furious as they watched a rival climb a flag-pole at the opposite end of the stadium and set fire to the Valletta club flag. Police had to restrain furious Valletta fans who, fuming at this ultimate insult, charged towards the Birkirkara enclosure.

The Birkirkara defile reached Valley Road at around 8.00 a.m. Around 10,000 people awaited their heroes. Women and children stood at the back and on the walls, and men and boys in the middle of the road in close proximity to the vehicles and the victorious team. The team arrived on the back of a tipper truck ahead of ten other long-wheel trailers. The jubilation was deafening as the victors took the acclaim of the band club, which held a banner with the face of club President Victor Zammit painted on it in a form of dedication normally reserved in Malta for religious saints. The parade ended at the club's bar above McDonald's. Around midnight the only bar with easy access to a drink was the Labour Party club, wherein a sole Birkirkara player stood drinking whisky and smoking, while chatting with a dozen locals. While the celebration was alcohol-fuelled and raucous, the event in its most public dimensions was over by 1.00 a.m.

The following Friday evening, the club held a rally in the village square on the forecourt of the parish church of St Helen. Lasting two hours, the gathering attracted around 1,500 curious onlookers, many of them families with children, who listened to various speakers connected to the club over the PA system as they sat in majesty with tables and chairs on the trailer of a truck parked outside the church. The President also spoke. It was a love-in of what all in the village had achieved.

A telephone hot-line for financial donations was set up by the club. Pledges of Lm10, Lm5 and Lm3 were possible. A celebratory CD was soon in circulation with vocals by an established local singer called Renato, who sang a line of 'Viva Birkirkara, we've pissed off Valletta'.

A few weeks later, the man proclaimed the saviour of Birkirkara was rumoured to have lost a fortune in a failed business venture. The club was bankrupt, and Internet messages informed readers that, if they had money and loved Birkirkara, they should come forward and take over.

Citizens and Stripes: encounters in Schadenfreude

Up until the early 1970s Birkirkara was a town divided, mainly between those who supported Floriana and those following Sliema. Indeed, the Birkirkara FC Committee were known to follow this duality. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sliema fans in Birkirkara tried to ensure that any decent player with their team joined only Sliema. Other committees, when dominated by fans of Floriana, sought to pass on their best players to Floriana or urge Birkirkara to play out of their skins to defeat Sliema and, thereby, hand the honours to Floriana. Football clubs had existed in Birkirkara since 1919, but its distance from British service establishments explains the late development of the game there. For decades the district housed people who were predominantly employed in agricultural production

and it was, and remains, a stronghold of Nationalist politics, housing the Party's headquarters. It was businessmen sympathetic to the Nationalist cause who made the football club the force it has become.

A late 1980s Birkirkara sponsorship deal provoked widespread hostility. The club had leased a building in a prime spot on the town's high street during the Labour government of 1971 to 1987. The lease was granted on the understanding that its sole use would be as a sporting club. However, the site was considered perfect by the expanding McDonald's burger empire which negotiated to lease the building's ground floor from the club for an initial Lm20,000 per annum. In the 1990s the McDonald's logo was also placed on the team shirts, which happened to match the corporation's colour scheme of red and yellow. Many in the game argued that the property should not have been rented for financial gain, and resented the injection of funds into the up-and-coming team, which could now buy itself success.

The story perhaps begins with a small club formed in the 1960s on the outskirts of Sliema in a district known as St Andrews. Here the Sliema Sports Association took part in amateur and youth competitions and proved to be very successful. When the British military left the district in 1979 the area was redeveloped and populated by the Maltese. A new club was formed after the name of the district and in the late 1980s the club was accepted by the MFA. Sponsored by Luxol (a paint company), the St Andrews side found themselves in the Premier League by 1992. However, their proximity to Sliema and relative newness meant they had no following. A proposal to amalgamate with Sliema came to nothing when the latter refused to have the name Luxol added to their name. The same idea appealed to Birkirkara however, which assumed the joint name in 1994. Funded by two well-known millionaires, the club paid good wages and soon attracted good players.

Forced as a consequence of the amalgamation to begin life in the Third Division, Birkirkara were in the Premier League three seasons later. This arrangement saw, for the first time in Maltese footballing history, the nominal merging of two districts. Keen to maintain this novelty, the club developed a management structure different to everyone else, and operated as a limited company with 600 shareholders and two committees – one for football, the other for business. They have a club chairman, not a president. With the wages they offer, the rest of the Maltese footballing world consider them to be a team of mercenaries and the board avaricious for success to the point of having no qualms about buying victory when the need arises. In 1997 one player received wages of Lm1,400 per month plus a free apartment and school fees for his children. Such an income was considered preposterous by the fans and committee of other clubs, and provoked a variety of rumours as to where the funding came from.

Birkirkara is a pleasant place to live; with a population of 27,000 it is the largest village in Malta. Attractive to young couples seeking refuge from the constraints of village tradition Birkirkara is also a destination for the aspiring middle class. It is home to a succession of political leaders – from both parties –

and a favourable location for overseas diplomats and other *nouveau* elites. It at one time housed a poor district known as *il-Laqxija* – ‘the left-overs’ – and with it developed the insulting metaphor of *il-karkura tax-xitan* – ‘the slippers of the devil’ left behind when departing in haste at what he saw. This district was demolished and rebuilt in the 1970s by the Labour government which, in an attempt to alter the voting ratio, packed it with their own supporters drawn from the south of the island. Such newcomers are not considered to be the true people of Birkirkara.

Home to six churches, the largest of which is St Helens, Birkirkara was at one time infamous for its intra-*fešta* hostilities. As the success of the football team has grown, however, this conflict has abated, and Birkirkara appears united behind its team. They have a core following of some 3,000 fans, which can be doubled for a big game, and in the past few years have been the only fans to offer a dialogue with those of Valletta. The latter point out that as a proportion of the total population of 27,000, 3,000 is not particularly impressive – particularly in comparison to the levels of Valletta support drawn from the city’s population of 9,000.

Throughout the 1960s Birkirkara floated between the First and Second Division. Their first trophy occurred in 1968 when they lifted the Sons of Malta Cup.² Better performances throughout the 1970s saw them win the latter Cup twice, and become runners-up in the FA Trophy. The 1980s saw one FA Trophy Final where they lost to Sliema. 1997 saw their first-ever qualification for Europe, but elimination after one round against Spartak Trnava. The latter part of the 1990s saw Birkirkara finish second in the Premier three times in a row and, in 2000, they finally won the Championship.

The fans and players of Birkirkara have become accustomed to being told – particularly by Valletta fans – to shove their new-found money up their arses. The *nouveau riche arrivistes* that are The Stripes – because of their kit – also suffer the occasional cacophony of mooing noises in homage to their part-sponsorship by the McDonald’s hamburger empire. As they have become a force in Maltese football, Birkirkara are now the most disliked team on the island. The reasons for this lie in ideas about the morality of success, and particularly the role of money.

Birkirkara has long been divided between the two band clubs that compete within the feast of St Helen, which are the St Helen Band Club, better known as *Tal-Bagri*, and the Duke of Connaught’s Own Band Club, better known as *Ta’ L-Ghama*. The people of Birkirkara often talk about the band club divides during *fešta* week, when the rivalry between supporters of the band clubs peaks; no one talks about unity. Different circumstances change opinions. The insults, traded between supporters of the different band clubs during *fešta* marches, are as harsh as ever. Letting loose a large number of live chickens in front of the opposite band club in mockery on *fešta* day is still a common occurrence in Birkirkara. During 1997, before the final touches to the club’s new premises were completed, the rallies and meetings organised by the football club were held in the band clubs’ premises; a practice many interpreted as a way of unify-

ing the town. The sense of unity which a major victory of the football team brings is lost to a degree during *festta* week, when the rivalry between the band clubs again takes the upper hand. In the months following the September 1998 general elections, won by the Nationalist Party, the Birkirkara team was inexplicably performing negatively on a constant basis. A split between players with different political leanings had taken place within the Birkirkara dressing-room, which had drastic consequences for the performance of the team. Our informants from the Birkirkara camp keenly emphasised the fact that the split was only temporary and that, in reality, Birkirkara FC was in the forefront in creating unity between *Karkarizi* with different politics. An image constantly put forward by the club is that of the founder of the Birkirkara Supporters Club Richard Muscat, a former parliamentary secretary and Nationalist MP, standing alongside Joe Debono Grech, a former Labour minister, who also occupied the post within the Birkirkara Supporters Club at some point in time, both showering praise on the football team and speaking about unity among the people of Birkirkara. Some months previously, however, canvassers of two politicians, hailing from Birkirkara but from the opposite political parties, came to blows prior to a football match between Birkirkara and Valletta.

In May 1998, celebrating Valletta fans drove down Valley Road, the heart of Birkirkara, on two huge floats and were attacked by locals armed with missiles. Earlier, the cavalcades of Valletta fans had passed through Birkirkara with the Birkirkara people being caught unprepared. However, a small crowd, which at that very moment was gathered inside the Birkirkara Labour Party Club premises, made its way to the Nationalists' Party Club, situated just a few metres away. This crowd of Labour diehards urged their Nationalist counterparts, who had gathered inside the PN clubhouse, to unite and 'be prepared' in case the offensive Valletta fans should make their way through Valley Road a second time. The political rivals did join forces and, the second time the Valletta cavalcade made its way through Valley Road, it was greeted by a barrage of missiles hurled from the balcony and rooftop of the PN Club. The Birkirkara supporters talk with pride about the incident because, in their way of seeing things, Birkirkara people showed unity by setting aside their political differences for the love of their town and its honour. However, one might argue that all this happened within a period of relative political peace, and such an event would probably not occur during the time of a general election. Time and circumstances change and influence social priorities.

A variety of previous unheard-of insults were hurled at the players and fans of Birkirkara. In evidence since the mid-1990s, such chants question the Birkirkara fans' knowledge of football and source of success. Thus, chants of *Ma tifhmux* (You know nothing about football) suggest to the Birkirkara listeners that their support is that of hangers-on and glory hunters. Allied to this is the realisation that their financial backing is not politically motivated and, whereas in the 1980s a club might face insults through its associated political ties, it now faces insults as a consequence of its commercial sponsors. It was inevitable that rivals would both question and abuse their wealth in their

chants. The post-2000 failure of Birkirkara to add to their sole championship has permitted gloating about their perceived football and economic failure ever since.

With lofty ideas of how to gain a much-longed-for championship – finally achieved in April 2000 after 50 years – Birkirkara broke with many Maltese footballing traditions in their five-year two-horse-race with Valletta. This competition saw both clubs turn professional – openly in the case of Birkirkara and de facto in the case of Valletta, whose President's businesses provide sinecured employment for his star players.

Considered for decades a yo-yo club of little footballing consequence, Birkirkara's recent success is therefore regarded as having been bought rather than fought for. Their sponsorship has assisted in the purchase of numerous international players, including an attempt to sign the son of Libya's Colonel Gaddafi. This is not without political significance, as Malta's southern neighbour is almost universally regarded with suspicion. Attempts by Mintoff to woo the Colonel during the 1980s troubled even the Labour faithful, who were unhappy with being associated with the Arab Mediterranean – his Nationalist opponents even more so. Birkirkara's deal with the younger Gaddafi fell through, thus depriving the world of the spectacle of seeing one of the Colonel's kin wearing McDonald's-sponsored kit. It is irony indeed that one of the West's most vigorous critics should have come so close to a family connection with one of its most powerful corporations.

With the entrenched party political antagonisms of the 1970s and 1980s largely a thing of the past, the 1990s and early 2000s saw a new political *détente*, with a centrist and 'New Left' agenda emerging from the MLP, and the PN dedicating itself to the project of EU accession – achieved in May 2004. Political mobilisation to mass rallies and celebrations gradually abated, such that by 2005 both the MLP's traditional Mayday celebrations and the new PN-sponsored Europe Day rally (timed to coincide) were quiet affairs. In past years this would have been unthinkable, and the coincidence of an MLP and PN rally would have led to certain violence.

At the same time, footballing celebrations and the ritualised processes of *tmieghek* – cavalcades and mock carnival celebrations – expanded (see Mitchell 2006). Party political antagonisms were replaced with parochial ones, many of which united otherwise politically riven towns and villages. The new parochialism was more to do with footballing reputation and tradition than with party politics. It pitted *nouveau arrivistes* such as Birkirkara, or smaller clubs such as Hamrun, with big ambitions, against more established footballing giants such as Valletta. While the quality of the latter was seen as innate – part of the legacy of a long-standing tradition of footballing quality – that of the former was bought; either through the legitimate, though problematic, channelling of funds through sponsorship, or through the more shady processes of corruption and 'match-rigging', accusations of which dominate Maltese football. It is here that we start in the next chapter, before moving on to the history of foreign influence on club football. In a context where

'foreign' – and particularly 'European' – is considered a mark of quality, the domestic game has seen successive footballing entrepreneurs import players, teams and managers in the hope of improving the chances of their teams, many of which have been thwarted by the complexities of local footballing politics and finances.

4 Playing to the big-men

Patronage and party

Corradino Stadium, April 2003

A sunny, breezy, Tuesday evening sees 1,000 fans awaiting the pitch entrance of the hosts – Malta – and visitors Slovenia. The 5.45 p.m. kick-off provides panoramic views for those sitting in the stadium located at the high point of the southerly shore of Grand Harbour. Four flags fly in front of the changing room before this April game, one the national flag of Malta, the other that of Slovenia. Another proclaims UEFA and one advertises a FIFA Fair Play campaign. Running along one touch-line are hoardings advertising Budweiser beer. Behind the evergreens are two enormous cranes used to lift the cargo from large ships. Surrounded in its immediacy by an industrial estate, the stadium is identifiable to visitors instructed to take a left turning adjacent to the Minaret that stands as the only mosque in Malta, built in 1980 and funded by Libya's Colonel Gadaffi. The stadium belongs to Hibernians FC from the adjacent village of Paola. The Hibs have played here since 1962.

The ground lies in a locale of great history. The three adjacent districts of Senglea, Cospicua and Vittoriosa are referred to, variously, as the Three Cities and, collectively, as the Cottonera. The latter nomenclature arrived by virtue of being encircled by fortifications built in the 1620s by the Spanish-born Grand Master, Nicholas Cottonera. The Knights of St John, upon arriving in Malta from Rhodes, based themselves in the peninsula called Birgu and from here withstood the Turkish armada of 1565, thanks, in part, to fortifications built in the ninth century AD by Arabs who had occupied Malta. The repulsion of the Turks was the Order's first significant land victory in its 500 years of existence and, in celebration of this, Birgu was renamed Vittoriosa. Anticipating further attacks from the Turks, the Knights built more fortifications in the early part of the seventeenth century. The consequence today is the Cottonera's ramparts and ditches of some five kilometres in length.

The various fortifications also brought the three districts a maritime reputation as centres of ship repairing and supplying. Vittoriosa's location at the head of the Grand Harbour meant it was often the first recipient of foreign visitors. As a consequence it was burdened with the task of defending the Christian faith; and it was also home to the Grand Inquisition. Further religiosity is evident in its dome of the Church of St Lawrence, which houses a statue of St Paul, who departed here for Rome having brought Christianity to Malta in AD 60. Under British colonialism from 1801 the

Navy made massive use of the Cottonera shoreline. At one time, the British Mediterranean Fleet would dock in the adjacent Grand Harbour. A dockyard, excavated by the British in 1834, was further expanded and, in later decades with the assistance of Chinese labours, became the Malta Dry Dock, which lies some 200 feet below the perimeter of the stadium and repairs ships bearing global flags in various states of disrepair.

The stadium is a legacy of the British Empire. Built in 1890, originally as a cricket ground, the area was officially opened in 1894 by the British Royal Queen Alexandria. Once the sporting arena of the British Navy, the stadium is splendid for the local climate in its ability to shade its spectators alongside one side of the pitch. Flowerbeds and bushes are evident both along the sheltered side and behind the left-hand goal, which houses the changing rooms above a stairway of 30 steps. The British colonial elegance is evidenced along the side opposite the stand, which holds dozens of 20-foot-high evergreens planted primarily to prevent the lofted match ball from dropping down on to the adjacent dockyard. Opposite the goal nearest the changing room is building rubble on a virtual no-man's land, forgotten for two decades. Contained within it are the remains of a chimney attached to the first-ever power station in Malta; this eyesore, however, is part of Maltese heritage and has a protection order on it. The stadium also stands as a witness to the post-colonial ambitions of the post-1979 Labour governments of Prime Minister Dom Mintoff. Those watching the game under the iron-corrugated roof canopy can then thank Lorry Sant, the first-ever Minister for Public Works, Housing and Sport, who in early 1983 ordered his ministry workers to remove fabrications from the newly derelict Empire Stadium in Gżira and reconstruct them here, where they have remained ever since. Concentric circles of mown grass enhance the best-kept playing surface on the island.

In this ponderous location a largely silent pre-match crowd enjoy the evening sun, and fail to notice the dozens of holes in the corrugated roofing and the weeds that have grown under the concrete blocks, which constitute the terracing. Home supporters manage some form of animation when their team enter the pitch. The national anthems of both teams are played, but few locals seem to know the words. There is more crowd noise whenever the team ventures over the half-way line after kick-off. The 14 visiting supporters make more noise with their collective sing-songs than the home fans. Within half an hour both sets of supporters are agreed on the poor officiating of the Lithuanian referee. The Slovenian visitors play possession football and, compared to their hosts, are bigger, fitter and stronger. The Maltese seem unable to run off the ball and cannot keep possession beyond five passes. Their coach becomes more animated and shouts Creole instructions combining the English Northeastern regional Geordie accent with pidgin Maltese.

At half-time, the match remains goalless. The six Maltese photographers, after the pre-match toss-up, place themselves behind the Malta goal in clear expectation of visitors' goals. Returning after the half-time interval, the PA system plays the anthemic 'Forza Malta' in an attempt to provoke the crowd into some form of enthusiasm. The effect is ignored. The second half is largely one-way traffic, as the Slovenians seek to find a way through the packed Maltese defence; however, in a counter-attack in the final minute, Malta miss the best chance of the game. Seconds later the referee blows

the full-time whistle. For the Maltese team and coaching staff, the 0–0 scoreline is akin to a victory. Their jubilation infects the crowd. They have just won their first point in this European Final Under-21 qualifying group.

Having lost their previous five matches and having not scored a goal, the evening is by anyone's standard an improvement. The point gained is a credit to the new English-born coach; this game was his first official match in charge. His advice to his players was to minimise one-to-one situations, and strike on the break. He tells me that no fewer than eight of his players were born in 1983 because there was no talent worthy of selection born in the previous two years. In this scenario and, in agreement with the German-born Technical Director, the policy was to sacrifice results for the experience needed to develop the potential talent for the full national team. The coach was aware that the local impinged on the chance of national glory. One of his players tonight had played two games in the previous six days for his domestic club in an under-19s tournament. The match was inconsequential to anyone but the dozen-man committee and 100 or so club supporters. To them it was everything and few of them would be watching their star player representing the nation they all lived within.

The following night the Malta first team played their Slovenian equivalents and lost 3–1 in the national stadium. Malta had no points from five matches and, while they could claim to have scored one goal, they had also conceded 17 in the duration. Global influences were reflected in the Maltese line-up. In the team was an Anglo-Maltese playing in a Scottish First Division, and a naturalised Yugoslavian currently playing in Bulgaria. A Maltese-born player currently plying his trade in Bulgaria also played, as did a returning Maltese national from the German Bundesliga. Following the defeat, the local sports press called for the dismissal of the German-born Malta coach, Siegfried Held. Two days before the game, Held publicly criticised what he had called the amateurism of Maltese football, when two of his Malta-based selections did not turn up at pre-match camp. He also criticised the situation that saw his squad not permitted to train on the pitch of the National stadium in the days before the game. He claimed that such a scenario would not occur in any other country in the world. His rambles were notable. He had played in the 1966 World Cup final and managed German clubs and the Icelandic national team. He was not to last long in his position, and left the job months later.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the early development of Maltese football was dominated by the presence of the British on the island, and by the politically motivated division between Anglophile and Italianate Maltese. During the same period – from the 1890s until the 1930s – entrepreneurial Maltese, aware of the potential money to be made from football, sought to enhance the spectacle of the game by inviting 'big-name' clubs from the UK and elsewhere to play exhibition matches. This established two trends within the development of the game. First, the significance of 'big-men'; well-placed, wealthy and entrepreneurial characters – often with political ambitions and connections – who sponsored events such as the *Sajf ta' Scicluna*, and individual club teams. This phenomenon was to consolidate itself at the level of the club,

which saw club presidents as financial benefactors and negotiants in the interests of the club, and at the level of the MFA, which has seen a succession of politically active ‘big-men’ in control of the Association. The second trend was, and remains, the preoccupation within Maltese football of ‘all things foreign’.

The preoccupation with foreign-ness as a gauge of value derives from the post-colonial strategy of self-essentialism through which the Maltese place the ‘blame’ for lack of ability and success upon themselves, in order to re-narrate themselves as agents of historical process (Spivak 1987). On the one hand, foreign players, coaches and tactics are viewed as a panacea – a sure-fire means of redeeming Maltese football from its endemic problems. On the other hand, they are viewed as inherently unsuitable for the Maltese situation, and a succession of foreign footballing reformers have been criticised for their attempts to change – or even simply criticise – existing footballing practices. For example, when a Maltese Premier League manager returned to his native Britain in the mid-1990s, publicly criticising what he saw as a corrupt and debilitating system of footballing governance, with widespread match-fixing and bribery, he was vilified in the Maltese press as an ignorant foreigner who had fundamentally misunderstood the nature of not only Maltese football but society as a whole. The calls for foreign intervention are therefore complemented by their rejection – a procedure which repositions the ‘hapless’ Maltese as strategically *different*, and the ‘expert’ foreigner as eternally naive; thereby repositioning the Maltese as agents of their own destiny.

Taking a gamble: fatalism and the Maltese

Discourses about corruption in Maltese football revolve around concealment and disclosure. When, in early 2002, Maltese TV journalist Simon Farrugia was suspended by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), his crime was less the fabrication of evidence or exaggeration to suggest the existence of processes that were absent in football, than the disclosure of processes that, it was quietly acknowledged, *did* exist. This preoccupation with disclosure could perhaps be linked to the Catholic sensibilities of the Maltese, which is preoccupied with the discernment of God’s action within those of his followers (Tonna 1994). It is certainly linked to a view of society and government which assumes that there are no arbitrary acts, coincidences or chance occurrences; but rather an integrated ‘systemless system’ (Mitchell 2002c) in which reciprocal social networks of ‘friends of friends’ and ‘patrons and clients’ (Boissevain 1974) govern all possible outcomes of human activity.

The Maltese are brought up with a variety of proverbs and adages, which offer a moral compass and means of both understanding and ‘getting on’ within this systemless system:

Bla qaddisin ma titlax il-Genna – lit. ‘without saints you will never enter

heaven'; used metaphorically to describe the need for well-placed 'friends'/patrons in order to achieve one's aims in life.

Min ma johrogx mill-bieb johrog mit-tieqa – lit. 'he who cannot leave by the door will leave by the window'; used to describe the resourcefulness of crafty people who will somehow get what they want.

Ghall kull ghadma mitt kelb – lit. 'for every bone there are 100 dogs'; used to describe the inherent competition for resources in life, and the need for both craftiness and good connections.

With this inherent competition for limited resources, it is important to discern the contours of the system, establishing links through personal networks of reciprocity. These can also be supplemented by gambling – which is itself a process of discernment. The daily, weekly, monthly cycle of licit state and illicit lottery competitions provides a constant focus for everyday practices of discernment – reading the patterns of numbers as they emerge, to look for clues as to future outcomes. Similarly, gambling on football provides a context for rethinking results as the outcome of behind-the-scenes machinations rather than on-pitch sporting endeavour. Crowds at big matches are as concerned with identifying which players or officials have been 'bought' as with the quality of football played (cf. Baldacchino 1991, 1993). The more prominent chants at the football ground include references to perceived corruption. When a player fails to make a particular play – misses a tackle, misses a goal or a save – the calls come: *Maffja* ('Mafia') or *Hallelin* ('thieves') or *Bil-guh* ('hungry', therefore easily 'bought'). These phrases connote a willingness to put personal financial gain over and above the performance of the team. The actual extent of corruption in Maltese football is impossible to know. Our question on this topic produced the following responses:

No one accepts a defeat in Malta. It's always either because the ref was corrupt or the players were....

(Maltese coach)

It's not down to betting syndicates. The problem is club committee men – they approach a rival player to lose a match; they play, do their job and get a bonus for losing!

(Club committee man)

How can they say the referees are impartial when in Malta everyone's related to everyone else! ... I used to play and one of the linesmen was the best man at my wedding.

(Player, 1990s)

Official impartiality?

The referee in Malta is an inevitable target for crowd abuse from perpetrators safe in the knowledge that he is not in a position to retaliate. The choice of referee for any particular game is a result of assessment by the match inspector. Former referees attend games in all three divisions and award marks to all three officials. Another issue, which may sway an appointment, is regularity in attending training and instruction meetings.

In an attempt to avoid accusations of bias, the Malta Referees Association have since 1987 implemented checks on the officials' background for connections to any club or current players. In the face of threats, intimidation and the subsequent fears of match officials, since 1993 referees are sometimes not told which game they are to officiate or who the linesmen will be until they arrive at the ground shortly before the match. The majority of referees receive notification by letter that they are to officiate only two days beforehand. The letters are accompanied by a reply slip, to be returned to the Officer of Appointments, indicating acceptance of the appointment. A refusal to accept may well lead to a summons to appear in front of the MFA Referees Board, and to merit a reprimand or a fine ranging between Lm25 and Lm50. In reality the gossip culture of football means that very often teams do know who will officiate, and information is often leaked by people close to the selection panel. Accusations of bias remain rife, and some club officials will attempt to have certain individuals removed from the referees' list because of perceived injustices.

The lack of evidence and matters in lawcourts will not lessen the belief among fans, journalists, coaches and club presidents that football matches in Malta are bought not won. There are few cases in which a footballer has been prosecuted for match-rigging; it is nevertheless assumed that it has occurred for decades. The famous Ruggieru Friggieri, considered to be the greatest-ever Maltese player, was in the 1920s accused of corruption and went to court, but the charges were never proven. In the 1950s, Effie Borg of Hamrun Spartans was convicted by the Maltese courts of corruption and sent to prison. The same thing happened to Lino Farrugia of Floriana during the same period and who was also gaoled. The latter was a fullback of international standard, reported to the MFA by his own club and taken to court. Over the past 30 years, few players have ever been suspended on charges of corruption. In 1993, one was banished from the game for life and a colleague gaoled for two months.

An incident of attempted corruption in 2004 relied upon technological innovation. When a player of Qormi FC then in the First Division attempted to offer financial inducements to a rival player to lose a game the conversation was (unknown to the Qormi player) recorded on a mobile phone. A transcript of the conversation was presented to the MFA which imposed a ban on the player and relegated Qormi a division. This was a most unusual act by the MFA, but the evidence was uniquely compelling.

Historically, gambling on domestic football in a society with no betting shops relied on two procedures. A crucial one was bookies operating out of cafés, who would receive wagers for bets on local games. The criteria for these transactions was a knowledge of the locations and an assurance that winnings would be paid. For this reason the bookies were usually renowned tough guys, usually drawn from Valletta or Hamrun. Alternatively, those interested could place their bets in the Gzira Stadium with its infamous ‘corner’ of the terraces, where bookmakers would shout bets and punters would wager. It was widely believed that local football players were in on the act and paid accordingly by the betting syndicates. Players’ ways of walking on to the pitch were considered to be unspoken messages sent from player to bookie, indicating what the dressing-room was thinking or had agreed.

The move to Ta’Qali killed the Gzira Stadium betting corner; but with increased TV broadcasting, betting on European games, and particularly those from the Italian Leagues, emerged. Although these games are clearly not controlled by the local Maltese betting syndicates, it is nevertheless assumed that they are controlled by somebody, and speculation about who is in control, and which players have been bought or bribed, is just as rife.

From one to all

The prime candidates for the control of football corruption are the club presidents. All seem ultimately to attribute the flow of illicit money to them. Individually, the presidents, of course, deny their involvement in match-rigging, but all believe that their opposing presidents are guilty. In their widespread belief in the corruptibility of their fellow citizens and all those involved in the game, such men appear caught between establishing their reputation as ‘clean’, and ensuring that their clubs have all possible opportunity for success. As in politics, there is a tacit assumption that successful presidents will use all possible options open to them to bring success to their team – to shy away from this is dereliction of their duty.

As club presidents pay the wages of their players, there is widespread belief that they control all areas of their club’s activities – including the more technical aspects of tactics and team selection. This creates a deferential attitude towards club presidents by coaches and players alike that is typical of the ‘lopsided friendship’ (Pitt-Rivers 1954) that is patronage. Some players go further by seeking out the president as an unofficial mentor, or institutionalising the relationship by inviting the club president to act as witness to their wedding or godfather to their children. These latter honours establish a long-term obligation in the president to provide guidance and assistance; to advance the player’s personal cause, be it in seeking regular appearances, preferred positions, improved contracts, or lobbying for national team inclusion. This does not always lead to selection based on the principles of neutrality and sports science, but places considerable responsibilities on club presidents and national selectors.

Historically, the men involved in political activism or seeking parliamentary positions often became presidents of football clubs. However, since the 1980s, political life has become more time-consuming than in previous decades. As a consequence, football club presidents in the past 20 years are more likely to be wealthy businessmen. Presidents give a substantial amount of money to their respective club, often in the form of loans. This is mostly 'unnoticed' by the fans but becomes very apparent when, for example, ex-president of Floriana FC Mr Grech Sant argued with his committee in 2000 and left the club, seeking a reimbursement of his investment. Grech Sant demanded and won the tens of thousands of Maltese Liri he loaned.

The Presidents' financial success is at one level reflected in their football clubs – Maltese football at the top level has become a rich man's hobby. The committee members of the top ten Maltese clubs are usually elected on the strength of the money, time and the connections they have or are considered to have. If they cannot deliver on these promises, they will soon be replaced with others who offer the prospect of better assets. The smaller clubs, especially those in the lower divisions, have a less corporate atmosphere. Several people sit on committees with nothing to give bar their goodwill, and may attend meetings sporadically in order to obtain first-hand news, gossip and generally feel important or at least wanted.

Gambling practices caused consternation over 80 years ago. The MFA, assisted by the Empire Stadium owners, was the first sports organisation in Malta to take preventive steps against betting in sport. In the early 1930s, the Empire Stadium management specified that 'admission tickets' were purchased on the understanding that the holder was prohibited from betting during a match. This condition was approved at an October 1934 MFA Council meeting. The prohibition had no effect. Corners of the stadium were renowned for hosting the betting fraternity until the day the ground closed down in 1983.

Other football-related gambling opportunities were available from foreign football leagues. The Paramount Pools operated by Douglas & Company Ltd of Valletta were introduced in Malta in December 1935. The winning bets were those whose total approached the highest possible points awarded for forecasting the winners in the English League programme. In February 1936, a Maltese court deliberated over an issue instituted by the police against the Pools Company General Manager over whether playing the Pools was a matter of chance or skill. The court decided it was skill and discharged the defendants.

Before the 1936/1937 football season, the *Malta Chronicle* sounded a warning: betting promotes corruption in sport. The following season the MFA believed that betting was as evident as ever in local soccer, and that steps needed to be taken to counteract its baleful influence. Concrete proof of the suspicion of corruption in the game linked to gambling was provided by a report from the MFA Disciplinary Committee over a case of attempted bribery of the Sliema Wanderers' players.

Press reports of the era illustrate that all sections of the sporting public were aware of the dangers of unlicensed betting on local football, and the concomitant accusations of bribery and corruption. The MFA even asked the Commissioner of Police to take steps to address the accusations and rumours. The Commissioner, however, was legally advised against taking such a step. Consequently, in 1938/1939, the Governor-in-Council made the following Order under Article 339 (No. 39) of the Criminal Law:

Betting on the result of or in connection with any football match, is prohibited in any of the football places: in or about the Empire Stadium, Mile-End Ground and the Floriana Parade Ground.

(Government Gazette, 23 December 1937)

Still, betting at and on football continued. Since the 1950s – unofficially and, indeed, illegally – punters would bet on English football using the English Pools coupons. The procedure relied on Services personnel, who circulated the coupons both within and beyond the barracks. Those who won tended to keep their winnings quiet because the government could confiscate the proceeds. Thus, Malta had a widespread culture of gambling and even the state-owned lottery was subverted for decades by an underground system offering more attractive odds.

In September 2003, the government introduced the Lotteries and Other Games Act to make provision for gaming operations in Malta. This also saw the setting up of a Lotteries and Gaming Authority (LGA). The six schedules the LGA concerned itself with were: Non-profit games, Commercial tombola games (Bingo halls), Commercial communication games, Broadcasting media games, VLT games and Racecourse bets and sweepstakes. In 2005 betting on football matches was finally legalised in Malta, with the licence given to U-Bet, introduced under the control of MALTACO Lotteries Ltd, licensed by the LGA to operate National Lottery games in Malta. This online gambling was considered to be the death of the so-called ‘Carta’ system (paper system) of local gambling on European games.

The rise of the big-men

The Europeanisation of Maltese football gambling represents one aspect of the Maltese ‘domestication’ of the foreign. By expanding the discernment project from domestic to European football, characteristics regarded in the first ‘phase’ of the move as inherently Maltese – corruption, clientelism, patronage – become generalised, as features of football, and indeed society, more generally. Through this rhetorical move, the Maltese have become the architects of European football, rather than vice versa. What is more, the attempts of foreign ‘reformers’ to change the game come to be seen not as neutral and well-meaning efforts to help Maltese football, but themselves strategic – part of an attempt by these visitors to further their own position – and

naive – because they are based on principles that no footballing culture can sustain.

The preoccupation with the foreign dates back to the 1920s and 1930s, and entrepreneurial Maltese such as Meme Scicluna, and Joe Gasan. Described today by many as the ‘Onassis of Malta’, Gasan made his fortune by importing buses and cars. He was a fanatical football fan, and while not ever officially a club president, was recognised as the unofficial patron of Sliema. Gasan was a port worker who won a tender from the British government to remove a shipwreck from the Grand Harbour. Getting the vessel floated, Gasan turned it into a passenger ship, moving people and goods between Malta and Sicily. By 1923 he had three ships and a contract from the British government to carry mail and people. Gasan was crucial in pioneering sea-based tourism to Malta. He expanded his routes to Tunis and Alexandria, and then turned his hand to domestic travel and began the first ever public transport system. Gasan’s bus service ran from the early 1920s, with buses built by local mechanics on imported chasses. The owner-drivers decorated their vehicles with names and interior dedications usually to saints, loved ones and football teams. He was then to run a ferry service between Valletta and Sliema in Marsamxett Harbour. Gasan then branched out, offering tourism and organised pilgrimages to the Holy Land and other Catholic shrines in Europe. Meeting Henry Ford in 1928, he became the local distributor of Ford vehicles for the Ford motor company of the USA. He negotiated favourable payment terms and took over the British Motor Company concessions to run a transport system which at one time consisted of 300 vehicles. He became fabulously wealthy as a consequence. In later years, he opened a garage buying and selling cars which became the British Armed Forces repair centre for boats, planes and armoured vehicles. As if this empire was not enough, Gasan then won the contract in 1945 to run the Gozo–Malta ferry, and later moved into property development. On his death in 1976, Gasan’s son took over the business and today the car business remains but is supported by investments in shopping malls, an insurance agency and broadcasting.

Gasan changed the system of finance in football in Malta for ever. Previous to him, players at the top club level in Malta would demand a payment before each game. If the club directors could not pay the player he would be conveniently ‘injured’ until money was found. The recovery often took place the day before or even one hour before the game kicked off. Gasan, the Anglophile, combined the English system of buying and selling players with the Italian system of allowing the player to negotiate a deal dependent on his worth and ability. This avoided the maximum wage structure of the English League, which Gasan realised would only lead to under-the-table payments. Gasan’s system of payment according to ability remains to this day. While technically there were (and are) limits to payments to players imposed by the MFA, these were (and are) conveniently ignored.

Gasan’s system was brilliantly effective, Sliema won everything available locally at the time. However, he was also fortunate in that he was a powerful

and rich figure in the 1930s, an era which saw very good foreign players arriving in Malta from Central Europe as refugees from Hitler. In 1936 Sliema played in Yugoslavia and Austria, a tour organised and paid for by Gasan. In the course of these exhibition games Gasan made contact with impressive local players and invited them to Malta. One player he brought over was the Austrian, Hans Kaborek, whose brother was a star of the Austrian *Wunder* team. Contacted by Sliema, Kaborek's brother Matthias was expected to arrive by boat to Marsa Harbour but, to the surprise of the waiting Sliema enthusiasts, Hans arrived, and not the star brother. Undeterred, Sliema kept him, and Hans proved a useful player over the next three seasons.

For the best part of 60 years (1910–1970) the influential patrons of Maltese football clubs were men who had the respect via what was seen as culturally significant. Their political stage was primarily local rather than national, and they contributed to their clubs through established reputation and respectability, and hard determined work. All would have a degree of wealth, would be respected locally, and would usually be private school educated, and in their chosen career would be considered articulate and literate. In this, football was not different from *festa*, which was and remains vitally important in village politics, where public display is a crucial feature of everyday life. The top people of each village, that is, the educated professionals, would be asked to preside over the *festa* committee – and no doubt contribute some of their considerable wealth to the event. To be appointed to such positions was both a privilege and prestigious, which could suit political ambition. Thus we have examples of both the local educated in the character of Emmanuel Tonna, headmaster of a local primary school and influential in the Floriana School Old Boys Association. A few miles away in Hamrum in the late 1940s the President was a local cobbler, who was not too proud to tour the town collecting money to finance the football team that won the Cassar Cup in 1948. In the late 1950 and early 1960s the Hibernians' President was Captain Serafin-Xureb, an industrialist who was also to build the Schriber football ground. Some individuals combined the honorific roles offered locally. Paolo Boffa, a one-time Prime Minister of Malta, was Vice-President of Hibernians and President of the Poala Band Club. Perhaps the most famous band club member of all was Dom Mintoff, who entered Parliament by virtue of his election as Secretary of Cospicua Band Club. By the 1970s, the links between football patronage and political office were firmly established, such that football club presidents were by then often involved in politics. At Floriana, Benny Camilleri, a former player of Floriana Ajax, held a career as a lawyer and, while President of Floriana, was elected as a Labour MP in the early 1960s. Similarly Joe Brincat, President of Marsa FC, also became a Labour MP. At Sliema George Borg-Olivier (later the President of Malta) regularly attended the national stadium which, while reflecting his love of the game, was also politically astute. While such men might be considered politically pragmatic, they were essentially amateur in their footballing philosophy. The monies they contributed to the clubs were small by recent standards.

The consequence of this switch meant that, from the 1970s onward, rather than political success being an opportunistic and perhaps unexpected outcome of football club presidency, potential politicians began increasingly to seek out office in football clubs as a deliberate springboard into politics. Likewise, a new breed of wealthy patrons emerged who had grand ideas for their teams, and were prepared to plough hundreds of thousands of Maltese liri into seeking footballing glory for their towns and villages. Their wealth derived from the new-found wealth of the post-colony; from oil production, construction, tourism and supermarket retailing.

Gentlemen amateurs

One club with a proud history and Gentleman Amateur ethos was instrumental in seeking the fusion of a variety of global processes. Melita FC were a manifestation of the Corinthian spirit of the Victorian era of Britain. Their players were generally educated and socially aspiring, but were willing to learn. The learning curve was imported in part by a refugee of Mitteleurope. The footballer's abilities this individual encouraged went towards the greater glory of the Maltese nation as the players moved to other Maltese clubs and assisted the national team set-up.

Situated in the seaside resort of St Julians (a one-time fishing village), Melita FC grew out of a locale that expanded as an agreeable seaside resort for both the British military and colonial civilian personnel. St Julians was popular as a summer abode and, by the year 2000, had a population of close to 10,000. Melita FC played under the slogan, '*For the love of the game*' and '*The game first and foremost*'. It began as an amateur entity and remained resolutely that way. Currently in the lower divisions of the Maltese League, Melita FC is considered a hobby by both its players and supporters. It is, for many, a means of socialising that attracts a mainly middle-class audience, and many a university-educated player. Its nursery system provides most of its first team.

Melita began in 1933, a time when football loyalties on the island were divided between Floriana and Sliema; and between England and Italy. The team founder was Gianni Bencini, who co-founded La Camera del Lavoro, which in 1920 changed its name to the Malta Labour Party. Popularly known as *Is-Sur Gan*, Bencini was asked by one of his ten children if the basement of the family home in Sliema could be used to host a football club. Three teenage sons convinced their father to become their club's first president and, believing that a sense of organisation was crucial to the life of teenagers, Bencini agreed. All members had to donate a penny a week and, under Bencini's guidance, Melita proved to be a well-run and respected football entity. Affiliation to the MFA was granted in 1933 and, in their first year of existence, Melita won the Fourth Division Championship, and were again promoted the following season.

In 1936 Melita found themselves in the Second Division and, seeking to enter the elite of local football, Bencini appointed Leo Drucker, an Austrian

Jew living in Malta in exile from the Nazis, as club coach. Having already coached in Malta with St Georges and Floriana, Drucker's wage of £12 a month was a substantial payment for the era. The appointment paid dividends and, in Drucker's first season, he managed to prevent relegation. A season later Melita were promoted to the First Division and, in 1939, won the FA trophy against the best professional team on the island – Sliema Wanderers.

The Second World War saw the population of St Julians drop from 2,500 to 800. The three fortresses in the area made the population fearful of bombs. The village, indeed, suffered massive damage from bomb blasts. The population did not return until the beginning of 1943. Meantime, Drucker was interned and deported by the British authorities; no Maltese ever knew his eventual whereabouts. Four of the Melita players died in armed combat or as a consequence of sickness epidemics arising out of the 1942 Great Siege. The post-war years also saw the arrival of teams able to challenge the dominance of Floriana and Sliema. In 1948 Melita were relegated to the Second Division, and Bencini ended his position as President in 1950 upon becoming a member of the MFA Council. Promotion to the First Division in 1962 ended two seasons later when the amateur club saw their best players offered wages elsewhere. Two years after Bencini's death in 1981, Melita attained First Division status. They were not to win anything for the next 25 years. Their significance to Maltese football lies in their role in locating talent and offering a form of footballing refuge to migrant/refugees. While Corinthian in spirit and bourgeois in membership, the club had a commendable history of middle-class socialist and humanitarian spirit.

Foreign tactics

Since the first international match played by Malta in February 1957 up until May 1984, all the national team coaches, bar two, were Maltese. The two foreign coaches appointed in this period, however, were not brought over to Malta specifically by the Association to take up the job. Both were on pre-existing coaching assignments in Malta, and were seconded to the national set-up. Thus, Janos Bedl was already with Sliema Wanderers and Terenzio Polverini with Gzira United. In both instances the clubs gave their coach permission to help the national team. Bedl gave his services for a double encounter against Libya. Polverini, meanwhile, managed both Gzira United and the national team concurrently. Having coached Italian Serie B side Reggina, he was brought over by the Gzira President Jo-Jo Mifsud-Bonnici, who loved Italian football. Polverini's greatest achievement of his nine-game reign was a 2–0 defeat over Greece in a European Qualifier. Polverini remained resident in Malta and later coached Valletta and Naxxar. While Malta played 77 matches between 1957 and 1983 (an average of 2.85 matches yearly), the number of matches played from 1984 to 2002 totalled 153 (an increased average of 8.5 matches yearly).

Traditionally, Maltese clubs considered a trainer's primary task as one of

keeping players physically fit. The more technical aspect of their knowledge and indeed the game was not considered significant by club committees. However, as strategy and tactics became more evident with the amendment of the offside rule in 1926 and the beginnings of the Christmas Tourneys, the role of the coach was enhanced. Arising out of a desire to better that available at the time, one local-born football coach Joe Griffiths – encouraged by members of the MFA – wrote to the Football Association of England in 1947, and requested they send a qualified coach to conduct a course in Malta. The FA sent George Duke, who conducted an eight-week coaching course at the end of which six Maltese qualified (one of whom was Griffiths).

The top Maltese clubs in the post-war era became more ‘coach’ minded. After Englishman George Shaw’s engagement by Floriana, Sliema Wanderers went one better when they employed the former Tottenham Hotspurs’ inside-left, Jimmy McCormich, as a player-coach. He was followed by the ex-Sunderland fullback Alec Hall. Valletta – then a power in the local game – soon had their own foreign coach when they also flew out a British coach to take charge. Griffiths, meanwhile, coached Rabat, spent his leisure time watching the English coaches in Malta in action and read articles on technique and tactics in the weekly Italian magazine *Il Calcio Illustrato*. A series of articles by Ettore Berra on *La palla che corre e oro fino* greatly impressed Griffiths. This led him to develop game analysis. He would study foreign teams’ techniques during their training sessions. The Yugoslav side, Red Star Belgrade, then regarded as one of the finest teams in Europe, visited Malta and manifested a hitherto unknown style, utilising short, fast passes intermingled with diagonal wing play.

The twice-weekly meetings of the national squad implemented by Griffiths had an effect. Soon the players were gathering on a friendly basis, and understanding on the field of play gained momentum. The first game with Griffiths in charge featured the Kinizsi club of Hungary against the MFA XI in the annual Tourney. However, traditional problems of Maltese football emerged; only hours before the match, Griffiths was summoned to meet the Selection Board. An influential MFA Council member had become the sole selector overnight, and insisted, without any serious opposition from his colleagues, that two Maltese players played in the match; neither had been called up for national squad training. The sole concession made to his pleadings was that, if nothing else, these two players should play half the match. Griffiths had to exert personal influence to restore dressing-room morale. Malta led by 2–1 with five minutes remaining before the class of their opponents saw them score an equaliser. The organisers, heartened by the interest this match had aroused, decided that the final match of this Tourney (in which the Yugoslav side, Beogradski, had also taken part) would be a return match between Kinizsi and the MFA XI. This time there were no interferences from the Selection Committee. Griffiths could thus include Valletta’s clever inside-right, Rapinett. The latter gave more balance in this sector, but the match ended 0–0.

The performances against Kinizsi and Beogradski established a new kind of thinking; the MFA Council was urged by Griffiths to establish a plan for future full internationals. The displays of the representative side illustrated that there were Maltese players of class. A Malta XI played several other teams over the next couple of years, and earned a very good reputation. Eventually, in 1957, Malta faced the full Austrian team then basking in the glory of the *Wunder* team. This first-ever international was momentous. Great Austrian players such as Wagner, Haumer and the Koslicek brothers were in the visiting squad that had played their previous game against the Italians. The Maltese players, with their clubs' consent, trained and played together for 15 days, winding up the programme with a match against a strong RAF Command XI; Malta won 13–0. The Austrians quickly caught the imagination of the public. Crowds even began to attend Malta training sessions. The game saw the visitors run out as 3–2 victors but the match was an auspicious start to a small nation and a great boost to the pro-independence euphoria.

A decade after Griffiths qualified as a coach, the MFA, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, organised the first coaching course for schoolteachers under the tuition of Griffiths. Thirteen teachers qualified, many of whom went on to coach senior teams. Some also coached in the national team set-up. Griffiths then founded the Malta Football Association in 1959 with himself as its first President. In 1965 the MFA coordinated a FIFA coaching course at which Sir Stanley Rous, President of FIFA, attended. This initiative continued in the following decades, and coaching luminaries, such as the Englishmen Harold Hassal, John Jarman, Ronnie Fenton, Alan Wade, Roy Small, Andy Roxbergh of Scotland, Thomas Venglos of Czechoslovakia among many others, attended Malta and gave coaching instructions. This distinguished line-up proved that there was never a shortage of capable football coaches willing to visit Malta and instruct.

Griffiths believed that the best way to spread the game's gospel was to start with youth. The Committee of the Floriana Football Club offered him the job of coaching their youngsters. Griffiths coached several clubs in Malta and became the first coach to be employed by the Malta FA. With others, he helped to form the Malta Football Coaches Association, of which he was honorary president. He served on the Technical Board and, on several occasions, as Technical Director of the national team. For his services to the local games, Griffiths was awarded the Malta FA's gold medal for 'Merit'.

The turn to communism

The ultimate footballing shame for Malta occurred in December 1983 when Spain played Malta in a European Championship Qualifier in Seville. To displace the Netherlands from their position at the top of the group, and thereby qualify for the finals, the Spanish needed to beat the Maltese by an 11-goal difference. Leading 3–1 at half-time, Spain scored nine more goals without reply in the second half and thereby qualified at the expense of the Dutch. Only four

days previously, the Netherlands had beaten Malta 5–0 in Aachen, thereby making an 11–0 aggregate over two legs. Technically, Malta were playing this match at home but, in fact, were disqualified from playing due to crowd trouble in Malta two years earlier. The result in Seville (despite providing for Malta's only away goal in the qualifying tournament) not surprisingly scandalised the Dutch. Inevitably accusations of corruption were hurled at the Maltese.¹ The 12–1 defeat to the Spanish followed a previous 4–0 loss to Libya in October 1983, an 8–0 defeat to Ireland in Dublin and the 5–0 defeat to Holland meant the departure of the Maltese-born manager, Victor Scerri.

Many factors contributed to Malta's humiliation at the hands of the Spanish. The Maltese players' skills, technical qualities and physical stamina were nowhere near those of their Spanish opponents. The Maltese players claimed tiredness. Their manager privately opined his belief that his team's half-time drinks were 'spiked' by some soporific substance. The Maltese public believed the causes lay in their countrymen's willingness to roll over and be defeated – for a price. No evidence of corruption was ever proven and the players concerned never broke ranks to reveal any story. Indeed, the goalkeeper and two out-field players were later to become part of the national team coaching staff.

The game brought humiliation to Malta and action: the nation could not let itself be so humiliated and ridiculed in the eyes of the (footballing) world. A year later, interviewed on the popular TV programme *Sibtijiet Fliemkien*, transmitted on 22 December 1984, the then-MFA President Dr George Abela stated:

Everybody has begun to understand that a national team is not the team of the Malta Football Association. Neither is it your team, nor is it my team, but it is the team of every Maltese.

In the face of ridicule from football worldwide the Maltese footballing authorities had to act and be seen to act. Expulsion from UEFA was rumoured and the post-colonial milieu of what Malta stands for was discussed in the streets. The outcome was a new beginning for football arising out of a new friendship with the Eastern Bloc.

As mentioned above, in 1983 Malta lost three European Championship qualifiers: to Ireland 8–0, Holland 5–0 and Spain 12–1 in little over a month. All three games were away from home. After the first match the squad went to a training camp, before moving to Holland for the second match and then to the south of France before the final game in Seville. According to Father Hilary – an Augustinian priest and philanthropist who was heavily involved in the professionalising of Maltese football – the Maltese players were not physically prepared for this enduring month of football. Neither were players prepared to be away from their families for so long. The players could not in his opinion cope physically or mentally. In the end, they *'threw the towel in, that is the Maltese character. We are allergic to sports, allergic to the demands of top class football.'* The accusations surrounding the event led to a three-man committee of enquiry. In

the subsequent enquiry the MFA President questioned whether Malta should continue to participate in international football competitions. A huge debate raged, both in the offices of the MFA and in the letters pages of the local press. The outcome was that Malta would continue to participate as a national team, but had to address the issue of professionalism (see Chapter 5). Two months after Seville, the Council of the MFA decided that continued participation at a national level was crucial, because withdrawal would mean isolation from the football world.

The very nature of the MFA changed due to the Commission. George Abela was appointed MFA President, replacing JoJo Mifsud-Bonnici as the Association's top official. It was acknowledged that Mifsud-Bonnici was to some extent responsible for the Spanish debacle, as it was he who had agreed to a double away fixture that saw Malta play two games in 12 days in different countries. The logic had been to save money for the MFA. Abela introduced a new team of administrators, generally younger than their predecessors and with fresher ideas about the game. Foreign expertise was sought as Malta opened its footballing doors to new global influences.

That Malta looked towards the Eastern Bloc for advice on professionalism in football was a product of Abela's political orientation and links to the MLP – of which he became Deputy Leader in 1992. Abela asked the (Labour) President of Malta Agatha Barbara to be allowed to visit Bulgaria to make a case to the President Ziscou to obtain coaching and technical aid. The move coincided with the MLP government's broader move towards establishing political and economic links with the Eastern Bloc, reforming the local polity and economy as one of state socialism. The outcome was that Malta were granted six players and a coach. None cost more than US\$600 a month in wages. Some proved very good acquisitions for clubs, notably George Dinov at Zurrieq and Todor Sokolov at Hibernians. Also arriving was Guentcho Dobrev, as the first full-time coach of the national team who was instrumental in establishing the Professional Scheme. Inculcating in the Maltese the necessity of possession, football in the Malta national team improved no end with a sound defence and a strong mid-field. Entertaining when playing at home, the side was never humiliated in away fixtures. Two poor results against Holland and Sweden might be expected but a narrow 3–2 defeat in Portugal and a 1–1 draw with Hungary were considered notable. In this era, Carmel Busuttil, with nine goals, was the top joint scorer of the European Championship qualifiers of 1988.

Formerly the head coach of the Under-18s Bulgarian team, Deputy coach of the Bulgarian Olympic team and a former player with Levski Sofia, Dobrev was a graduate of sports science, and had once occupied the position of Director of Sport in a school in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. He was brought to Malta in 1983 to coach the Under-18s and as 'supervisor' of the National Squad under Victor Scerri. However, in March 1984, six months after arriving in Malta, Dobrev was appointed national team coach – the first foreigner specifically imported to manage the national team.

For Malta facing a UEFA enquiry into the Spain match, his appointment was part of addressing what could have been expulsion from future UEFA. The appointment of this well-connected and qualified professional foreigner was meant to signify to onlookers that the MFA was serious in making the domestic game more professional. Versed in an ideology that used sport to promote communism, Malta provided Dobrev with an opportunity at national-level football denied to him in Bulgaria by virtue of his refusal to declare himself a supporter of communism. Dobrev arrived from a nation that provided sports facilities free of charge to the populace, and which sponsored hundreds of athletes in pursuit of athletic (and implicitly state) glory. In Malta he was to find a team containing players so unfit as to be unable finish the 90 minutes of competitive football. This situation was manifest most evidently in the number of goals conceded by the Malta side in the second half of many matches. The majority of players Dobrev inherited he dropped, seeking out replacements. He also introduced a regime of regular fitness tests. Crucially, Dobrev selected players without regard for political or familial networks, and so sought to dispel the rumours that pervaded Malta at the time, suggesting that team selection was not just on footballing merit.

Inheriting a squad that trained on gravel with old footballs, Dobrev negotiated with the relevant people to enable his squad to play on the turf of the Marsa Sports Club. Dobrev's arrival coincided with changes in the sports infrastructure in Malta. The newly built Ta Qali Stadium meant that the Maltese could finally train daily on turf. He then had to deal with the problem of player absenteeism; those he selected could not all afford time off work. In conjunction with the MFA, Dobrev was to inaugurate the Professional Scheme. Alongside this innovation, Dobrev introduced bonus payments to national team players. The hitherto flat wage now came with incentives to obtain points, and was a challenge to the collective Maltese fatalist adage of *ahna zghir wisq* (we're too small) to achieve footballing success. Dobrev had to challenge what he saw as a neo-colonial inferiority complex both mentally and physically and, considering the long ball game unsuitable for the physiques of the Maltese, set about improving technique and passing, and sought a game based on possession – of containment and counter-attack. His arrival initially provided a steady improvement in national team performances. A narrow 3–2 home defeat to Germany in December 1984 was followed by a 0–0 draw with Czechoslovakia, and then a 2–2 away draw against Portugal, which was followed soon after by a 1–1 draw against Switzerland. A 5–0 loss to Italy reminded the Maltese of times past, but the rise in match attendances – assisted by the presence of brass bands at the match to enliven the atmosphere – meant that, for many, watching the national team was now a more fun occasion than in the recent past. Further training camps in Italy and Bulgaria produced a victory over Jordan, a narrow 2–1 defeat against Sweden, a 0–0 against Czechoslovakia, and a narrow 3–2 defeat in Lisbon against Portugal. The Malta squad were to take training camps in Bulgaria. This was a level of preparation and professionalism hitherto unknown in the Maltese game.

The Malta FA Sports Complex adjacent to the National Stadium was inaugurated in 1986. Fr Hilary was Technical Director of the Complex and the National Team from 1986 to 1996. The Complex included the MFA Technical Centre, which comprises a fully equipped gym, physiotherapy clinic, conference hall, coffee shop and restaurant, 12 twin-sleeping rooms for players, as well as other amenities. The complex also includes extensive training grounds. Young players attending the MFA football school and local club nurseries also use the facilities. In winter, foreign teams mainly from Northern Europe hold training camps in Malta.

The arrival of Dobrev saw a number of fellow Bulgarian coaches arrive in later years to manage clubs. A few Bulgarian players also finished their days with Maltese clubs. The most prominent coach was Krassimir Manolov, who coached Valetta in their dominance of the late 1990s and the early millennium. Another was Atanas Marinov, a former player of the Olympic team, who Dobrev once coached, who coached Birkirkara and Marsaxlokk. Two other coaches were Borislav Giorev, who began coaching in Malta in 1993 following a playing career with Valetta and Floriana. The fashion for Bulgarian coaches and, indeed, players dwindled alongside Malta's relations with Bulgaria at a political level. That said, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Bulgaria has been the one place that Maltese players have managed to make a living. The first was the former Valetta player Stefan Giglio, who spent three seasons with CSKA Sofia. Nigerian-born but Malta-nationalised Chucks Nwoko was to follow. The latter's six-month trial at CSKA Sofia was not successful. Soon after him Justin Haber moved from Floriana to SK Dobrudzha.

After 21 games in charge, in which he managed one victory and 16 losses, Dobrev was relieved of his job in December 1987, shortly after losing 1–0 to a last-minute goal by the Portuguese. In the two previous games Malta had drawn against Switzerland and Israel. The termination of his contract could not be said to be a consequence of footballing ability. Obligated to send 50 per cent of his national team coach income to the Bulgarian government as part of the deal that brought him to Malta, Dobrev had held out in negotiations with the MFA to obtain a more lucrative contract. Faced with this, the MFA ended Dobrev's contract by mutual consent. It was around this time that a large Swiss/German media company entered into a deal with the MFA for the television rights of the national team. This was an unprecedented move in the history of Maltese football. The search for a replacement provided inevitable intrigue.

The new professionalism? The global instructing the local

The low esteem in which the Maltese Football Authorities hold their native-born coaches suggests that their qualifications and credentials are doubted, and that foreign must equate with superior. Cold statistics might suggest otherwise. Between 1991 and 1993, the Maltese coach, Pippo Psaila, was in charge for 17

games, won five and lost eight, and was in charge of a team narrowly defeated 2–1 by Italy at Ta'Qali.

The search to replace Dobrev saw Abela make an offer to the then Manager of the Italian youth team. He turned it down. The immediate successor to Dobrev was the German national Horst Heese. Heese, as a former Hamburg and Eintracht Frankfurt player, was a respected coach at the latter club with experience in Cyprus. Perhaps more significantly he was a German national. Appointed because of a new-found fashionability towards all things German in MFA circles, Heese had club-level coaching experience and was well connected in German football circles. Heese was appointed at the suggestion of former German international Gunther Netzer, who had retired from the game to a position at Swiss/German media company CWL, which had secured a deal with the MFA for television advertising rights. It was assumed that a German coach in Malta could guarantee stronger links for Malta (and the broadcasting company) with other football associations in the UEFA and FIFA corridors of power. Heese brought vast experience and the friendship of Franz Beckenbauer and Rudi Voller, both of whom managed the German national team.

The initial 1988 reign of Heese produced three wins in 36 games. Heese got off to a winning start, defeating Finland and Tunisia in the Rothmans Tournament. He then obtained commendable draws against Scotland, Cyprus and Hungary. However, in late 1990 came three successive defeats: 4–0 to Greece, followed in the New Year by an 8–0 home defeat to Holland, and a 5–0 defeat against Portugal. These results were only partly responsible for Heese's departure. He also fell victim to a classic footballing power struggle between coach and administrators. Before a European championship fixture in Finland, three Maltese players had been arrested on allegations of shoplifting. Released by the police and questioned by the then MFA President George Abela, one of the three accepted the blame (in Abela's belief, on behalf of the other two). Abela told Heese to send the players home but in a crisis meeting agreed with him that they could remain in Finland with the squad, but not be selected either for this or future games. A week later, on return to Malta, Heese selected the players for the national squad, and when instructed by Abela to drop them, walked out of the stadium. An MFA commission suspended Heese for disobeying instructions and not taking training sessions.

Heese's CWL-funded contract had only a few months to run, and a three-man subcommittee of the MFA was convened, with a view to an early termination of the contract – saving the MFA around Lm1,000. With the threat of legal action in the air, Abela moved for a compromise, but the matter remained unresolved, and Heese filed a legal case for unfair dismissal. Years later, before the case had ever had a chance to go to court, Heese was reappointed by the MFA, this time to the position of Technical Director; effectively national team coach. The return of Horst Heese as Technical Director to the MFA in 2001 was seen as expedient. Malta's most honoured footballer, Carmel Busuttill, was also appointed coach of

Sigmund Held, who took over the position of national coach in July 2001 as Malta stood at 133 in FIFA's World Rankings – the lowest position since ranking began. Held, aged 59 when appointed, had some 422 Bundesliga appearances and had won the European Cup with Borussia Dortmund in 1984 and 41 international caps, and had played in the 1966 and 1970 World Cup Finals. His coaching expertise saw him in charge at club level at Schalke 04, Dinamo Dresden, Galatasaray, Admira Wacker and Gamba Osaka. At international level Held was for three years the coach of Iceland and later the Egyptian Olympic team.

Held departed his Lm30,000 p.a. position in September 2003 on the expiry of his contract shortly before the national team managed a 2–2 draw against Israel in a Euro 2004 qualifier. Not considered a strong enough personality for Malta, the players ignored his post-training instructions on stretching and 'warming-down'. In reply he went public in his belief that Maltese players had a 'vacation mentality' and while in the gym were more interested in looking at women (*Spiegel* online interview), and complained that while they missed training the MFA would not enforce fines for such insolence. On occasion only three national team players turned up as part of the Professional Scheme. In his era the MFA some Lm300,000 was being spent annually on the

Table 4.1 Coaches of the Malta National Team

	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Coach</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>A</i>
1	24/02/57	18/06/61	Joe Griffiths	Malta	6	2	2	2	7	7
2	05/11/61	08/03/64	Carm Borg	Malta	5	0	1	4	3	17
3	13/02/66	27/03/66	Janos Bedl ^a	Hungary	2	2	0	0	2	0
4	27/04/69	27/04/69	Joe Attard	Malta	1	0	0	1	1	3
5	04/01/70	04/01/70	Salvu Cuschieri	Malta	1	0	1	0	1	1
6	11/10/70	21/04/71	Carm Borg	Malta	4	0	1	3	2	9
7	12/05/71	25/11/72	Tony Formosa	Malta	9	0	1	8	1	27
8	28/09/73	11/11/73	Victor Scerri ^b	Malta						
9	24/08/74	10/03/76	Terenzio Polverini	Italy	9	1	2	6	4	23
10	31/10/76	14/07/78	John Calleja	Malta	11	2	1	8	4	31
11	25/10/78	21/12/83	Victor Scerri	Malta	27	4	3	20	16	92
12	23/05/84	20/12/87	Gentcho Dobrev	Bulgaria	21	1	4	16	16	54
13	07/02/88	16/05/91	Horst Heese	Germany	37	3	8	26	19	73
14	07/06/91	22/06/93	Pippo Psaila	Malta	18	5	4	9	14	31
15	05/07/93	12/11/95	Pietro Ghedin	Italy	24	4	5	15	16	39
16	07/02/96	11/02/96	Robert Gatt ^b	Malta	3	0	1	2	1	5
17	12/02/96	30/06/97	Milorad Kosanovic	Yugoslavia	15	0	2	13	7	44
18	15/07/97	06/06/01	Josef Ilic	Yugoslavia	36	5	4	27	22	74
19	15/08/01	05/09/03	Siegfried Held	Germany	21	4	5	12	20	44
20	01/10/03	Present	Dusan Fitzel	Slovakia	13	1	2	10	7	28

Notes

a Jointly with Tony Formosa.

b Acting as on 31.07.99.

Accurate up until June 2006.

national team set-up but the return in 27 months was one draw in eight qualifying games.

As Technical Director, Horst Heese wanted Maltese players to play in Europe and (alongside George Abela) was instrumental in Carmel Busuttill signing for the Belgian club Ghenk and for Michael Mifsud signing for Kaiserslautern. Despite being a *bon viveur*, Heese recognised that his problem, as Technical Director was compounded by 'living in a holiday country with a population who were forever living a holiday'. In December 2004, Malta was placed 134th in the FIFA World Rankings. Furthermore, the Professional Scheme had collapsed; companies were unwilling to sponsor players, and attendances at national games were paltry.

Qualified to teach?

The arrival of foreign coaches in Malta introduced the UEFA coaching qualifications to the island. Held at Ta'Qali since the mid-1980s, these courses were both tutored and examined by foreign coaches of many different nationalities. This undoubtedly aided the game when one realises there are no sports science qualifications available on Malta. The qualification programme in Malta consists of four awards. The Youth Development Diploma is a nine-day course with a 30-minute practical exam and a two-hour written exam. The Coach Club Licence (referred to as the 'C' licence) is a four-day course building on the diploma. The UEFA 'B' and 'A' licences each take 15 days, followed by a period of private study before a final assessment. The UEFA 'B' and 'A' are subsidised by UEFA who pay for foreign coaches to provide the training. The subsidy, aimed at improving the standard of coaching in smaller countries, means that coaches pay a fee of only Lm150 for the UEFA 'A' qualification, a fraction of the fee paid by an English-born coach.

Football coaches in Malta do their job mostly for the love of the game. In 2007, at Birkirkara FC for example, the youth team coaches receive on average Lm35 a month. It is not surprising that historically there were few qualified coaches. As a consequence, there are many unqualified coaches working in Malta, a problem that is most acute in the nurseries. One Premier side nursery's staff in 2004 (shown below) illustrates the dearth of qualified coaches. Four coaches hold the most basic coaching qualification, alongside a coach with no qualifications. Experience can count – as long as it is experience of good coaching practice. Notably the best (most qualified) coaches only seem to want to work with older or first teams; some nurseries exist where even the head coaches have no coaching qualifications.

Under 6s	No qualification
Under 7s	Youth Development Diploma
Under 8s	Youth Development Diploma
Under 9s	C licence
Under 10s	C licence

Under 11s	A licence
Under 12s	Youth Development Diploma
Under 13s	Youth Development Diploma
Under 14s	C licence
Under 15s	A licence
Under 16s	A licence
Under 17s	A licence

The UEFA badges provide coaching techniques that could not be used with the younger age groups (complex skills occurring in small-sided games and in phases of play). But it is in the younger age groups that skills are best learned and good habits instilled.²

Crisis of confidence

The results of the national team have severely affected the players' confidence for two decades. One national team regular stated in 2004 that 'we don't really believe we can do it. Some of the games we're going there just to play.' Perhaps there are parallels here with Seligman's idea of 'learned helplessness' (1972), wherein the acceptance of a defeat is essentially a manifestation of players succumbing to what they perceive they cannot control; though it also constitutes a performance of the inherent weaknesses narrated as fundamental to the Maltese character. Horst Heese was more prosaic in 2004, when he claimed to us that the Maltese players 'know they play in a shit league so they don't believe in themselves'.

In recent times, the Malta Under-21 side has produced some creditable performances under English-born coach Mark Miller. A 1–0 away defeat to Croatia in 2005 was bettered by a 0–0 home draw with Norway and a 3–0 home defeat of the Italian Under-20 team. The year before a 0–0 away draw in Portugal was considered a major achievement. However, a culture of player laziness was mentioned by many of our interviewees. An exasperated Heese gave the analogy, 'if you ask a Maltese to run 100 m, he tries to find a way to run only 99 m'. Heese further opined that when defenders clear the ball they should move up the pitch. However, in Malta, Heese claims, they reason: 'if I run up there, they'll get it, play it back and I'll have to run backwards, better I just stay here.' By remaining deep, the players are breaking one of the key coaching factors of defending – remaining compact. As a result, when they play against good-quality teams, one good dribble from an opponent leads them to being in a good goal scoring position. Mark Miller recounted the story of one national player who, when asked after a fitness test if he ever felt tired when playing, replied, '*no, I'm not stupid!*' The culture of doing as little as possible goes some way towards explaining the style of play observed in the Premier League. It is a disastrous situation when Maltese clubs line up against skilful teams in Europe.

The globalisation of the game in the late twentieth century has permitted

small nations to enhance their national teams. Countries no bigger than Malta, such as Iceland, now have over 20 players in the top leagues of Europe. As a result their national team performances have improved. But moving from Malta has proved problematic.

Players in Malta accustomed to an easy footballing life show little inclination to stretch themselves in pursuit of their craft. One of the few émigrés, Michael Mifsud, explained that when he was at Kasierslautern in 2003 'there was eight men in my position, even in training (it's competition)'. Younger players look up to players who have been to different places and learn from them; there are consequently few role models for younger players. The absence of Maltese players with experience of other cultures means that the national team has not developed as have other nations of a similar size.

Foreign players are signed on the premise that they will improve the standard. In Malta this is not thought to be the case. Most of our interviewees commented that the standard of players arriving was poor. Indeed, Heese claimed succinctly in 2004 that 'foreigners who play here are all shit'. One long-standing national team player suggested in 2001 that they 'try hard for the first year until they've got a contract and then they don't care'. Players are not the only people affected: foreign coaches on the island claimed that the Maltese hated their presence. This tension does nothing for national or domestic team spirit. At both match level and in training the foreign players regularly group together or sit by themselves while Maltese players converse close by. Despite reports that foreign players regularly also go unpaid there is a feeling among the Maltese that foreign players are given preferential treatment. The presence of foreigners cannot be beneficial if there is contempt for them from the very players who are meant to be learning from them.

This 'arms'-length' attitude towards foreigners in Maltese football contradicts and effectively 'trumps' the self-criticisms or strategic essentialisations of Malta and the Maltese as inherently inadequate. While foreigners are seen as a possible solution to the ills of the local and national game, they are ignored, bypassed and otherwise thwarted as part of a strategy to demonstrate that Malta is a social and political system through which only the Maltese themselves can successfully negotiate a pathway.

This local protectionism manifests itself as well in the attitudes of the MFA – or more specifically, its President, Joe Mifsud – towards footballing out-migration. The Chairmen of the Maltese Premier League clubs, having witnessed the financial boom occurring elsewhere in European football, began to see pound signs. Several potential transfers to foreign clubs have however fallen through; Joe Mifsud, was accused of sabotaging deals. One talented young player, having been invited to a trial with an English Premier League club, saw the club ask the MFA to extend the trial period. Mifsud responded with the ultimatum that if he did not return to Malta he would be unable to play in his Maltese clubs' remaining fixtures. The club, which was challenging for the title at the time, applied pressure and the player returned. One Maltese football migrant suggested the logic behind Mifsud's action was that he was 'afraid if the

good players go abroad the league is finished'. While this paternalism for the domestic good is touching, it will not develop the Maltese games in the eyes of the global audience.

Nor will it lead towards the much-heralded goal of 'professionalism' within the local game. It is to this theme that we turn next, as the importation of foreign ideas, tactics and personnel turns itself towards the importation of a 'professional' ethos within the Maltese game.

5 Professions of faith

Footballing modernities

Just as Maltese politics of the 1980s and 1990s was dominated by the issue of Malta's potential accession into Europe, so too was Maltese football preoccupied with its relationship with Europe. This was an extension of the enduring preoccupation with 'all things foreign', as outlined in the last chapter, but with a particular concern in mind. Where Chapter 4 outlined the successive importation of players, tactics and coaches in pursuit of footballing success, this chapter examines the particular preoccupation with the question of professionalism. While professionalism is clearly a means to an end – a way of ensuring quality of performance and organisation – it might also be usefully seen as a symbol; a footballing proxy for modernity.

All sectors of Maltese society are dominated by narratives of modernisation (Mitchell 2002c, 2002d). Such narratives present efficiency and bureaucratisation as both a promise and a threat; a promise that could potentially lead Malta into a new and successful modernity, a threat that could destroy established Maltese ways of organising society – which although problematic, are nevertheless functional. While there often appears to be consensus as to the necessity of modernising, this is tempered by an anxiety that reform will not bring the promised access to resources, but will rather generate a level of regulation that will effectively cut off existing channels of clientelism and patronage through which people access resources.

Within football, the appeal of professionalism is tempered by the same reluctance to straightforwardly accept outsiders' input as we outlined in Chapter 4. The calls for professionalism, though, are not entirely exogenous. Much of the impetus to professionalisation was home-grown; from Joe Gasan, Father Hilary, Victor Tedesco – all pioneers and reformers in pursuit of professional modernity.

The pursuit of professionalism

Professionalism in Maltese football has existed since the 1930s, but has always been reserved for exceptional local-born players and mainly for foreign-born players. Ascertaining who was the first Maltese-born professional footballer depends on the criteria of professionalism. The first salaried player was Ruggieru

Friggieri who, in 1922, was paid by Sliema. As well as being the full-time groundsman of the then brand-new Gzira Stadium, he later played professionally for the Sicilian Club, Palermo. The same year Gejtun Psaila was considered to be a professional after being bought out of the police to play for Floriana. We then have to wait 60 years, to the late 1980s, when Michael de Giorgio was considered to be the first Maltese professional player.¹

Throughout the history of Maltese football, the pursuit of better playing standards has produced a variety of financial incentives and schemes aiming to induce good practice. Few of these initiatives may be said to have had the desired effect. Players in Malta negotiate their own deals with club presidents and always have done. Traditionally, players signed for a club who held their contract for five years. The player left only when the committee gave its blessing. In recent years, this five-year 'retainer' has been reduced to two. Younger players of up to 21 years – even those without contracts – can leave the club to which they are attached only if the new club is willing to pay what is perceived as his 'parametric'. The price of a transfer depends on various criteria but, up until 2005, no transfer fee within Malta had exceeded Lm50,000. Things have changed over the past decade inasmuch as elite players have been represented by agents. Good players in Malta can thus be guaranteed a good income. Their agents do well out of this at the same time. In 2003 a decent Premier League player could pull an average of Lm300–400 monthly, plus win bonuses. The outgoings of the player might be limited by fines for breaching club discipline, or paying Lm5 as a result of a yellow card and Lm10 as a consequence of a red card.

Significantly the game in Malta has never had a players' union. In 1956, the Sliema star Tony Nicholl attempted such an entity, and called a meeting at the Vernon (an Army) Club. Over 100 players attended to discuss the problems of income when injured and the general absence of decent income from the local game. The protagonists sought to encourage football's employees to guarantee an income if a player was injured in the course of playing. The situation remained inconclusive. The next meeting saw only 20 players turn up, and no attempt to set up a similar organisation was ever pursued again. In the 1980s Alan Zammit, a goalkeeper who had played with Sliema, Hamrun and Naxxar, suggested a players' union, but his call to colleagues was largely ignored.

Men can make a career out of football but too few can rely on the game for an income and all regardless of ability are beholden to patrons, be they corporate or individual. The dice is loaded against the individual competing against the club in a court of law. If a player enters a dispute with a club over wages and seeks redress in a court, he is automatically suspended from playing by the MFA. In the absence of legal routes to justice, the player has to appear before the MFA Disputes Board. This brings problems, not least of which is who in this intensely parochial society is sitting on the Board, given the perceived (and actual) power that some clubs have in such instances.

Professional principles

In 1986 a press conference was called by the MFA for local media which revealed the Secondment Principle of a football talent development scheme entitled the Professional Scheme. The MFA compiled a brochure in collaboration with the Corinthia Group of Companies which stated that, as a small nation, Malta could not aspire to have a national football squad but could have 22 players training together in a form of professionalism called the Secondment Principle. The first footballer to benefit from such a scheme was Michael De Giorgio, who conveniently was an employee of the hotel in which the press release was announced – itself part of the Corinthia group. The hotel offered to pay the wages of its employee while he trained with the national team. Other companies followed suit. In March 1986 three players, employed by the government, were given special leave with the approval of the then Prime Minister, Dr Karmelo Mifsud-Bonnici, to train full-time. The Prime Minister further recommended that the parastatal bodies, which employed other footballers, do the same.

The Secondment Principle actually contained two schemes. The first, named Direct Secondment, saw a player seconded to the squad while employed by a company willing to participate. The company continued to be the player's employer, and paid his monthly salary, national insurance and tax. The company was not expected to pay overtime and bonuses were at the discretion of the MFA. When the player's footballing services were no longer required he would return to his place of work and his football activities were not considered an interruption of service. The player, in turn, was expected to report for work with the MFA and perform all activities as directed by MFA officials. The MFA would then forward its time-record sheets to the employer company. The player was entitled to wage increments and promotions while seconded.

In a second variation to the scheme the sponsoring company (ideally) paid the MFA biannually – and in advance – a sum approximately equivalent to the player's salary. In turn the MFA undertook to give the employer at least one month's notice should the player be excluded from the squad in order for him to be re-engaged in his original employment. While all players were expected to train five days a week, there were two concessions. One was that players, who could not be seconded full-time, were exempted on a semi-professional status and expected to train two and a half days weekly. Another consideration meant that all players were able to train with their respective football clubs two afternoons a week. Such a programme was globally unique; no other national team trained together with such frequency and intimacy. The national team was, thus trained and prepared, in theory at least, as a top-class professional side.

While the management personnel changed the national team results did not. A credible victory over Belgium in a Friendly in 1986 was then followed by a home defeat against Luxembourg in a competitive match, which gave the visitors their first away victory in 30 years. An 8–0 home defeat by Holland

was shortly followed by a narrow 1–0 defeat in the away leg. Things looked promising when Malta twice held the Czech Republic to goalless draws, once in the Euro qualifiers and again in the 2002 World Cup qualifiers. Pending the departure of Pietro Ghedin in 1995 the MFA froze the Professional Scheme and enquired into the sustainability of it because the costs were not matched by the results. The scheme was resurrected two years later under the newly appointed Serb Milorad Kosanovic on a two-tier basis of professionals and semi-professionals. This caused a dispute among the players which resulted in three quality players withdrawing from the national squad, refusing to play for the team. By 1997 24 players were chosen for the Professional Scheme. Ironically the national team has achieved less when professional than its predecessors had when merely part-timers. Perhaps the enormity of their disastrous 1998 World Cup campaign can be placed in context when one realises that Malta were the only national team in the world to train together every week throughout the year – yet they still failed to pick up a single point.

The Professional Scheme undoubtedly provided the opportunity for elite-level players to train in the most professional way. The scheme made youngsters aspire to a footballing career. But few Maltese footballers manifested any eagerness or desire to make a success out of the Maltese experience, and to try their luck abroad. As a consequence, by 2002 the scheme had only ten players under its jurisdiction, who trained together and played each other on a near-daily basis. The scheme was thus considered by many in the Maltese game as a waste of time. By 2002 the pursuit of national footballing glory was failing in many instances to compete against the pursuit of job security provided in other occupations. The difficulty of accommodating those who had self-employed status was an issue with which the scheme could not come to terms.

According to Father Hilary, who was involved in the establishment of the Professional Scheme, the scheme initially worked and the players were very fit. The scheme was eventually abolished as the clubs complained they rarely saw their players and the MFA could not justify its existence following a number of poor national team results. However, in recent years the scheme has been resurrected, although in a reduced form. In 2005 the national team were paid Lm5 for every training session they attended. Therefore, players receive around Lm70 per month for training which is supplemented by their club earnings as well as individual sponsorship. In the same year players were paid Lm100 per match, Lm50 for a draw, and Lm100 for a win.

An observer can watch Premier games and note that matches are played, on occasion, at virtually walking pace, with minimal off-the-ball movement. The tempo of the matches is so slow because the players' physical fitness is poor. This is a result of their part-time status as well as their social habits. The lack of movement off the ball and players' ability on it leads the game to being more of an individual than a team game. Defenders of this style may argue that this is a result of the heat in Malta; however, football is a winter sport in Malta as it is in England and few games are played in temperatures above 30 degrees centigrade. The pace of the game is slowed further by the groundsmen, who purposefully

leave the grass (such a sacred resource on this barren island) on the pitch long. This prevents the ball from rolling quickly and players having to chase it. The slow pace of the game is a source of irritation for the national side's centre-forward Michael Mifsud, who stated in 2005 that 'even if you want to give 100 per cent, you can't; the pace of the game is too slow'. The top players are not being stretched; thus when they face foreign teams in European competitions, the pace of the game is too great for them.

The problem of the national League is significant. Carmel Busuttill, one of the few Maltese to have played abroad, claimed that in Malta there are 'only four or five competitive games in a season'. As a result some of the better players tend to stroll through the domestic season. When these players come to play for the national team, or for their clubs in Europe, they are not prepared for the competitive nature of the games. As a result of this attitude Horst Heese took to playing younger, inexperienced players. This policy was based on his thinking that 'we do not want players with international experience who have a losing mentality. I think it is better to play inexperienced players who believe in their abilities.'

The inclination to play for oneself rather than for the team is also shown in the challenges for the ball. In general players would not compete for a hard challenge of the type in which an injury may occur; instead they may resort to fouling the player. The majority of Maltese players are technically competent but a flamboyant 'Latino style' is evident in a penchant for melodrama. Players fall over after minimal contact and remain on the ground for several minutes. Father Hilary put this down to a lack of flexibility in the players, claiming that 'they go stiff for the ball, there is no coordination of the body'. Rather than being a lack of flexibility, it is probable that when players do challenge for a ball they go stiff to prevent themselves from being injured.

Traditionally, warm-ups have not been a significant part of the Maltese game. Carmel Busuttill explained that in the 1990s he and his team-mates used to warm up in a corridor outside the dressing-room before the game. This attitude has changed slightly, but warm-ups are still often performed half-heartedly. On a Ta'Qali match day the teams playing in the second game will often meet before the first game to watch the match. Players are regularly found sitting in the stands 15 minutes before the start of their own game. When teams are playing at the national stadium the players warm up on the adjacent training pitch. Consequently players get no 'feel' for the stadium prior to the match, even though they have space in which to use a football. Warm-ups in the Tedesco stadium at Hamrun are performed behind one goal, with both teams preparing in a space the size of half the width of the pitch between the advertising hoardings and the concrete stadium wall. The limitation on space means that players are confined to jogging and stretching with very limited ball work. Preparation for a match ideally begins at the final whistle of the previous match, in the form of a cool-down. In Malta this rarely occurs. One problem is that when playing the first match of the day, teams must leave the field to allow the second game to commence. Despite this limitation it is possible to perform a

cool-down. Instead, players appear ten minutes after their game to watch the second match.

Training sessions in Malta are complicated by the fact that better Maltese players spend half the week in training with the national team and not with their club. At one Pieta Hotspurs training session witnessed in 2004, eight first team players were missing. Of the players that were present, over half were not wearing shin-pads. With a match under a week away, every effort should be made to avoid injury. At the conclusion of the training session players leave the club immediately, often without showering. Showering returns the body to its pre-exercise state. Along with a cool-down most professional teams have a recovery session. This might involve massages and a check-over by the physio. In Malta in 2005 only three teams, Hibernians, Birkirkara and Sliema, had such a regime. Even then the programme is performed in an undisciplined way. As one Malta international claimed, 'the coach is not here so you can just go and sign your name and walk out again'.

Between training sessions and matches, players should be eating and drinking sensibly. This is hindered by the socialising culture of Malta. Like most Mediterranean countries, socialising does not begin in earnest until the early hours. One leading international player stated matter-of-factly that he was in bars every night. In Malta everyone knows everyone else's business; news of players' affairs or misbehaviour spreads quickly. News of drinking habits soon reaches fans – some of whom are boys in the nurseries. Similarly, the nurseries supply ballboys at Premier League games and are therefore witness to the attitude that top players manifest.

The nurturing and developing of footballing talent relies on good youth-level coaching and concomitantly decent facilities, and ultimately finance. These three factors were not readily available in Malta. Attempts to provide coaching pedagogy saw acrimonious political disputes and parochial contests to the detriment of the national team set-up. Playing facilities were the subject of jealousies and debates over who should fund what. Money was always an issue.

Suffer the children

Father Hilary is an Augustinian priest and philanthropist, who had played for the Hibernians' junior team in the 1950s and 1960s. Known throughout the islands as the 'Sports Priest', Father Hilary became a somewhat revolutionary clerical figure in the 1960s in his avoidance of wearing the traditional cassock associated with a cleric in Malta. Founding the Tarxien Oratory in 1958 to teach Catholicism and provide sport to keep children from a variety of temptations, the Oratory eventually set up an adult section as the boys grew older. Following phenomenal local success coaching with the Tarxien youth team, Fr Hilary became Technical Manager of Hibernians in 1962 and team coach from 1965 to 1975. A fall-out with the committee saw him leave only to begin in 1972 Malta's first 'football nursery'. Fr Hilary also established the first Under-16s League in Malta. Youth football had previously been confined to the streets.

The new league saw teams drawn from bars and shops, as the established football clubs in the opinion of the founder 'weren't interested in youth football'. Fr Hilary then established the Centru Sports Edukattiv (Educational Sports Centre), effectively the first youth development centre on the island, at the Marsa Sports Club in 1972, the aim being to 'educate young people through sport'. As many as 400 children attended the centre twice a week in its first year. Assisted by land granted to the MFA by the government, the set-up schooled pupils in one of four sports: one was inevitably football; the other three were gymnastics, basketball and athletics. The best youth players were chosen by the ten staff coaches employed therein.

When the Marsa Sports Complex was taken over by the government in 1971, the Minister of Public Works, Housing and Sport, Lorry Sant, did everything in his power to frustrate the work of Father Hilary. Why this dispute arose is not easy to ascertain over 35 years later. Sant wanted all football glory to be his and, as a Labour man, maintained the MLP's historical antagonism to the clergy. From the 1950s onwards, the Church and the Labour Party had been at periodic loggerheads; initially over the British integration referendum, then subsequently over the introduction of civil marriage, and the curtailment of Church schools' powers (Mitchell 2006). Initially, Sant tried to enforce his own choice of coaches for the centre. He then invited overseas coaches to the island – well-known figures such as Helenio Herrera, Brian Clough and the Dutchman Wiel Coervir, and lesser football managers such as Scottish-born Jimmy Sirrel – to teach football and compete with Father Hilary's centre. They were paid out of public funds. On reflection (in 2004) Father Hilary suggested that Sant's motivations were complex: 'he had a grudge against the church ... I just recruited the people I wanted. The church is not democratic.' The feud gathered pace and eventually led to Father Hilary being arrested – for possessing government stationery without a written concession. Father Hilary was released without charge after refusing to answer any questions.

Sant then fell out with the MFA following the building of the national stadium at Ta'Qali. The building was part of Lorry Sant's ministerial portfolio. The MFA was allowed to use the stadium. However, on one occasion in the early 1980s the national team arrived for an international match only to find the stadium locked. The situation was only resolved when Sant asked for a fee, which George Abela (then Vice-President of the MFA), having met with Dom Mintoff, agreed to. An annual rental fee of Lm10,000 was set, giving the MFA control over Ta'Qali.

When the MFA built the Ta'Qali Technical Centre in 1981, Father Hilary was appointed Technical Centre Director and remained with the MFA in a variety of posts until 1991. Retiring as MFA Director of Coaching in 1995, Father Hilary was content to be President of the Malta Youth FA, a sportswriter of international acclaim and the official chaplain to the national team squad. Mass was said before international matches by Father Hilary; all players participated in the worship. The youth football centre, established by Fr Hilary, was such a success that it could no longer support all of the children who wanted to

the national team. The return of Heese, to many observers, was calamitous with Malta twice losing against the Faroe Islands and suffering 7–0 defeats against Germany and Sweden.

In 1991, a Maltese national by the name of Pippo Psaila took over from Horst Heese, appointed by Abela. Psaila was a surprise choice for the job. In the figure of Psaila, Malta had a coach who had studied the game and obtained a variety of coaching qualifications, including an 'A' licence from the Scottish FA and hands-on experience from US colleges. Having managed the amateur Melita, he was then to take charge of the Under-18s under Ghedin, then the Under-21s under Dobrev and Heese, before accepting a job with the First team. Initially Psaila achieved respectable results, but then lost to Cyprus, Switzerland and Scotland and was removed from his position following a 2–1 defeat by Italy. His record was not as bad as others, who had been given a longer time on the job. Players of the time inform us that Psaila did not have the confidence of the squad and was relieved of his position by player power. His major achievement was an away victory over Estonia, and the five wins he achieved for the national team have only been equalled by the Yugoslav Josef Ilic, who obtained five victories in 36 games to Psaila's five in 18. Psaila was to leave the position, in his own words, following a disagreement with MFA President Joe Mifsud and, turning down offers to coach Maltese clubs, he contented himself with managing a local food-processing industry and being Director of Sport on the Malta Olympic Committee. The last Maltese coach of the national side, Robert Gatt, served for only one week in 1996.

The former Lazio and Italian national team player, Pietro Ghedin, arrived in Malta in 1991; his wages were paid by the Italian Football Federation. Previously assistant to the national coach Arzeglio Vicine in the 1988 European Championships, Ghedin was later assistant at the Under-21 level to Cesare Maldini. While initially employed in Malta to coach the Under-21s, he was by June 1993 in charge of the national side, following the departure of Heese. Ghedin's 24 games produced four victories and 15 defeats. By October 1994 Malta stood in 66th place in the FIFA World Rankings. In 1995 Ghedin resigned and returned to Italy as assistant to Maldini, who was by now coach of the full Italian side. Later he was assistant to Giovanni Trapattoni until 2004. In 2006 Ghedin returned to Malta as head of the Italian Federation Women's football section.

Following Ghedin the national team went into free fall. The appointments of Serbs Milorad Kosanovic in 1996, and later Josif Ilic, failed to improve matters; the former going down in posterity to the nickname, 'Mr. Six' after managing the side to three consecutive 6–0 defeats. In his 18-month reign, Kosanovic never won a single game out of 15. Dismissed by many as the man who made Malta the laughing-stock of European football, he won the Chinese Championship with Dalian Shide and in 2007 was managing the renamed Red Star Belgrade in European competitions.

His successor, Josef Ilic, was promoted from coaching the Under-21s to the full team, achieving just five wins in 36 games. His replacement in 2001 was

attend. This led to the established football clubs forming their own nurseries. Perhaps the supreme accolade of this man's achievements was not in playing and coaching, but in being the first Roman Catholic priest to sit in the Directors' box at Glasgow Rangers Ibrox Stadium.

Youthful energies

The majority of club nurseries today run teams from ages of five up to 17; Luxol St Andrews even run a team of four-year-olds. Nursery teams normally train twice a week up to the age of ten and then three times a week from 11 upward. Despite having a very early starting age, the teams cannot play in a league until they reach the age of 12. This means that some players are training for nine years without playing regularly. This lack of competition undoubtedly leads to players getting bored and quitting the sport as there is no end-product for their training. The only games that the under-12s age group play are tournaments organised by the nurseries. The aim of most nurseries is for each age group to participate in three tournaments a year.

The temperature, which can hit the 40-degree mark during the summer, means grass pitches are few and far between in Malta as the climate makes it very difficult to grow grass, especially when rain is unheard of during the summer months. For 100 years young footballers in Malta have learned to play the game on compacted sandstone. In the late 1990s many clubs sought to change this, but, realising that the tending and nurturing of grass was laborious and costly, chose to install artificial playing surfaces. As a consequence most nurseries prefer astroturf. One club that possesses such a facility is Pieta Hotspurs, paid for by the club at a cost of around Lm100,000. However, Pieta is renowned as a club that focuses on youth development. Other clubs are not so lucky; one such is Birkirkara whose nursery committee had long-standing plans to turn their sandstone pitch into an astroturf one. Unfortunately Birkirkara spent huge sums on their first team and consequently the nursery received no support from the club for this venture. They had to thus actively seek a sponsor. The chances of sponsorship for the sum of Lm100,000 were slim but was eventually found in 2005. Not all astroturf surfaces are the same and not all are well laid or well maintained. Indeed, the variety of surfaces has led to claims that they are causing player injuries. Unfortunately no studies exist on the proliferation of such injuries in Maltese football.

As well as playing at the nurseries, the best players from under 11 upward are involved with the national youth set-up. This means at least another weekly training session at Ta'Qali. These teams play Friendlies against other nations, although these can be few and far between. As a result of playing for both a nursery and the national set-up it is possible that players suffer overuse injuries. One 18-year-old player in 2004 played for his club the previous day, came into the national set-up the following morning, returned the day after to the local club and then attended university. Such motivation is hard to sustain.

The drop-out rate among young footballers in Malta is very high. There are two main age bands where this occurs. The first is around 16. Alfred Cardona, formerly manager of Birkirkara FC, suggested this was because of the age-old (and global) distraction of puberty – ‘they get their girlfriend and start missing training’. However, the predominant reason is the amount of study required of many. The 1980s onward focus on formal education – coupled with the realistic lack of prospects (and good income) available in Maltese football – led parents and schools to put pressure on children to stop playing football and concentrate instead on academic studies. Children at the top schools in their mid-teens are regularly given up to three hours of homework, rendering it unthinkable for them to train three hours a day. Studying becomes a major problem from the age of 16 when working towards exam preparation. In 1999, 60 per cent of Maltese continued with post-secondary education, and 17 per cent continued to post-18 higher education, a number which is forever increasing following the governments’ introduction of a stipend for all Maltese undergraduates. This, combined with free tuition, makes university an attractive choice for many.

The second age at which players stop playing is post-19, and is the consequence of the MFA scrapping the reserve team league when many clubs realised they did not have enough players to field a team. Consequently, when a player becomes ineligible to play for the under-19s, he can no longer play competitive football except in the first team. Many are unwilling to wait what could be years to make the grade.

Not all potential football talent is pursuing academic glory. Others miss out due to poverty through their inability to pay the footballing nursery membership fees, which can range from anywhere between Lm15 to Lm50. However, at some clubs such as Hibernians the players only pay if their parents can afford it. Luxol St Andrews charge Lm50 a year, the highest rate on the island, which reflects their largely middle-class membership. Children also have to pay monies to the nurseries for kit, equipment and coaching in order to play for the youth teams. Having to pay could prevent poorer children from being able to play. Unable to play, they are therefore not exposed to the best-quality coaching.

Funds could come into youth team football if clubs were more astute in developing good players. Both the clubs and the nurseries can gain money from the transfers of players. Nurseries gain money from their players moving to another club’s nursery. The fee is determined by the MFA, based on the number of years the child has been with the original nursery. However, such a process is rare, as players in Malta tend to stay with a club for a long period of time. Parochialism wins over money in such instances.

A spartan existence: Victor Tedesco

In the evaluation of former Hamrun President Victor Tedesco, when interviewed in April 2005, football in Malta improved in the mid-1980s and has regressed ever since. The bottom line in the decline was finance, or rather the

absence of it. The system as it stood in the early twenty-first century was in his opinion unsustainable and beyond rational economics, and brought near ruin to both individuals and clubs.

It had been so different in Tedesco's playing days. Turning out for Msida St Josephs the game then paid nothing:

The club would have a stocking hanging outside the district's barber shop near to the church. People leaving Mass would donate a few pennies towards the kit.

This was the situation some 70 years previously. Later decades saw the best players earn around Lm40 per annum. Then began transfer fees and wages for professional players in the 1980s. This pivotal change was brought about by Tedesco himself. Well versed in local football he was to turn out for Floriana before becoming first the President of Msida St Josephs before taking the Vice-Presidency of Floriana.

An astute businessman, Tedesco realised that there was money in football, but it was focused in the hands of individuals and not the football clubs themselves:

Each Sunday four teams played two games at the stadium. The money went five ways – four teams were paid and some went to the MFA. Over a season in the 1990s the club didn't even get Lm10,000 from gate money.

The MFA renewed the Empire Stadium contract annually. The stadium owner always wanted more. Even less income was available when a new national stadium was built. Having left Msida to join Hamrun Spartans in 1981 his club played at the newly built Ta Qali Stadium. Asked by the Labour government to play there but to forfeit any income from gate money, Tedesco agreed. Why?

The government had too many debts ... they had built a grass surface for the first time in Malta. The government gave the stadium to the MFA for Lm10,000 a year rent for 10 years. When gates were good and money came in training pitches were built adjacent. Now most of the gate money goes towards the MFA.

A Labour sympathiser and once prospective Labour MP, Tedesco was involved as adviser to the Mintoff administration of the early 1980s. In return for the funding provided by Colonel Gaddafi of Libya for the national stadium, Tedesco took his Hamrun Spartans club on a tour of Libya in 1983 and played several clubs at an exhibition game as part of the Libyan Revolution Day celebration.

Tedesco then combined entrepreneurial skills with a love of English players. Sensing that success could be achieved by a backbone of foreign players Tedesco brought in veteran ex-England Internationals. The list of arrivals was impressive: Jimmy Rimmer (Arsenal), Dave Latchford (Everton), Peter Barnes

(Manchester City), Ray Hankin (Leeds United), Tony Morley (Aston Villa). Tedesco bought his English players new suits and shoes. When Latchford arrived he was driven from the airport in a vehicle which had chauffeured the young Princess Elizabeth (later the Queen) while in Malta in 1953. Reading the list of out-of-contract players produced by the English FA, Tedesco would phone the players in England and negotiate with them. In the 1980s a Maltese club was permitted to have three foreign-born players. The temptation to the foreigner to play in Malta was a signing-on fee of Lm3,000 plus a Lm800 monthly payment with free car and accommodation. Four free flights a season rounded the package off. The big names played to varying degrees of success. Those who gave him the best service were largely unsung in their home country – players such as Barry Gallagher and Ian Lee. As a consequence of his imports Tedesco brought unprecedented honours for the Hamrun Spartans:

Hamrun had not won a trophy for 36 years when they asked me to take over. I was considered a ‘Gentleman’. I was Vice-President of the two Hamrun band clubs and accepted their offer.

Between 1982 and 1994 Hamrun won an average of two trophies per season and lost only five games in the five seasons of 1982 to 1987. The favourite chant of their fans was ‘*Kemm għanda liri*’ (what a load of cash we have). At times Tedesco stayed 12 hours a day with his players in the Hamrun Spartans’ clubhouse.

I paid the best wages. I was also the manager. I selected the team in spite of my coach at times. He was really my trainer. The final word in the pre-match lecture was mine.

In later years Tedesco looked to Italy and Bulgaria for players. Then came three Argentinians. Two were former internationals who came to Tedesco’s notice via a brother of 1978 World Cup winner Renee Houseman who became a player’s agent. Two of the three married local girls, and remain in Malta to this day.

The Maltese players in the championship-winning Hamrun teams of the 1980s were generally the cream of the local crop. As a consequence Hamrun became the first Malta club to make it to the third round of the Inter-Cities Fairs Club, beating Ballymena of Ireland and Rapid Vienna of Austria before losing to Moscow Dynamo.

Success on the field provoked Tedesco to think big for his club off it. His plan to develop a small patch of land in Hamrun into a football ground won government approval in 1984. The new development was welcomed by the MFA as it provided some relief from fixture congestion at Ta Qali which saw some teams play competitive games every fortnight rather than weekly. It was also another grass surface, which was for the good of the local game. The stadium was named after its patron, and provided training sessions for an

emerging nursery system which produced good teams that combined the best of home-produced, Hamrun youth with good veterans brought in following careers with Valletta and Floriana.

Such a development needed funding. With little forthcoming from the MFA, other revenue streams had to be found. Supporter collection and fundraising could never produce more than Lm10,000 annually, so the costs of footballing glory were borne by Tedesco. From 1981 to 1986 he was to give Lm250,000 of his own money annually to the success of Hamrun. He has no regrets:

I had a good business ... water, electric and air-conditioning in Saudi Arabia. I owned the company and made very good money. My money made people in Hamrun happy, they cried when they won a cup after 36 years of nothing. While winning I was their idol.

When footballing success proved elusive local politics entered the equation. In 1998/1999 what Tedesco terms 'a mutiny' occurred as rivals sought to get him ousted from the position of club President.

I said, you asked me to help. I did and made it a success. Now try it yourself ... I'll help.

In his absence Hamrun were relegated to the First Division. In 1999 the club were in debt to the extent of going out of existence. The Hamrun players were unpaid and the unpaid wage bill hit Lm65,000. The players responded by going on television, threatening not to turn out for future fixtures. Concerned fans visited Tedesco in his palatial bungalow in St Paul Ta Targa district to seek his assistance:

I paid the players and saved the club. Then I got together eight nursery players with three foreigners and a couple of local veterans and by 2002 we were in the Championship pool.

More committee intrigue saw a reshuffle and Tedesco's eventual departure. The club were then relegated and in 2006/2007 existed as an average Premiership side. Reflecting on the nature of football-related democracy, Tedesco raises a number of local issues:

It's difficult here for people to accept committees. I accepted people on to it who were not of sufficient standard to run a club. I proposed a new regulation – which was accepted – that we had to have 15 elected who represented 50% plus of the vote. But when it's hard to find 10 sometimes you have to accept some who aren't up to the job ... you see it when decline sets in and we saw members who were not obvious in their aims, caring not about success, they were not bona fide people working for the club but there for the purpose of kicking out the president.

Throughout its history Hamrun Spartans yo-yoed between the top division and that immediately below. The village throughout the twentieth century had a reputation for polarised politics. Tedesco considers himself as the man who stabilised Hamrun in football status and acted as a mediating figure in local polarities:

The football club became the link between the two band clubs. We sought to accommodate their problems.

Accepting the offer to be an honorary President of both Hamrun band clubs of St Joseph and St Gaetano saw both *fešta* committees in the village contributing in turn to the Spartan players' funds. The payment of outstanding monies from the club to its players coincided with the *festas*. It was a point of honour to Tedesco to pay in full all debts in tandem with this religious celebration.

The balance sheets of the club often showed discrepancies however. One individual owed large monies was the contractor who built the stadium. Owed Lm20,000 in 2005, Tedesco recalls how he had paid him Lm10,000 in 1998 and Lm10,000 in earlier years. The MFA had then given the same man Lm7,000 towards the facility. The best sponsorship deal the club had attained was via Tedesco, with a London-based tourism company which provided Lm30,000 annually. Smaller deals brought a maximum of Lm600 a year. Combined, these would not pay the wages of half of the team when in the Premier League.

Aged 87 when interviewed, Tedesco regrets little of his time in football:

I was popular and had a committee which saw rival factions sitting down and working together. I got more popularity from the game than I could have from politics or from the band clubs.

Assuring us that if one worked to the principle that respect for others would bring respect for oneself, his greatest honour was a medal from the Council of Hamrun – the highest accolade the village could give. Tedesco could never contest local elections due to a residency prerequisite; he avoided living in Hamrun. His one flirtation with the political system came in 1971 when he stood as a Labour candidate in the Hamrun, Msida, St Venera constituency – and lost!

Mintoff made me do it. He convinced me that I would win because of the support from the band clubs. But before me was Dr Buttlegieg [the Deputy Leader of the MLP]... Established people got the vote. Labour won anyway.

The murky world of politics had its equivalent in his dealings with the MFA:

I reported corruption no fewer than three times. Sometimes it was players, other times committee men of clubs. I was responsible for the dismissal of both players and officials ... I would not tolerate corruption in football.

Sitting on the MFA Council for 25 years he described its difficulties as one of the ‘sixty people who think differently’ and using the Maltese vernacular explains how with his fellow countrymen ‘you never know what is behind the smile’. Nomination for the MFA Executive Committee produced in his recollection lobbying against his aspirations, which annoyed him then as it does now, considering himself as he does as a man who did a lot for the domestic game and the people involved in it. Personalities always entered the equation, one of which was his own. By his own admission:

I was too enthusiastic, too egotistic. In pursuit of all honour I got too determined, too involved ... it’s a mistake to want only victory.

Some mistakes cost him chunks of his personal fortune.

I was always the first to put money on the table. I allowed borrowing sometimes from banks, sometimes from third parties ... I shouldn’t have because I always honoured that commitment.

To what extent personally: ‘Today it would be Lm350,000.’

From a good family who taught him the necessity of both good manners and working hard, Tedesco had attended the prestigious Jesuit college of St Aloysius. At the age of 18 he considered entering the Priesthood while serving his apprenticeship as an electrician assisted by a correspondence course from England. Aware of local polarities he favoured neither England nor Italy in football. He will be remembered in the domestic game for an era and template he inadvertently created – namely the bankrupting of the top clubs in pursuit of footballing glory:

Maybe! ... you’re right. I launched this system and the rest suffered the consequences ... I wanted three foreign players so we could compete in Europe. Many clubs opposed it because of the expense of wages – the issue was discussed every season and I chaired the Premier League Club Committee. Today there are six or seven salaried players in the top clubs, three are foreign the others are nominally Maltese by nationality or residency but they are paid as if they are ‘foreign’. The money from the MFA would not pay two months’ salaries for local players ... to be honest without rich benefactors we might as well stop football in Malta ... but when the club’s successful people don’t look too hard.

Footballing ‘big-men’ such as Joe Gasan, Father Hilary and Victor Tedesco attempted to pioneer professionalism within the Maltese game, as a process of modernisation. While this involved the importation of foreign players and coaches into the game, more often than not it meant the reform of financial and training structures to encourage success. That these efforts appear to have systematically failed encourages a return to the preoccupation with the foreign,

and new attempts at different levels to reform and professionalise. As the interview with Tedesco demonstrates, much of the reform process was dependent on the new availability of financial investment that emerged from the 1980s onward. Through this process emerged a new class of footballing ‘big-men’ who invested money, time and social capital in the pursuit of success and glory for their team – in return for the pleasure and honour of success, and a host of spin-off benefits to their business interests and political careers. The next chapter examines these big-men and their careers as they strive for mutual success for themselves and their clubs.

6 The bigger they come

The price of football

Although clearly a modern technological democracy, Malta is in many ways also a face-to-face society. As suggested in Chapter 2, such a context means that the attenuated and mass-mediated public sphere of the nation as ‘imagined community’ is cross-cut by face-to-face relationships. The nation’s media are dominated by letters to the editor, phone-ins and hosted chat-shows. In Habermas’ (1984) model of the development of the public sphere, such manifestations are seen as evidence of the shift or transformation from a public sphere that is productive of public opinion – as a genuine and positive contribution to political debate and democracy – to one that is simply an object of consumption. Although apparently generating ‘more’ debate, such mass-mediated communicative activity in fact, claims Habermas, creates less *real* debate, though creating the impression of there being more. This calculus of the public sphere and public opinion, however, fails to account for situations such as Malta, where the public figures who appear in the mass media are also familiar local personalities with whom the public can – and frequently do – have personal, face-to-face relationships. The situation creates what has been classified as a ‘semi-transformed’ public sphere, which sees mass-mediated debate articulating with face-to-face debate in a hybrid public sphere (see Mitchell 2002a).

This situation generates a politics of personalisation, and ensures that not only do political actors need to have public charisma, but they also require strong networks of person relationships with friends, patrons and supporters to succeed. Boissevain (1994) uses the term ‘big-men’ to describe such political actors, borrowing the term from the anthropology of Melanesia. In diverse areas of Melanesia, political authority is determined by prestige, which in turn is acquired through publicly organised prestations – giving away valuable goods to political opponents (Sillitoe 1998). In highland Papua New Guinea such prestations ‘traditionally’ involved giving away pigs, but by the 1960s and 1970s they had extended to cash and Western consumer goods such as tinned food and even motor vehicles (Strathern 1975). These prestations require the big-man to personally manage complicated networks of reciprocal exchange, which enable him to momentarily accumulate a maximal quantity of goods to give away. The process is not dissimilar to that of the Maltese footballing big-man, who also exchanges the generosity of investment for prestige, managing

complex networks in order to facilitate his projects, making grandiose gestures of generosity in return for loyalty and support.

This chapter examines the careers of these big-men, who have competed not only against each other, for their respective teams, but also with the MFA. The latter is run by a 'super big-man', Joe Mifsud, whose ambitions are not only national but also international – on the board of UEFA and FIFA. What his strategies for 'getting on' in these contexts reveal are the continuities between the politics of local Maltese football and that of global football – which is similarly based upon the concept of the well-connected and tactically astute 'big-man'. We turn to his career in the next chapter, although he is a constant point of reference for the Maltese club 'big-men'.

The taciturn politician: Robert Arrigo

In May 2005 Sliema won the championships at Ta Qali. In time-honoured tradition the trophy was presented to the victors by the MFA President Joe Mifsud. Breaking with tradition, the victorious team captain was instructed by the Club President to stand aside – the trophy was going to be received by Robert Arrigo, the President of Sliema Wanderers. In the ensuing stand-off the two Presidents, each holding a well-known mutual loathing, stood one metre apart, one enjoying the power of discomfort, the other holding the trophy and calling over the shoulder of his antagonist for the team captain to come forward. The captain, preferring the wrath of Joe Mifsud to that of Robert Arrigo, asked him to give the trophy to Arrigo. In the ensuing impasse Arrigo snatched the trophy from Mifsud's hands and held it triumphantly aloft. Mifsud stormed away. The onlooking press were aghast. A century of protocol had been ended in a dispute that was both personal and political.

Brought up in Sliema, by a family heavily involved in Nationalist politics, Arrigo adopted Tottenham Hotspur as his boyhood team by virtue of watching their progress in the Inter-City Fairs Cup of 1965. His father had no interest in the game and was Mayor of Sliema. His great-grandfather was the first Speaker in the Maltese Parliament of 1921. Despite his affections for English football, Arrigo accepted the position of Honorary President of the Juventus Vera Amore Supporters Club (see Chapter 8), a task which involved no financial input and just the occasional appearance at a club function.

His footballing passion was Sliema Wanderers. Playing in his younger days for the Sliema Zone, Arrigo had moved from St Julians to Sliema Young Boys who were effectively the nursery side for Sliema Wanderers. However, at the age of 18, Arrigo put football second to business ventures. By his early twenties, he owned his own travel agency. By 2006 he had three hotels, and was an airline representative of 35 years' standing. His company brought 90,000 tourists annually to Malta and some 20 million Maltese Liri into the country's coffers. While making his fortune, Arrigo remained a keen fan of Sliema Wanderers and in 1994 joined the Board as an Ordinary Member. Two years later

the incumbent President stepped down and Arrigo took over the role. A few months later, Sliema won the League. By April 2003 Arrigo was a Member of Parliament.

Sliema have a reputation among footballers and other clubs as being efficiently run and paying wages on time. Sliema pay good money – up to Lm700 per month – but do not have the add-on of free accommodation, free vehicles or school fees that some clubs offer. Much of the funding comes via entrepreneurial sources. In 2006, Arrigo explained how it all worked:

It is important to bring in monies from outside of your pocket. The success is not just down to my private income ... my business produces a lot of sales for a lot of people – Lm20,000,000 a year divided between hotels, services, transport and others. So they pay a kickback for the contracts I give them. They give money which goes to a central fund which pays for the club and wages. I ask them annually for Lm1,500 each, which as a proportion of the Lm500,000 sales they make from me is minimal. I consider it a thank-you gesture. Sometimes they provide help by advertising in magazine publications or websites. This system is the backbone of our finances.

Others who wish to sponsor the club do so in sums of between Lm1,000 to 5,000. This can see their name on a team shirt. The 2005 championship winning brochure intimates the depth of individual sponsorship, with no fewer than 67 businesses advertising their services. The donations account for 60 to 70 per cent of Sliema's finances per season. The remaining 30 to 40 per cent derives equally from UEFA monies by virtue of Sliema qualifying for Europe (which brings broadcasting rights) and the rest from Arrigo's pockets. This latter sum equates to Lm60,000 a year, and this Arrigo admits he is prepared to lose for his hobby. The return for Arrigo is four championships in ten years and the consequent chance of playing in Europe. The other benefit to Arrigo is electoral success.

By virtue of Arrigo's business acumen, Sliema have opportunities on player transfers not available to other teams as Arrigo so adroitly puts it: 'they sell ... I buy.' That said, Arrigo has to sell his club more than the others. His supporters are apathetic, middle class and his fanatical followers are hostile to him by virtue of his political persuasions. In 1998 Arrigo attempted to form a company to run Sliema, the idea being that this entity ran it instead of him. The idea was advertised with the intention of joining the Malta stock exchange. The idea failed. There were not enough people willing to put their money into this idea despite the brief presence of a 'marketing manager'. While the idea existed for nine months, there were too many employees and too few sales. Bad feeling was created (and remains) but Arrigo was undeterred. 'We should revisit the situation – I'm not here forever.' The idea of a club membership is envisaged by Arrigo in what he calls democratic dictatorship. Sliema have a nominal committee – it just never meets. That said, there are people who are given tasks and they are expected to do them. Arrigo has no time for trivia: 'I'm not interested in the number of socks and bibs – that's the kit manager's job. It's his job to get

it right – same with the team manager.’ Admitting to being hard on his players, the recompense is that he pays well and has sacked players who were ‘non-competitive and happy to sleep on the bench with a guaranteed wage’.

The politics of Sliema are such that many a resident considers him a hero. Others who dislike him grudgingly accept him because they see no alternative. While he is blue and some of his supporters are red, Arrigo is convinced that there are many people in the village who are of an orange persuasion – supporting the small but increasingly influential centrist party *Alternattiva Demokratika*, which combines a social democratic focus on undermining the established political *ethnies* of Labour and Nationalist, with environmentalism. Although supporting *Alternattiva*, such voters are effectively a floating constituency, swinging strategically between the two main parties according to policy and contingency. In the 2005 election, they mobilised behind Arrigo the Nationalist, and voted ‘Yes’ in the referendum on EU accession.

Arrigo is fully aware of the bourgeois roots of his club and its supporters, manifest most obviously in the relative absence of footballing celebrations and creative *tmieghek*. As Arrigo puts it:

Sliema supporters only rejoice when we win the League. We didn’t really have a drink after the other trophies – we just go home. Remember, we have won 105 cups. The championship party went on until 10.30 and we got 20 letters to the press from locals complaining of the disruption to their lives. This was for one evening. Elsewhere they celebrate for weeks.

If fans won’t come to Sliema, the club has to take itself to them. Consequently, Sliema have a weekly one-hour TV show on Smash TV dedicated to them. In its fourth year of operations in 2006, the programme is a mixture of footage and debate and is paid for by eight minutes of advertising. No viewing figures for the show are available, but Arrigo did add: ‘the phone calls and SMS messages don’t stop.’

The furthest Sliema have got in Europe is the second round. They have thus got further than any other Maltese club. However, with the UEFA seeding system, the opportunity to go further is difficult. This is a frustrating position because Arrigo considers his team too good for the Maltese League. ‘We played a team from Moldova – the poorest nation in Europe. We lost. But they had 14 foreigners – we’re allowed only three. It’s not a level playing field.’ One attempt to level the playing field saw Sliema in trouble with UEFA. Before a game with a Hungarian side in 1998, Sliema’s Czech-born star was found in the hotel room of the opponent’s goalkeeper. The latter accused the visitor of offering him bribes to throw the game. The Sliema player claimed he was taking holiday brochures promoting the island to the President’s hotels. If found guilty, Sliema faced a five-year ban from European competition. No ban was forthcoming but the Czech player left Sliema soon afterwards – for Hibernians.

Sliema finished runners-up three years in succession before winning the league in 2003 with a Maltese-born coach and Maltese-born assistant and seven

players on the Malta national side. Sliema have tried to develop local talent and also bring in foreigners. In the former instance Sliema were the first club to establish a youth nursery in Malta. Sliema's policy is to groom good youth-level players and loan them out to lower League teams for experience. Successful in bringing players through, it was located on prime building land, but its relocation to the university campus, to make way for a proposed new development, cost the club members, as parents did not want to travel the extra three miles to the new site. A return to the old site will see better facilities which are intended to be completed in 2008.

The willingness to bring in foreign players has been a characteristic of Sliema since its origins. In recent times, however, this has resulted in a very public spat between Arrigo and the MFA President, Joe Mifsud. The outcome is an impending court case which has seen Mifsud accuse Arrigo of libel. Despite EU law implementing freedom of movement, and despite the Bosman ruling, the MFA restrict Maltese clubs to three foreigners each. However, the Minister of Trade and Industry will not intervene in this matter; instead the MFA President is free to implement this policy with the connivance of the national government. It even extends the policy, to deliberately exclude players who, despite qualifying to play for the national team, are nevertheless regarded as 'foreign'. For example, the Sliema player Orosco Anonam, who is Nigerian-born, but can represent Malta by virtue of his marriage to a Maltese, is none the less considered one of Sliema's three foreign player quota. Whether this is overt or implicit racism, or part of an MFA campaign against Sliema, is not clear, but it has led Arrigo to publicly challenge the MFA, bringing him into direct conflict with Mifsud. When the championship was won by Sliema in May 2005, Arrigo decided to bring matters to a head in a most public manner – at the stadium on the day the trophy was awarded. When Arrigo broke protocol to collect the trophy himself, the startled Mifsud was clearly furious and in a public rant called Arrigo all the names under the sun. The following week Mifsud implemented an MFA law barring anyone other than the team captain from accepting trophies. Anyone not adhering to this would be banned from local football for five years without the right of appeal. This reduced Arrigo to the sardonic 'if you kill in Malta you have the right to appeal. If you take a trophy from that bastard you don't.' The three-player rule has been raised in Parliament by Arrigo. The newspaper in which Arrigo stated Mifsud was acting beyond the law brought the promise of a court case from Mifsud. At the time of writing, the court case is still pending.

Frozen out: Joe Caruana-Curran

Assuming the Presidency of Valletta meant following in the footsteps of Manuel Bonnici, Nationalist MP, whose political promotion to Minister broke the club policy that ministers should not sit on the club committee. At the time Caruana-Curran was Vice-President, and when he took over as President he made the immediate, politically astute move of depoliticising the club, forbid-

ding even MPs from sitting on the club committee: 'Valletta is divided 50:50 politically. I don't like the idea of Party interests antagonising half of our fan base.' Born some seven miles from Valletta in the coastal resort of St Julians, Caruana-Curran had good Valletta pedigree. His father had played for the club and his two elder sisters were born in the city. By the time he was born the family had left the capital, but he was to become an avid fan of Valletta.

His business abilities brought him to the attention of the Valletta committees. Approached to provide some form of sponsorship – initially to fund the wages of a foreign player – his donation led to him being asked by Joe 'Chief' Salinas – Bonnici's predecessor – to become more involved. The words of the Chief resonate even now: 'Once in it's hard to get out.'

Caruana-Curran brought wealth and leadership qualities, and by his own admission stubbornness: 'not in my personal life but determined in business and it turned up in football.' He considers that he had both in the beginning and on his departure some 20 years later good relations with all the players who passed through Valletta's ranks: 'I did consider myself later in life a sort of father figure. They brought me their problems when many times I was younger than them.' Indeed the relationships established with players remain his best memories of his Presidency.

Primarily involved in cold storage and the importation of frozen foods, his business portfolio extended to property developing and advertising, primarily the construction of displays and billboards. At one time in the late 1990s most of his footballers were employed by him:

The flexible hours meant that time off for training was negotiated between me and the coach. They all had semi-professional status. Internationals worked for me: Gilbert Agius, Ivan Zammit, Joe Zarb ... Nicky Saliba even achieved managerial status here.

Fanatical in his support of Valletta he was to miss only two games in 18 years as President. Sitting on the bench with the coach and players he justified his location, arguing:

The players wanted me there and I had good relations with all my managers. I still speak weekly to the Bulgarian who managed... But I was a bad loser. That attitude is important if you want to win. I would be comfortable before games and at half-time but if they had lost they didn't want me too near afterwards.

Did such close involvement translate into team selection?

Never ... Friday evening I would usually dine with the coach and before the selection was made and I insisted on knowing it two hours before the players ... so that when the line-up was announced in the dressing-room I would be aware of any potential reactions of players left out.

Eschewing any opportunities to be patron of other clubs and organisations he declared his staunch Nationalist credentials. His former father-in-law was once Prime Minister of Malta and President of the Republic. But party politics was not an issue he wished to proclaim, and indeed he was elected to the Valletta local council on an Independent ticket. Valletta is divided politically, but also parochially, between the parish of St Pauls Shipwreck – the national patron saint, and a predominantly Nationalist parish – and the parish of St Dominic's – predominantly Labour. He was quick to learn the delicacy of this divided situation:

Some 20 years ago I attended the feast of St Paul but was out of the country for the St Dominic's one. The controversy! ... I never went to either in the next 20 years.

The epic encounters with Birkirkara brought a realisation that enmity had to be constrained.

Birkirkara had new ideas and a different structure to us. This is good for the game. If they didn't like us then they join the list. It was Hamrun in the 1980s and Rabat for a couple of years in 1985 to 1986. As long as we were involved in the antagonism was all that mattered.

A friendship with his Birkirkara equivalent (they live a few hundred metres apart in St Paul Ta-Targa) would see them agreeing to walk in and out of the stadium together before and after matches and enjoying a cigarette in the tunnel at half-time.

His Presidency resulted in the most successful era of Valletta's history. By 2004 Valletta had won 68 trophies in their history yet 31 of them were won in the 10-year period 1991 to 2001. In total his 18-year reign produced six League Championships, six Super Cups and six FA Club Trophies.

Everyone has to take some credit with different levels of participation. Players and coaches ultimately bring success but the committee and supporters have to take credit.

His ultimate aim was to make Valletta a self-sufficient club. His vision however required others to support him. He was to find that the perennial problem was the difference between income and expenditure. No models from business worked in football. Deficits were only solved by people funding from their own pockets. He admits that he was carried away by success and paid too high salaries: 'I take responsibility – and I ultimately had to cough up the costs myself.'

Valletta remained a club run by a committee and a President reliant on both their largesse and the donations from devoted fans. Sponsorship deals were achieved with Findus frozen foods as a consequence of his holding the import-

ing and distribution licence for their products. Later a similar deal was arranged with Belgian beer Stella Artois and then camera manufacturer Konika. In 2003 Valletta had deals with Carlsberg via the Farsons' Brewery, Pirelli tyres (via the Demajo group) and Innovative Transport Systems. In 2004 a deal with American leisure and sport apparel producers Nike saw them described as 'Technical Sponsors'.

That was the best deal we got. They chose us. They wanted to find one club here and because of our success and supporter numbers they chose us... Our white shirts have helped too!

No single sponsorship deal, however, ever covered the cost of the players' salaries.

Not even all the sponsorships could cover even four player's salaries and we usually had 13 on full-time salaries.

The Valletta committee was ten-strong elected annually. Disputes were rare and until his departure in 2003 controversy minimal. In his 18-year Presidency his style was personal not political.

I'm very placid but I made it obvious that I didn't want people working behind my back. I did not want anyone to spend their time working against me.

Things declined in 2003. After two victories in local council elections he chose not to counter a third term. Standing in the general election of 2003 was not really practical. 'My brother-in-law was standing in the same constituency...' He then decided to resign from the football club.

They chose another route for image and finance – I called it a day. No one forced my hand.

Despite being elected again to the club Presidency he walked.

I wasn't happy with the voting which saw manoeuvres which saw many but not all vote for me.

His legacy was at first glance a club saddled with massive debts which had not won a trophy since his departure.

I left a cabinet full of trophies and a bank guarantee of Lm250,000 and 15 years ago I bought the St Lucia club premises rebuilt it and gave it to the club. It cost Lm180,000.

The personal debt incurred he refuses to divulge:

I don't know and I'm not interested. I don't have other hobbies. I never calculated the cost. The pleasure it gave me was the first thing. Mistakes were made but not consequential for the club. What errors there were, were paid for by me.

A failure to proceed in European competitions remains a regret. The greatest moment was the 2–1 defeat of Birkirkara in 1997. With 5,000 fans locked out of Ta Qali and the match shown live on local TV the game was watched by some 200,000 people in Malta.

Now concentrating on business interests in the former Eastern bloc and cohabiting with a Russian migrant, the former President still attends Valetta games, albeit in the stand opposite to that which the current Valetta committee will be seated. His new status allowed him to reflect on the difficulties local football faced:

It's hard to raise the levels. Comparison though is odious and we have to make do with what we have. We have to take things more seriously though soon. Football clubs and schools today, sport in schools is not considered important. In my school-days inter-college games attracted crowds of 5,000 at Gzira.

He also mentioned the appalling diet that many young Maltese pursue. To ask if the importation of processed foodstuffs and ice-creams played a role in this was perhaps churlish. Now aged 47 he is dismissive of both the wider political structure of Malta and the role of the MFA:

Parliament is dominated by lawyers, doctors and architects, but they are not the brightest people and whatever they propose has problems. We have a civil service of huge numbers and crap wages and are thus poor technocrats. We pay 110% duty on car imports and our roads are worse than Iraq.

In the summer of 2004 he challenged Joe Mifsud for the position of MFA President, but lost out on a 56–41 vote. The closeness of the result shocked many in Maltese football. Eight votes would have swayed this issue: 'I only stood two months before the election'. It was close. But not all those he considered friends voted for him – one was from Valetta FC. Personal links take away reason. Some don't want change. In his opinion he was one of the '10 idiots' who sustained Maltese football out of a sense of duty; history and 'the ego and all that comes with it'. While ego drove him in some way, so did his anger and the way that football was run in Malta. Referring to the President of the MFA as 'the Kim Il Sung of football' for his approach to running the game the Valetta chairman has publicly and frequently clashed with Joe Mifsud:

Ten Premier Presidents – and I’m one – keep him in a job. He exists only because of us. At one time some 10 of my players were in the national team squads and I’m refused a response as to the wages of the national team Technical Director because such a figure ‘is not in the public interest’. Records are not kept, there is no transparency and yet he gets votes because he rewards club Presidents by sending them on MFA junkets to Israel or Palermo where they stay in nice hotels and wear an MFA tie. Then he pays himself on top of his salary Lm12,000 a year additional expenses which no one on the committee has ever approved ... he stood for the Labour party in election in 1983 and lost by 20 votes unfortunately Malta then got him running football for the next 20 years.

The price of a club: Victor-Zammit

A fan of Birkirkara since being taken by his father to watch the then lower division club at the Gzira stadium, the man who was to become its Chairman first became involved in the club in 1986. Local born and son of a man of professorial status in maths and physics, Zammit’s education at the prestigious Jesuit school of St Aloysius in Birkirkara was followed by a correspondence course graduating in marketing. Aware that attempting to market Maltese-made products abroad was in the early 1980s ‘a joke’ he was to export his own company’s personal hygiene products to over 50 countries by the late 1990s and employed some 100 people locally. Of these, no fewer than nine held MBAs.

In his teens his local football visions were complemented by those of another nation. At the age of 16 he and school-mate Noel Enriquez co-founded the Maltese-Roma fan club run from his father’s house. A few years later he was to found with Joe Fava the *Tiforsi Azzurri Ta Malta*. With a ‘Head Office’ meeting place in Valletta hosted by the Italian Embassy and its sympathetic ambassador, the association once boasted 12,000 Maltese members and thus remains the largest-ever foreign supporter club in Malta (see Chapter 9). Travelling to Italy and even staying in the same hotel as the Italian squad that travelled to the World Cup in Mexico in 1970, Zammit was to present a gold Maltese Cross to the player the Maltese fans chose as their Italian Player of the Year.

Local football attracted his fuller attention in 1986 when he first offered sponsorship to his local club. This arrangement bubbled along without controversy while the club made a business deal that was unique in Maltese footballing history. The joining together of Birkirkara with Luxol St Andrews saw him invited on to the committee of the new club, which he was to co-sponsor with a business friend. Not in favour of the arrangement and knowing Birkirkara could survive alone when the two deals ended in 1996, he was approached by the Birkirkara committee and asked to become Chairman. It was undoubtedly an honour but if he was to assume such a status it was to be on his terms:

I insisted that a PLC run the club. Historically a committee system ran the club with members elected annually – how can you plan when your

membership might be voted off within 12 months? I insisted on a PLC structure and a three-year plan to win the championship.

A shareholding issue was begun. The 'A' shares sold for 1,200 euros, the 'B' shares sold for 120 – over 80 per cent of the shareholders took the latter option; Birkirkara became a public company but did not enter the Stock Exchange:

It took us some time ... the club as it was made up of local enthusiasts but with little idea of business management. I tried to explain to them that football was not an amateur game any more – we needed professional attitudes in a business venture. I had to go to meetings in band clubs to explain to hundreds of people – but it was not accepted.

Some 600 shares were sold in 1996 with the expectation that a return would not be theirs until off-pitch activities were developed in a parallel business structure to the football club. The desire to be different to the 'traditional' clubs was a deliberate and even provocative policy:

I was an avid reader of all football literature. I was fascinated how foreign clubs – particularly Italian – clubs were run. I had friends on the Board of Roma and Milan. I wanted a small-scale structure based on the big Italian teams.

In pursuit of this he was to become Malta's first-ever football club 'Chairman' – all the others were presidents – presiding over six administrative committee divisions: Administration (daily running), Finance and Commerce; Technical (playing staff divided into specialist training of technical managers, team manager and even goalkeeping coach); Discipline; Nursery; and Supporters' Club. The existing structure Zammit described as awful: 'amateurish and a pot-pourri of prejudices'; he vowed never to attend such a gathering. Instead he changed it, arguing that the Board discuss policy not day-to-day activities.

A new club HQ was needed. This brought considerable controversy from politicians and other football clubs over a deal which while within the law was possibly against the spirit of it. All Maltese sporting clubs including football clubs are given a premise by the government, usually on a 50-year lease on a peppercorn rent. Each club is however forced to come to an arrangement for 'contracting-out' the bar and catering arrangements. Invariably the barman is versed in local snacks and beers, and opens at the convenience of club members. The Birkirkara club premise was located at a prime site on Valley Road and could, with the right franchise, make a tidy profit while the football club remained upstairs.

I thought beyond the village bar and indeed rented out its catering arrangements – to McDonald's. They got the best site in the village, the club got a

good financial deal and we also got women and children going to the club premises.

The opposition Labour Party were vehemently against the use of government property for the benefit of a US burger giant but could only rage.

The share issue alongside the McDonald's deal did not bring sufficient funds to impact on the club, and as a consequence huge sums of his own money were invested in achieving the 1996 League runners-up position and a place in the European competition for the first time. That said, some 51 per cent of the shares were held by Zammit himself and he sustained his investment until the club finally won the League in 2000.

April 2000 was one of the happiest days of his life. His face was painted on a banner that was hung high from the village band club premises. He was hailed as the saviour of Birkirkara, and a crowd some 10,000-strong turned out for the team home-coming, complete with trophy and his father's dream of the championship realised. But it was a lonely furrow to plough:

It was the culmination of years of solo effort. I didn't have any help. People thought me crazy, they questioned my football abilities. But by 2000 the first part of my mission was achieved ... now I wanted to sustain the club as the best in Malta and begin the second phase which was to make the club self-sufficient.

Phase 2 projected the building of a training complex and stadium. Surface-level all-weather pitches would stand above an underground business complex. All that stood in the way were the Jesuits and their nearby school grounds. He was proposing to exchange some 10m of their land with 12m of the club's existing training pitch. Opposition from the one particular religious Brother brought the proposal down. The refusal was consequential. While five-a-side pitches and a clubhouse were built and raised some monies from being rented out, the anticipated capital of the bigger idea was never realised.

The new ideas met with systematic opposition, though he remained convinced that the obstruction was to the idea and not to the person. His need to attract new blood was always going to annoy those who had been around for decades. Thus shareholders had to face the faction that sided with Joe Gauci, the previous President. Preferring reason to force Zammit got his own way. The championship was the ultimate vindication of his style. So did his business model succeed?

I would say yes ... I'm still respected. I had the final word. But in a village you must not be a dictator, consensus is needed and I had the support of the people.

He did however suffer disillusionment when his business project ran aground on local ingrained football practices. Having bought the best players on the island

and paid the highest wages in the history of the Maltese game he was to see his side defeated in the FA Trophy final some ten days after their championship victory. Furious with what he considered the corruption of his players whom he believed had thrown the game in favour of their Valletta rivals he announced in anger that he would consider selling his interest and leaving:

I may have said it in anger ... but it is hard to hand over something you built yourself with capital, energy and ideas... All the money I spent does not justify what we won.

Between 2001 and 2003 the club's annual expenditure was Lm250,000 but the capital required to build a team was closer to Lm1 million. The shortfall was paid for by Zammit. Although the McDonald's deal was financially 'nothing ... but good in comparison with other clubs – we got the best deal for football in Malta from them' – it went on player's wages, and accounted for only 10 per cent of the income. Gate receipts accounted for 2 per cent of income; the supporters' club raised 16 per cent and money from UEFA competitions provided 10 per cent.

Zammit had no political ambition whatsoever. He enjoyed the 'buzz' of the involvement: 'I might have spent better – but I enjoyed it.' Regrets?

Not a single one ... well maybe ... people abused my generosity and ignorance in the worlds of both football and business.

No hint of antagonism ever crossed his lips when Valletta was mentioned. He had by his own admission good relations with his counterpart Joe Caurana-Curran, even considering him a good friend, despite the acrimony with which fans of the clubs fought. He had also visited Valletta to watch their float parade when they were the League winners, and was proud of the fact that on any day of the week he could walk through Valletta without molestation or abuse.

The mention of Sliema, however, provoked all the powers of mild damnation. A few weeks earlier while on a local TV football chat show he had become embroiled in an argument with his Sliema counterpart over the transfer of players. According to Zammit, Sliema would not sell him any of their players and competed with him for the purchase of all excellent local ones. He believed that the issue was personal, but did not know why. A few years previously, relations with Sliema had been sufficiently close to organise a joint venture to fund a visit to Malta of Juventus, to play a combined Sliema-Birkirkara team.

In 2001, Zammit masterminded a similar trip to Malta by Manchester United:

It was part of our championship-winning celebrations – I got them on my own. Myself and the President of the Manchester United (Malta) supporters club visited Manchester for a week. Even though we lost the game 5–1 we packed Ta-Qali and broke even.

Global publicity was generated for this fixture when both Diego Maradona and the son of Libya's Colonel Gadaffi were considered as potential players for the host team. In the event, Maradona did not appear, as his fee of \$150,000 was too much even for a victorious Maltese team. Sayed Gadaffi was injured, preventing the world from seeing the son of one of the most vociferous opponents of the West perform in a football jersey bearing the McDonald's logo. He watched from the stands. Libya had provided a lucrative market for the retailing branch of Zammit's business enterprises. This brought him into personal contact with Colonel Gadaffi, and their mutual enthusiasm for football led Sayed to organise a training camp in Malta for his Tripoli-based team. Zammit arranged permits and accommodation, and also arranged for Sayed to play against Manchester United.

Zammit was always willing and able to arrange international footballing liaisons, but many Maltese believed him to be naive in his dealings with the local game. His failure to 'fix' matches was seen as a fault, and a contribution to his downfall, though Zammit claimed: 'I would never use such strategies to win games.' Sitting on the MFA Marketing Board and the Strategic Board (seeking to improve local standards) meant he had no obvious antagonism with its President. He had abstained in the 2004 election contest that saw Caruana Curran competing with Mifsud. The regulations that the MFA imposed on local clubs were dismissed by Zammit as 'a joke'. The maximum transfer permitted was Lm20,000 plus Lm2,000 for each year of the remaining contract. One player Zammit bought cost him a six-figure sum; he then recited another five transfer deals all of which were way over the MFA benchmark. As for wages, whatever the MFA stated was the wage-cap was inapplicable to everyone in the Birkirkara squad.

Remaining in control of Birkirkara in 2005, Zammit presided over a team that, while established in the Premier League, was unable to win anything. His business fortunes had also turned, as he lost Lm300 million in assets, and a number of friendships, when the Price Club supermarket chain collapsed. In his own terms, Price Club fell because of naivety and the vested interests of the Maltese economy:

I'm a manufacturer not an investor. I had no idea how to run a retail enterprise. I attended the board meetings of Price Club and I got my picture in the paper and the headlines when it crashed and the creditors closed... This is how matters work in Malta. The economy is divided between manufacturers and traders. The traders consist of Importers and Retailers. The Importers have got the Retailers by the balls, they are their puppets ... Price Club was growing; by 2000 over 16% of the total foodbill market was ours and we began importing ourselves. This pissed the importers off no end, they were scared of the colossus and of losing their monopoly. It was in their interest to kill us off. When the cash flow was tight they called the creditors in. The 90-day credit facility with the importers was not extended, they called a creditors meeting and Price Club crashed.

The crash had brought him to tears and despair. His eyes are moist while recounting these events. The question remains as to what Price Club monies went towards the running of Birkirkara football club.

None ... none whatsoever. I never signed a single cheque for Price Club. Perhaps I should have kept my eye on the ball ... I didn't, others ran it and I was a partner. I lost so much money. Birkirkara victories were expensive for me ... but the money came from my pocket not Price Club.

Mister Mayor: Michael Zammit-Tabona

Fast-talking, ebullient and indiscreet, the diminutive yet confident figure of the man referred to by all who approach him in the course of our talk in late 2006 as 'Mister Michael' is one of life's optimists, who lives a full life, crucial to which is football. Now the owner of 20 vessels offering tourists a variety of cruises from Sliema ferries and one of the island's best hotels, Michael Zammit-Tabona is a wealthy individual from a patrician background with a love of football. Having once placed most of his energies in the domestic football leagues he then, in the face of corruption, pulled out most of his monies and time and now prefers to invest time and monies following Manchester United.

An Anglophile by virtue of his family connections with Lord Mountbatten, the building of Malta's second hotel by Zammit-Tabona's father saw it frequented by naval top-brass in the days of British colonialism. A sports enthusiast via inter-school competition in archery, horse-riding and football, Zammit-Tabona was by his own admission a difficult boarding pupil at St Edwards Jesuit school. His first business was selling confectionery to fellow boarders at the age of 13. A natural rebel who was beaten daily by those in religious robes charged with caring for him, he remembers returning to the family home with underwear bloodied by corporal punishment. A refusal to be cowed led him to continue questioning the educational system he was being raised in and resulted in the resignation of some teaching staff.

By the age of 16 Zammit-Tabona was in Switzerland studying languages and hotel management. By 21 (in 1973) he was managing a hotel in Malta wherein he was to meet the Queen of England. At the same time he began buying second-hand boats, and rented the vessels' hulls to the Captain Morgan rum company for advertising. When the deal ended Zammit-Tabona kept the name (dropping the word rum). Captain Morgan cruises are well known throughout the island. A central figure in the burgeoning UK package holiday business of the late 1970s and 1980s, Zammit-Tabona would bring to Malta some 30,000 sunseekers annually. In the early 1990s he was to open a sea-front hotel in Sliema and diversify into quality tourism with a variety of sport therapies and spa treatments.

Having bought a palatial home in 1984 in Naxxar – one of the most pleasant of Maltese villages – he was, while moving furniture, invited by a neighbour to take a beer at the Naxxar FC bar (the club at the time was in the Third Divi-

sion). In the upstairs room sat a committee meeting of some 20 men who welcomed him and asked him there and then to be Club President. Ignorant of the rules of the association, but not wanting to cause offence and suffer ostracism in his newly adopted home, he accepted the Presidency and within a year Naxxar had won their division and three years later were in the Premier. He was to manage the club's finances which amounted to around Lm35,000 annually and was the man the 400 or so fans looked to for success.

The success Naxxar enjoyed was based around foreign-born players. Favouring English players, Zammit-Tabona brought to Naxxar the former Arsenal, Portsmouth and England centre-forward Paul Mariner, who for 18 months visited Malta to play games and then returned to England. He was replaced by former Liverpool forward David Johnson who had played in three European Cup Finals. More modest UK talent came in the shape of Paul O'Berg. His one-time coach was Simon Lane, once of Chelsea, and a former player-coach was former Brighton full-back Chris Ramsay. A penchant for all things British even saw a coach appointed who had formerly been part of the backroom staff of West Ham United. In later years Naxxar were the pioneers of Nigerian talent in the Malta League.

The Naxxar club survived five seasons at top level, taking points off all the established teams and occasionally causing on-pitch commotion:

One game against Valetta was played on half the pitch – their fans were on the other half and the ref was pissing his pants. Afterwards I'm locked in a cupboard at Ta Qali with a broom in my hand ready to hit the first one who forced the door ... it was exciting.

Despite holding their own in the top division Naxxar were relegated as a consequence of what Zammit-Tabona terms bribery of his players and MFA corruption.

It was points on the pitch versus points on the table ... we lost six points in a strange decision made by the MFA who punished one team but awarded the points to teams below us. As a consequence we got relegated.

Insisting the rival team players never made money out of him or Naxxar FC, Zammit-Tabona recalls how once relegated the final fixture saw their opponents needing a win to avoid relegation. Some of the Naxxar players were offered up to Lm500 to lose the game from opposition supporters who attempted to do the deal in the Naxxar village square. In this situation Zammit-Tabona made footballing history in Malta, being the first Premiership team to fail to fulfil a fixture. Wanting to bring the issue of corruption to a head Zammit-Tabona told the media what was happening and took his squad out for a drink when the scheduled kick-off approached. As a consequence Naxxar were relegated two divisions and deducted 10 points.

As part of the punishment for such football-related insolence, Zammit-Tabona was suspended from the Naxxar Presidency. The EGM of the committee

elected his wife a week later. She was to become the first female president of a Maltese club – but only learned of her new-found position at 8.00 a.m. the next morning when asked by a journalist for a comment. This scenario endured for two years – until Zammit-Tabona was ‘reinstated’ by his committee which he explains was never a committee structure but was three to four people who existed as a ‘kitchen cabinet’ who would meet on an ad hoc basis in a system that has endured for 20 years. The club provided a modest income for players from modest income streams. Primarily this came from the club bar in the village square which began in the late 1980s. Other monies came from control of parking lots at the annual trade fair held on the outskirts of the village. Yet other funds came from supporters’ club barbecues. When in the Premier League, the personal cost to Zammit-Tabona was Lm40,000 to 50,000 a season, mainly on wages and bonuses, and primarily for the foreign players’ wages and accommodation.

Eight years as Deputy Mayor in Naxxar was a public office gained out of his position in the football club. First elected in 1992, the vote he received was undoubtedly football-related. Considering the eight years as ‘fun’, Zammit-Tabona could claim to have changed the face of Naxxar by his building of a park and five-a-side football pitch and cultivating trees to shade the sun. He was to tie himself to a tree for a photo-shoot to publicise a resistance campaign – led by himself – against plans to chop down a tree directly outside the football club door. After two four-year terms in political office Zammit-Tabona saw his 18-year-old daughter elected in his place.

The best Naxxar achieved was at one time standing second behind Valletta. The aim was to get into European competition and ask for a few favours from Manchester United – namely the loan of four or five of their second team – to give them a chance of making the second round. In April 2000 Zammit-Tabona announced his resignation as President, declaring that his target of winning a trophy and getting into Europe had not been realised. All the Naxxar players were thus available for transfer at the end of the season.

Well known to some of the Board of Manchester United, Zammit-Tabona could sit with the United directors, travelled in the open-top bus celebrations and at times on the first team coach when United played in Europe. As a former Manchester United shareholder Zammit-Tabona knew many influential people at Old Trafford. At a fixture in Turin, he was invited to be the club’s guest and had his accommodation paid for. When in Malta, Alex Ferguson would stay in a hotel owned by Zammit-Tabona. Bringing Manchester United to play a village of just 10,000 people was quite a feat. Visiting in 1987, the Manchester United squad came to the Naxxar clubhouse and played an exhibition match the following day. Alex Ferguson fielded a strong team against a side managed on the day by former Manchester United boss Tommy Docherty. The opposition consisted of Naxxar players alongside guest players brought over specifically for the fixture. Thus Bruce Grobelaar of Liverpool turned out with Kevin Radcliffe of Everton and former United player Sammy McIlroy. Unfortunately these and others went on a drinking spree the night before the match, until 6:00 a.m., then took the field at midday at Ta Qali. Needless to say, United won the game

11–0 in front of just a few thousand – a crowd limited by the fact that the following day was a general election. At what cost was all this?

Some of it came from the travel business I owned in Manchester ... other monies went from the club to Manchester United ... to whom or where it went, who knows?

The mysterious finances of this three-day event have provoked continual rumours ever since. For some, the monies were never paid – the huge attendances never materialised, and therefore the trip must have made a loss. For others, the trip was an opportunity for one Manchester United official to line his pockets.

Zammit-Tabona is forthright in his accusations that Maltese football is corrupt. In the late 1980s a game could be bought with just Lm400 to 800 given to three crucial players. The source of such monies were club committees and betting syndicates. Naxxar, however, did not indulge in such practices:

The referees were always against us when playing Valletta. We never beat Valletta in 12 years – that worries me. Small clubs don't stand a chance. It's a Maltese syndrome: If we win we will give you something. They like strong teams with supporters who can intimidate and beat you up.

Part of the problem, he acknowledges, was treachery within his own teams – 'one or two or three will always screw you up ... or buy the coach to play the wrong tactics ...' In the face of the likelihood of his best players being bribed to lose, Zammit-Tabona increased their wages:

It's a combination of position and character. I'd call on the crucial few players and give them a Lm200 bonus to win and tell them to ensure their colleagues did win the game. *Did it work?* They'd try and screw you for four games but they'd ensure that you got the vital points.

Believing the Maltese game corrupt from top to bottom he recounts rival team players entering the village square offering their players monies to no avail: 'We were the most honest club in Malta.'

Antagonistic to the national team set-up, Zammit-Tabona resented the selection of his players without those in charge discussing issues with him. When injured on national team duty he was left to pay their wages. With a small squad and limited budget the national team duty was an obstacle to his pursuit of domestic trophies. Contemptuous of the MFA, Zammit-Tabona was publicly critical of the deal Joe Mifsud struck for the sale of TV broadcasting rights.

There was double-dealing. He dealt with a media company connected to a former German international player and Mifsud was a godfather of the son of the media company's owner.

On national TV Zammit-Tabona called the deal and implicitly Joe Mifsud idiotic. The future of Maltese football in Zammit-Tabona's vision is bleak:

No one in Division One wants to enter the Premier. If you do as a player half of you are out of a job and income – you're not good enough and so will be replaced. Look at the league, we're all playing for middle position. One win and you're in the top three – one defeat and you're in the bottom three.

That said, he will not give up the role he has established and possibly his endless acknowledgement as 'Mister Michael':

Somebody has to keep it in the right direction. Keep the nursery open. The kids of the village can't do sport because our state schools are too poor to promote sports – and our people are lazy and obese.

Is-sur-Ton: Tony Bezzina

President for 28 years of the only Premier club never relegated, the name of Hibernians FC (Hibs) is synonymous with its President Tony Bezzina. Historically renowned as a good club forever failing at the final hurdle, Bezzina sought to alter this reputation and has had some limited success. Having followed Hibs from the age of eight Bezzina became the club's President in 1978, having joined the committee at the age of 22. After three years on the committee he was to leave over 'ways of doing things', keeping his activism for the supporters' club. He returned to the inner sanctum and by 2006, aged 58, Bezzina still had an infectious enthusiasm for Hibs, despite health problems.

No angel in his youth and even in his late fifties a man not to rile, this generally amiable character is only at peace when among his football family. Everyone in the village respectfully acknowledges Bezzina, and football circles acknowledge that Bezzina is the most passionate fan of all the Premier Club presidents. In his youth he met with fellow fans days before a game to gather fan paraphernalia. He would walk the four miles there and back to the Empire Stadium in the company of dozens of mates:

We collected bells and rattles – and accepted that bottles would be thrown at us by rivals on the route and at the stadium. The stadium is like a church now – thanks to the MFA, you can't swear, stand, or bring in banners. That's not football as I know it.

Perhaps context is crucial. In June 2002 the band of the Hibs fans was banned from the Hibs enclosure at Ta Qali stadium for three games after twice accompanying insulting songs directed towards fans of Birkirkara in a Super Cup match.

One suspects that while Bezzina would naturally enjoy the glory that a winning club bestows on those who patronise it, he was meanwhile content

with the busy social life that football brought him. Synonymous with the dock-side working-class district of Paola, Bezzina was the proverbial local boy made good and a man of the people who lived and would always be with those among whom he was raised. As the big-man of Paola he was a highly respected figure. Rarely without his mid-forties football side-kick 'Hutch' who described his role as that of 'fixer', Hutch was the sounding-board and go-between for Bezzina and a variety of voices. Attending all Hibs games (with Hutch), Bezzina was most relaxed in the Pavilion bar of the Hibs sporting association. Here his largesse was renowned and the drinking sessions legendary. It was hard to dislike Tony Bezzina.

Born and bred in Paola, Bezzina played football as a boy in the local Schriber ground standing some 70m from his family home, which grounded Bezzina in local football enthusiasm. Studying as a boarder at St Alysious and later at St Edwards, Bezzina left school at 16 and worked in the family business. The family home in the village square was sustained by family money arising from marine salvage. The monies earned came from a commitment to a dangerous and arduous task alongside entrepreneurship. Bezzina chuckles when recalling the family plundering of the British Navy and merchant fleet:

we salvaged many boats ... and returned them for scrap ... but there were never any brass or copper fixtures given to them ... who knows where they went? Bottom of the sea probably [laughs].

Adding heavy lifting and steel-erecting to the business portfolio, by 2004 Bezzina was employing 130 men in manual duties and 30 in white-collar tasks. His main trading post was Libya which his father first visited in 1948. For Bezzina work and making money was more significant than political debate. Declaring himself non-political and politically neutral, he claimed he had always sought to get on with all people in the cause of business. Such diplomacy seemed to serve him well in the antagonistic nature of Maltese football. His diplomacy with politicians of both parties saw Hibs awarded a 49-year lease on their Corradine ground in 2004. Bezzina could build facilities knowing they could not be taken away at (political) whim and whatever he built would outlive him.

In the 'politics in everything' ethos of Malta, Hibs were considered a Labour club. There was evidence aplenty to support this belief. The facilities owned by Hibs are a product of Lorry Sant's largesse. The former British naval recreation base was given to Hibs in 1980 by Sant, who also happened to be Labour MP for Paola. Sant wished to leave a landmark to the people who elected him. Under a system known as 'encroachment' the ground was rented annually from the government. This precarious arrangement stigmatised long-term investment and development. To assist this, Sant used his Ministry to enhance his constituency's football stadium. The corrugated-iron roof of the moribund Empire Stadium was brought to the Corradine in 1983. The Pavilion building (formerly a military prison and indoor sports facility) was developed into a social club and

basketball and squash facility with public money, and the ground was given a turf pitch, only the second of its kind after the Marsa Sports Club. When Sant left office, the facilities remained in the hands of the Hibernian Club by virtue of Bezzina having good relations with politicians of all persuasions. In 2002, Hibs commemorated 20 years at Corradin.

The developments around the Corradin paid off. The Hibs were the best team in Malta for a few years in the mid-1980s. The entity grew; Bezzina was approached by local sports enthusiasts to form an association which took the name of the Associazione Sportiva Hibernian (AS Hibs). This sporting association had football at its core (run by Bezzina) alongside women's basketball, volleyball, judo (a flirtation with baseball lasted just two years) and a recently (2006) formed Rugby Union side. Arising out of this, by 2005 some 25 people were drawing an income from AS Hibs. Each of the sports have their own elected committees but exist under the umbrella of AS Hibs. Loath to interfere, Bezzina wanted them to exist as self-sustaining entities. Since 2001 Hibs became a limited company, 51 per cent owned by Bezzina, the remainder split between the AS Hibs Sports Clubs and other individuals. The Corradin ground has a management board with a chair and members, although Bezzina states that 'policy is made by me'. The football ground makes money from the MFA for fulfilling League fixtures, and from Northern European teams who use its facilities as a winter training camp. In recent years Scandinavian and top-class Dutch clubs have spent weeks at the Corradin.

The membership of AS Hibs peaked at 600 but in 2006 some 300 children were registered in the football nursery. Taking control of the latter entity and buying the buildings for the nursery committee to meet in, Bezzina's concern is to stress the local and celebrate what Paola has to offer. Over the decade 1996 to 2006 Bezzina sought to develop local-born players because, as he stresses dramatically with fist to heart, 'the blood is here'. Emotion plays a role in his footballing beliefs but Bezzina shows that locality alone does not win trophies.

Attempting to run football on the principles of his successful business, Bezzina is adamant that no president in Malta can make money out of the game. For him, money is secondary to a sense of both curiosity and pastoral care:

I know all the people in the village ... all the committee, all the players and their families. I want to know what's going on. It's the same as my job site ... I have to know.

While the stress was on nurturing the local born, Hibs were willing to look to foreigners. In the 1950s and 1960s Czech players turned out for Hibs. The famous Stanley Matthews briefly managed the club in the 1960s. In the early 1980s an Italian by the name of Luigi Bongiovanni signed without a transfer fee. By the early 1990s the nationality of choice was British, in the shape of Mick Docherty and George Lawrence and later a solitary Dane in the shape of Carl Zacchau. In the 1990s the English coach Bob Higgins was brought to Malta by Hibs and changed the mentality of coaching: 'Up until then we didn't

know what professionalism was.’ The British connection resulted in the appointment of former Arsenal and England international Brian Talbot as coach in 1995 which saw two championship-winning seasons. In early 2000 Mark Miller was coach for two seasons before the Maltese Robert Gatt took over for the next six seasons.

The style and system of play Bezzina leaves to his coaches although he perhaps understates his involvement in proceedings:

I won’t interfere with the coach ... but I can guide the coach ... if I see a player is in need of a rest ... if he’s clever enough he knows how I’m thinking.

Calling two playing squad meetings per season – one at the beginning and one before the first game of the second round of the league – Bezzina saw his role in the first instance as introducing new players. Any criticism of their performance he insists is done with the player in private. The Maltese-born Hibs players receive around Lm300 a month, which Bezzina believes is the lowest income available to players from the top five Maltese clubs. So why would Hibs players turn up for such a low return?

The name! Look at the facilities here – and our traditions. I always pay what is due ... when I’ve shook hands no one can say I don’t give. Contracts are all the same ... but I can give extras when I feel like it – Christmas, Easter, end-of-season bonuses. If a player needs money I can give it right away – you having a baby? I might help out with Lm1,000.

We live with what we have ... Maltese football exists because of 20 crazy people. People were loyal with me ... I was very lucky. I got screwed up 28 years ago ... when I accept something I do it to the best of my ability. Many who helped me are now well into middle age – I can’t let them down now. You’ve given them part of their life because they did the same for you.

Some Lm70,000 annually leaves Bezzina’s personal income to fund his football hobby and passion. In return he expects dedication and honesty. In his 28-year association with the club only one player – a goalkeeper – has ever been banished from club premises for what was considered blatant cheating in allowing goals in while in the employ of the Hibs. To this day the same individual would not be welcome in the company of Bezzina.

When asked if Maltese practices militated against the pursuit of professionalism, and whether winning is by virtue of footballing ability alone, Bezzina laughs and is remarkably candid with (we think) a metaphor of human nature:

Everybody who raises an arm proves that we all in circumstances stink ... I’m not saying bribery never occurs in Maltese football and I won’t say Hibs have never had monies to persuade players ... we have enough to compete.

Hibernians as a going concern are dependent on Bezzina. Monies enter the coffers via adverts on pitch-side hoardings and via playing apparel but the words emblazoned across the breast of the shirts advertise Bezzina's company and have done so for 28 years. At nursery level the shirts proclaim a company owned by the former Paola President of some three decades previously.

As Chair of the Premier League Standing Committee Bezzina has a profile in both media and football circles and has used it to criticise the MFA President Joe Mifsud.

Mifsud is ignorant and selfish and for a lawyer cannot communicate. The MFA is a club not an association – he's supposed to safeguard the rules. The deal on broadcasting he got was LM1 million less than the Premier clubs could have got ... that said I never saw the contract. I see Mifsud and smile and comment about the monies required for his new suit and tie ... I also accept that as a good administrator it would not be easy to find a replacement.

At the same time due to broadcasting disputes Bezzina points out that in the cafe where we sit on a Sunday afternoon amidst 300 Maltese watching Chelsea vs. Man Utd no bar in the village can broadcast Maltese football highlights or the result of Maltese matches because of the 2006 boycott of the MFA by Net TV and Super One TV. Not particularly perturbed by this fact Bezzina seems long in the tooth and realises the local conditions that militate against competence and progress.

Football in Malta will always remain the same ... maybe we should become a region of Europe and join a small European league ... we have an Arabic/Mediterranean mentality – there's always pique between people, villages, Presidents, but there's usually not much more than a lot of noise with the media making a big fuss.

The paternalism of figures such as *Is-Sur-Ton* Bezzina is that of the archetypal Maltese footballing 'big-man'. Opportunistic rather than partisan in his political allegiance, he like Victor Tedesco in Hamrun was able to unite warring *festa* band clubs under the banner of local football when in 2003 even the Church despaired of finding a solution to entrenched antagonistic *pika* (competitiveness) in Paola.

While many such big-men use their positions to launch political careers, this is not universal. Nor is political office necessarily sought at national level. With the establishment in 1992 of a system of local government, footballing big-men could seek office, as Independent candidates, in local councils or as town/village mayors.

The interview data presented here shows a high degree of candour in explaining the relationship between personal and club financial dealings, but there still remains a degree of ambiguity, and a tacit acknowledgement through-

out that bribery and corruption exist within the game. Indeed, the boundaries between licit and illicit payments to players becomes blurred, as clubs are forced to pay illegally high wages, bonuses and other 'positive' incentives; while in Bezzina's account we come close to an acknowledgement that such financial incentives are seen as interchangeable with more problematic, 'negative' inducements to influence the outcome of particular games.

A final enduring theme is the relationship between the clubs and the MFA, which in all cases is presented in a negative light. Joe Mifsud is the villain of the piece, and it is to him, the 'super big-man' of Maltese football, that we turn in the next chapter.

7 All the President's men?

Follow the money

The previous chapter – on football presidential big-men – revealed an enduring tension between the clubs and their ambitions, and the MFA, as personified in Joe Mifsud, its President since 1992. Mifsud might be considered a ‘super big-man’, who like other MFA presidents before him has not only consolidated his power and prestige within Malta, but also expanded his influence to an international stage. Jo-Jo Mifsud-Bonnici, MFA President from 1968 until 1982, had been elected to the UEFA Disciplinary Committee through his ties with the Italian Arturio Franchi, and George Abela, his successor and Mifsud’s predecessor, had narrowly missed election on to the UEFA Executive. By 1999, Mifsud sat on no fewer than eight committees of both FIFA and UEFA. Sitting on the executive committees of both of these organisations, Mifsud also chaired the UEFA Referee’s Committee and FIFA’s Committee for Legal Matters. He was also FIFA’s vice-chair of the Players Status Committee and a member of three other FIFA committees – National Associations, Youth and Security, and Fair Play. These external loyalties and ambitions were to bring Mifsud into direct conflict with the member clubs – and presidents – of the MFA, and with other members of the MFA committee, particularly his one-time friend and MFA Treasurer, Norman Darmanin-Demajo.

Turf warfare

Much of the conflict between the clubs and the MFA revolved around the use and access to the Ta Qali Stadium, an issue that dominated the relationship between the MFA and the Labour government – particularly Lorry Sant – since the building of the stadium in 1981. Initially, the Nationalist-leaning MFA President Mifsud-Bonnici refused to move Maltese football from the old Gzira stadium, but even when his Labour-friendly replacement George Abela took office in 1982 the issue was not settled.

Having secured funding and a workforce for the building of the stadium, Sant clearly regarded it as his own domain. The MFA had agreed to use the stadium, but Sant made it clear that he was still in control. During the MFA Trophy Final in 1985, with Hamrun playing Zurrieq, crowd disorder at Ta Qali delayed the match. Sant visited Abela in the bowels of the grandstand and told

him to abandon the game because people were getting hurt in the fracas. Abela refused, informing Sant that the decision to abandon a game was the referee's alone. In the ensuing argument, Sant threatened to pull the police out of the stadium, at which point Abela warned him that any resulting injuries would be his responsibility. The game was played to completion and the police managed the disorder. In an ensuing press release Sant hurled insults at Abela. In another incident, Sant threatened to lock the national side out of Ta Qali when they turned up for an international fixture with Ireland.

The politics of access to turf went further than Ta Qali itself, and also affected the national squad's access to training facilities. Sant objected to the national squad using the Marsa Sports Club, which he had taken over, and would lock them out of the premises. They and MFA officials were forced to scale the fences to enter and train. They were also prevented from using Ta Qali for training.

Sant's ambition appears to have been to establish his own, competitor football association. In the late 1970s, in opposition to the MFA, he established a separate Referee's Association, a Federation League (again in opposition to the MFA) and argued that the national team players were government employees, effectively nationalising their contracts. He formed his own Malta national team called the National Team XI, which played one notable game against Nottingham Forest. In response the MFA issued a directive which informed anyone playing for the National Team XI, or within the Federation League, that they could not play in the MFA Leagues. The response was that the Federation League teams were predominantly workplace teams, and how could they refuse to play, if chosen?

Meanwhile, public interest in football was in serious decline. The Ta Qali pitch was in ruins, and the MFA, with no income from the turnstiles, faced eviction from their Valletta premises for non-payment of rent. Realising the potential popularity to be gained from demonstrating his largesse to the football-supporting public, Mintoff called a meeting with Sant, Fr Hilary, George Abela and Karmenu Mifsud-Bonnici (Mintoff's adviser). Mintoff asked if the MFA was prepared to pay rent for Ta Qali, in return for control of the facility and income from matches. Abela replied that he would turn the stadium into a theatre of football, because the game in Malta was dead in the current situation. An hour later the MFA had the stadium for a rent of Lm10,000 per annum. Abela had initially offered Lm1,000 but negotiated access to the Pace Grosso pitch and the Marsa ground for Division Three and Division Two games as part of the deal.

The President Elect: Joe Mifsud

While footballing politics were dominated in the pre-Mifsud era by conflict between the MFA and the government, with Mifsud came the beginning of an established enmity between the MFA and the Premier League clubs. Joe Mifsud took over the MFA Presidency in 1992 and raised the revenue for the MFA,

building the infrastructure which made the game in Malta more plausible. He rationalised the structure of finances to maximise MFA income from Ta Qali, and exploited television coverage deals to an unprecedented extent – to the benefit of MFA and, rumour had it, himself. By 2006 the MFA had some 30 officials on its payroll. Most held a part-time status but could earn a modest, but very welcome, income. Under Mifsud a number of new committees were begun, but while these pleased the lower division clubs, he infuriated many of the Premier League chairmen who considered him unapproachable and over-defensive.

Mifsud came from a modest background. Alleged to hate those with inherited wealth and status – and therefore many of the Premier League Presidents – he is characterised by friends as a man determined to succeed. Believed to have more friends abroad than in Malta he was accredited with obtaining unprecedented funding for his homeland football association from UEFA and FIFA sources. He was clearly well regarded by a number of international Football Association representatives, and Mifsud stood for and was elected to the 12-man executive committee of UEFA, and later to the 30-man FIFA Executive Committee. He was elected to the former at the expense of a German candidate, which was considered phenomenal, and was partly a consequence of his courting allies within the small post-Soviet nations that joined UEFA in the early 1990s. His politicking within FIFA saw him invite its President, Sepp Blatter, to Malta in 2000 to see him elected President at the UEFA Congress.

How Mifsud attained the lofty heights of world football mystified many observers, but he successfully developed a number of important friendships – among them UEFA President Lennart Johansson. Mifsud invited both Johansson and his deputy Michel Platini to his daughter's wedding in Malta in November 2006, and the latter – now UEFA President – even acted as a witness at the ceremony. The reception, held in the elite Cordina Cafe, Valletta, saw the main street blocked by police for the benefit of guests, a procedure previously only accorded visiting royalty.

From a humble family in the tiny village of Qrendi (pop. 3,500), Mifsud's critics gossip about him as *nouveau riche*; and a man who initially knew little about the game of football. The demise of the Qrendi village football team in the early 1980s was seen as symptomatic of his lack of civic duty. Had he been a 'big-man' of the normal variety, he would certainly have invested his energies in the growth or at least survival of this local team. Having twice stood for Parliament as a Labour candidate, and twice failed to get elected, Mifsud obtained a footballing constituency – with the limited MFA electorate – which gave him access to considerable power. Mifsud managed to become the first MFA President to receive a living income. This was considered to go against the principle of volunteerism in Maltese football, and only became public knowledge following revelations during the disagreement he was to have with former MFA Treasurer, Norman Darmanin-Demajo.

Often thought to favour his own international ambitions above those of his local clubs and Association, Mifsud has an awkward relationship with the

Maltese media. In 1993 he boycotted the Maltese press following a number of disputes, and his overseas activities caused a minor scandal when it was discovered how much he earned in bonuses from his international duties with UEFA and FIFA. In February 2005, Mifsud spoke out on television against local journalists, in a programme entitled 'MFA Magazine', when they asked prying questions about the state of Maltese football. He referred to them as 'stupid, venomous and biting serpents'.

Mifsud clearly felt vulnerable. In 2003 to 2004 total premier attendances were down 50,000 on the previous season. Attendances of 3,000 were considered big. As all Maltese were aware, the domestic league was boring, did not facilitate surprises and was totally dependent on the financial indulgence of half a dozen men. The best that could be achieved by smaller clubs was a one season's surprise victory, usually courtesy of a president seeking some unexpected glory for his local team. In the context of this tedium, local journalists called for a Premier League based on district – as opposed to village – representation. The MFA responded with a call to the tradition of established socio-geographic boundaries and antagonisms, which were at the centre of the Maltese game. The decision, though, as all within the MFA, had come primarily from the clubs in the lower leagues. The Premier League clubs might have relished the potential of re-establishing themselves as district, rather than village, teams. Premier presidents as early as 1998 had met to discuss the possibility of forming their own association to both control their own destinies and seek out the more lucrative sponsorship deals. During the same year, reports in the Italian footballing newspaper *Gazzetta Della Sport* suggested that Mifsud, when interviewed before an Italy vs. Malta fixture, had suggested that the Malta team relinquish its national status and join the Italian club Serie 'C' – the Italian Third Division. Mifsud was pilloried in the local press, and claimed his words were misinterpreted.

As with powerful people everywhere, Mifsud was – and continues to be – the subject of numerous rumours and negative speculation. A trained criminal lawyer whose practice specialises in defending the Maltese poor, cynics criticised his dependence on state legal aid payments, and accused him of delegating too much work because he was always away on MFA/UEFA business. The trips themselves were the subject of speculation, some alleging that he habitually travelled on economy class tickets, pocketing the first class expenses allowed by UEFA. Others questioned his commitment to family life, alleging that on return to Malta from abroad he would visit his office before his family home – a powerful criticism in a society that holds the family as sacred above all else. He is reputed to have foreign bank accounts containing monies that belong by rights to the MFA. If he had a saving grace in the eyes of his critics, it was a reputation for working very hard for Malta's interests and those of European football more broadly. Indeed, even his critics offered him the backhanded compliment that he was a better football administrator than lawyer.

Hosting the events

Power in local football is vested in the Executive Committee of the MFA. Lesser power is available in the MFA Council, which consists of representatives of all clubs in the four divisions operated by the MFA. The highest authority in Maltese football is the General Assembly of the MFA, which is held at least once a year, usually in July. During this meeting, an administrative report and an audited financial report are presented for the comments and approval of the members of the Association. Elections are also held for the ordinary members of the Executive Committee. The officers of the Association, namely the President, three vice-presidents and an Honorary Treasurer, are elected every two years. The General Secretary, who is also an officer of the Association, is chosen by the Council, and has an indefinite tenure of office. The General Assembly of the Association is also empowered to make changes to the Statute of the Association, which require a two-thirds majority of those present and voting.

Given this structure, it is relatively easy to generate allegiances within the MFA that effectively sideline the Premier League clubs, which provide much of the revenue to the MFA. Like the conflicts between the MFA and government before him, the Mifsud-era antagonism between the clubs and the Association revolved around access to Ta Qali Stadium. The MFA's power is a product of both statute and finance. A disgruntled employee cannot start legal proceedings against any football club without the MFA's approval. As for finance, the MFA pockets 60 per cent of income from all games played at the National Stadium – a sum that provides for much controversy.

The Maltese government gives no money to football clubs and, hence, the game relies on money from sponsorship, television rights and the income from matches – as well, of course, as the patronage of the rich 'big-men'. A ticket for a Premier League match at Ta Qali in 2006 cost Lm3. Half of this goes to the MFA automatically. Proportions of the remainder go towards policing; and a final split is made between the MFA and the four clubs appearing on any given day. For every Lm3 spent by a supporter, a mere 24 cents goes to the football club. The stadium is leased by the government to the MFA, who pay for the running costs. The MFA would argue that ground maintenance, floodlights, electricity bills and the costs of cashiers, referees and security are not cheap. The clubs, wanting more money, are aware that the four-way split of the remainder is not distributed in proportion to the crowds watching any particular game. The bigger clubs feel they systematically lose out. In the lower divisions, income from the turnstiles is pooled in an account system, held by the MFA, and is distributed equally to all teams at the end of the season. What this means crucially is that domestic footballing success is not financially beneficial to the winning club.

In this situation, one can see the attraction for bigger clubs of building their own stadiums. Initially, when games were played at either the Hibernians or Hamrun grounds, 40 per cent of the gate money was split between the two

teams, though an agreement was reached in 2000 that each club would be paid Lm1,000 when playing at these grounds, regardless of the size of the crowd. This procedure was accepted by the MFA.

The big monies are available in European competition, and the aim for the bigger clubs is to progress further than the first round of a European competition. When playing in Europe, the clubs own all the gate money plus broadcasting rights to the game. Television rights and advertising can be sold for that game independently of other ongoing contracts. However, UEFA legislation fed into the dispute between Mifsud's MFA and the Premier League clubs over revenues from Ta Qali. UEFA regulations declared in 2003 that if clubs did not have minimum 3,000 seating capacity they could not compete in European competitions. Only Ta Qali in Malta has such a capacity, but the MFA imposed a fee for clubs playing there in European competitions – believed to be Lm3,000 per game. The clubs objected, arguing that this was their only opportunity to make any meaningful money, and the fee significantly cut into their earnings.

A series of meetings between the Premier League clubs and Mifsud over the issue led to further acrimony. In one such meeting the Sliema President Robert Arrigo was barred by Mifsud from speaking on the issue as he was not a recognised MFA delegate. In June 2003, Sliema were drawn against Skonto Riga of Latvia. The MFA imposed a fee of Lm5,000 for Sliema's use of Ta Qali, and the insulted Arrigo suggested he would ask Riga to play both legs in Latvia instead.

Mifsud had already drawn swords with Arrigo over the issue of employing non-Maltese European players. With the MFA allowing only three foreign players, regardless of their origin, Arrigo threatened to take the MFA to the European court to force them to recognise the Bosman ruling. Mifsud countered that if he did this, Sliema would be suspended from MFA competition. In February 2005 Maltese MEP Simon Busutill accused Mifsud of operating a system contrary to EU law. By permitting restraint of trade on non-Maltese EU citizens, he was denying a fundamental EU principle. In response, Mifsud argued that his stance was to protect local youth football and used the article that recognised the 'specificity of sports' in the European Constitution and the possible distinction between sport when it implies an economic activity and other economic activity.

The MFA under Mifsud has received a number of accusations that its financial dealings are underhand and corrupt. The Premier League presidents seek answers to the advertising deals that are negotiated between the MFA and sponsoring companies, and the monies awarded from television broadcasting agreements. In 2003, the Premier Leagues' Standing Committee agreed to leave *en masse* at the time of voting at the MFA General Assembly. In the event, the agreement was broken and individuals voted pragmatically.

A roof on spending: the Millennium Stand

One of the main sources of funding for football globally is revenue from the rights for television broadcasting. Television provided a much-needed input of

cash into the MFA coffers during George Abela's presidency. At the time, the MFA had a match-by-match agreement, which was seldom lucrative, as most of Malta's fixtures were against minor nations. One game of interest to the Northern European market was Malta vs. Holland, which was played in Aachen, Germany – a neutral venue chosen because UEFA had banned home games in Malta, following crowd disorder at the Empire Stadium during a match between Malta and Turkey in November 1979. With the television rights proceeds of this match, the MFA were able to buy their Valletta headquarters outright, solving the rental crisis. After this bright outcome matters grew worse when Cesar Luhti, who controlled the advertising account of the German FA, bought the rights to all Maltese games, regardless of the status of their opponent. A friend of Luhti was Gunther Netzer, who in turn was a friend of Horst Heese, who arrived shortly afterwards to manage the Maltese side. The MFA is still contracted to the broadcasting company founded by Luhti, and Joe Mifsud, Abela's successor, is godparent to one of Luhti's children.

In 2002, a new stand was built at Ta'Qali, named rather bizarrely the Millennium Stand. With a capacity of 5,200 which includes 20 executive boxes, it houses underneath a 24-hour leisure centre containing a swimming pool, gym, café and retail outlets. There are offices and boxes, which are privatised and available for hire to corporate fans. It is a grand edifice, which many regard as a monument to the ego of Mifsud the President. Its construction caused widespread resentment beyond Maltese footballing circles, further opening up the rift between the MFA and the clubs. The contracts for the building and refurbishments that the structure required were widely coveted in Malta, and there was intrigue about the process of tendering for and the final decisions about the contracts. Many saw the contracts as unduly beneficial to their recipients. As one skilled worker informed us, 'The MFA were paying workers Lm12 for a square metre of tiling, whereas the national rate was Lm4.'

The stadium is seen by some as a white elephant for football in Malta, the grandeur of which is not matched by ambition for the future footballers of the country. This was summed up by Normal Darmanin-Demajo, the one-time MFA Treasurer, who used the analogy 'If the King has a new castle that's fine. But when your people are all without shoes and the King is building another castle that goes against my morality.' One football club president summed up the discrepancy between stadium development and development of the national game as follows:

The Lm4.5 million stand is a legacy to himself. That could have paid for 10 pitches in 10 districts of Malta – this would have provided training grounds and progress.

The stand cost almost Lm256,000 from MFA funds, yet Darmanin-Demajo felt he was not adequately consulted. Other critics asked why the original plans to put a canopy roof on the stand were changed half way through the project. No answer was forthcoming.

In July 2004, Mifsud was re-elected to the MFA Presidency, winning 56 votes to the 41 obtained by Joe Caruana-Curran. Caruana-Curran had opposed the Millennium Stand project because he had his doubts about its feasibility. The response from Mifsud asked why there had been no other candidates to contest his presidency when certain people seemed to be only interested in opposing all that the Association was doing. In the same year, all 49 Maltese football clubs under UEFA jurisdiction were granted licences. This effectively declared Maltese football financially secure and free from all malpractice.

Blowing the whistle: money talks

If the Premier League presidents saw an opportunity to oppose, and perhaps overthrow, Mifsud, the campaign was spear-headed by Norman Darmanin-Demajo. Born in Sliema and raised and educated at St Aloysius', Darmanin-Demajo was in his mid fifties in 2006 and pondering his next move. Divorced, with grown-up children, and living what he described as an idyllic life in a Gozo maisonette, he combined accountancy consultancy with teaching lateral thinking (often to those imprisoned) and spent much of his free time on the mainland in his capacity as CEO of Luxol St Andrews nursery. With 550 children registered and a Lm45,000 turnover the Luxol facility was the best of its kind in Malta. That said, Darmanin-Demajo realised the futility of producing good youth talent in Malta, arguing that 'at 16 the university ends for promising players in Malta'. In an attempt to rectify this he was, the day after we met, to visit Bolton Wanderers and Glasgow Rangers to discuss arrangements with aspiring talent and to convince them of the benefits of using the Luxol facilities for winter training breaks.

A good player in his time, Darmanin-Demajo had played in Europe in the 1970s with Valletta, and at the end of his career had played at Qrendi. While there he met club President Joe Mifsud who became a close personal friend and appointed Darmanin-Demajo to the position of MFA Treasurer, and subsequently manager of the MFA Technical Centre. By November 2000, however, this relationship had grown sour. Ostensibly, the argument surrounded the unauthorised purchase of office furniture for the Technical Centre. Mifsud the President declared that he should be consulted on all decisions of expenditure, which Darmanin-Demajo considered unnecessary interference, and so resigned his position. He kept his office as MFA Treasurer but then refused to attend meetings involving financial matters for the MFA Council. When he did attend meetings of the Council, the Executive and indeed the AGM, Darmanin-Demajo questioned the expenses lavished on the Millennium Stand, which had originally been costed at Lm100,000, then signed off as Lm200,000 by himself in a 1999 document sent to UEFA, but rose to Lm256,000. The cost of the stand had thus risen exponentially and at the same time as an agreement was signed with an Italian steel company for the stand's steelworks. Darmanin-Demajo expressed his reservations about the cost of the project and how the costs had escalated without authorisation. He also claimed that his opinion as

Treasurer was always ignored by the President and added that he was not party to any negotiations with the Italian steel company.

The stand was funded in part by loans from UEFA and an advance of Lm770,000 from the CWL television companies, which gave them the rights for all matches in Malta to be broadcast on foreign stations until 2008. The MFA President said that such an agreement was made by the Executive Committee the previous December. The British tabloid newspaper, the *News of the World*, cited Darmanin-Demajo as stating that the whole deal was done in secret, and that Mifsud signed it alone. In MFA history two signatories were required for every contract, as laid down in its rule 154(ii). Furthermore, the Swiss-based CWL was headed by Gunther Netzer, who was an ambassador for the Germany World Cup 2006 bid. This set of intersections linked the internal, local politics of Maltese football and their new stand, with the global politics of FIFA, World Cups and international corporate television and sponsorships.

FIFA and funding: the mystery of the World Cup bid

In the July 2000 election to host the 2006 World Cup the Germans beat South Africa by a single vote (12–11), courtesy of an abstention by the New Zealand delegate, which defied the instructions of the Oceania region he represented to support South Africa's bid. The President of Germany's 2006 World Cup Organising Committee was Franz Beckenbauer, the former World Cup winner captain, nicknamed 'Der Kaiser'. In April 2003 the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* claimed that Bayern Munich and a firm linked to the German media mogul Leo Kirch had bribed four small FIFA federations – Thailand, Tunisia, Trinidad and Tobago and Malta – to support the German World Cup bid. In return, German *Bundesliga* champions Bayern Munich, whose President was Beckenbauer, would play friendly games in each of the four nations and Kirch would offer financial incentives via monies on TV rights. These four Associations had changed their votes late in the bidding process, allowing the vote to swing in favour of Germany. Mifsud had voted for Germany late in the day, but claimed that UEFA had instructed its delegates to vote for the Germans, and thus had merely followed their directive.

Prior to the vote, in 1999, Beckenbauer had allegedly dined at the home of Mifsud, the food prepared by a chef hired from the Malta Hilton Hotel. After a cordial dinner, it was alleged that the German FA had agreed to give some Lm3 million towards the refurbishment of the Ta Qali Stadium in return for Malta's vote for the German World Cup bid. Following the vote, Beckenbauer agreed with Mifsud to bring Bayern Munich to play a friendly in Malta in January 2001. The contract for the Bayern match was signed between Joe Mifsud and Gunther Netzer (the Managing Director of CWL) in Valletta on 26 July 2000, and in Germany on 14 July, eight days after Mifsud had voted for Germany. According to the *News of the World*, Mifsud had a secret deal with Netzer to renew the contract with CWL and sell TV rights for all Maltese games for £1.2 million. The Bayern game brought in £175,000 for the TV

rights, and the MFA were allowed to keep the gate money. Bayern effectively played for free, staying a mere twelve hours in Malta before continuing on their journey to the Middle East hours after the game. Although signed in July 2000, it was not until October of that year that the visit of the German team was made public at an MFA Council meeting. Hence no one in the Malta FA knew about the deal until four months after it had been signed.

Mifsud's detractors questioned why it was that he had apparently begun to renegotiate a new deal with Netzer and CWL. The existing contract had at least two years to run. Why at this point did it need renewal, and why was it renewed for a further six years? The conditions of extension were no better than that signed with the same company two years previously, they argued, and Mifsud was never authorised by the Executive to sign anything on behalf of the Association. Mifsud alone knew the terms of the arrangement, and he had also acted without Executive clearance in relation to the Bayern contract. As a consequence, the MFA Treasurer Darmanin-Demajo resigned and went public with his disquiet over the circumstances.

An accountant and sometime UEFA delegate, Darmanin-Demajo had been outspoken against many of the practices in local football, and had held a number of roles in the MFA. As national team manager, he had promised at least a point during the Euro 2000 qualifiers, and resigned when it did not materialise. When made manager of the MFA Technical Centre, he claimed to the press that the institution was a shambles and egoism reigned supreme. He subsequently resigned this position when he felt undermined.

The staying power of the criminal lawyer

Mifsud took the MFA Presidency in 1992. He has held the title ever since. He was re-elected in July 1994 and 1996, and in 1998, 2000 and 2001 held his position, despite public criticism, by virtue of being uncontested. In an Extraordinary General Meeting of the MFA, held in December 2000, Mifsud was given a vote of confidence following issues which arose months before. During the 2000 General Meeting, Mifsud stated that here was a conspiracy to bring him down; in his opinion several people were conspiring to shift the balance of power within the MFA. Mifsud alleged that MFA Treasurer Norman Darmanin-Demajo had given information to the British *News of the World* Sunday newspaper in exchange for money. Mifsud stated that his vote for Germany was based on the decision taken by the UEFA Executive Committee in 1994. He therefore argued that he should not have had to justify himself to the MFA because, as a member of UEFA, he represented European football and not just Maltese football. The Treasurer's opinion was that among other things the funds of the MFA were being mismanaged, and that Mifsud was making use of the money without asking for the consent of the MFA. To illustrate the point Darmanin-Demajo told delegates of how a TV set had been bought for national team Technical Director Horst Heese, but the Treasurer had not been consulted on the monies spent.

The revelations and accusations were manna from heaven for the presidents of the Premier League. Valletta FC President Joe Caruana-Curran did not agree with the CWL contract, accused the MFA of serious mismanagement and suggested the issue was more than *tahwid* (mix-up) and that it was corruption. In spite of all these allegations, Mifsud won a vote of confidence; 66 per cent of the MFA delegates expressed their full support, although most of the Premier League clubs' delegates did not vote, having stormed out of the room. Caruana-Curran stated that if Mifsud refused to appoint a Verifying Board to inquire into the allegations, the Premier presidents were going to leave and not vote. The issue here however was whether they were seeking a redistribution of power, or wishing to create the typical mayhem evident in Maltese politics.

On 28 July 2001 another General Meeting was held. This time the focus was on Mifsud and the seven-year TV rights contract signed with CWL. Valletta's Joe Caruana-Curran and Hibernians' Tony Bezzina once again urged Mifsud to dissolve this contract and accept a new offer proposed by VH Sport Media of Switzerland. For the second consecutive year, the Annual General Meeting descended into conflict, this time between the President and the Premier League clubs' presidents. At one point, Bezzina urged Mifsud to sign the deal with VH Sport Media to prove that he was *ragel*, i.e. a real gentleman. Mifsud promptly rebutted: 'A gentleman is he who doesn't bribe players.' This remark incensed the Premier League presidents, who demanded that Mifsud withdraw his allegation. Mifsud duly obliged and told a hushed hall: 'There is no bribery in Maltese football.' He admitted that, after negotiations, the bid proposed by VH Sport Media to buy the TV rights for national team matches was more attractive than the one signed with CWL the previous year. However, because the CWL contract contained the legally binding 'right of first refusal' clause, the MFA were obliged to ask CWL whether they were ready to match the offer by VH Sport Media. If CWL offered the same terms proposed by VH Sport Media, the MFA would be obliged to sign another contract with them.

This clause in the contract was not to the liking of Caruana-Curran, who claimed that the contract proposed by VH Sport Media would benefit Maltese football and all clubs would benefit from the money which this contract would bring. Mifsud reiterated his stance that he would annul the CWL contract signed in 2000, but the MFA was legally obliged to abide by the right of first refusal clause because otherwise it would be liable for legal action by the German media company.

Once he had gone public Darmanin-Demajo called an EGM, with the hope of removing Mifsud in a vote of no confidence. However, in the words of Darmanin-Demajo, Mifsud responded by 'giving out presents' to a variety of members of the MFA Council and won the vote. Not wishing to work alongside Mifsud, Darmanin-Demajo resigned. The MFA council has 101 votes – some clubs have more than one delegate. Others on the Council are co-opted by virtue of their sitting on specialist subcommittees. These delegates are often chosen by Mifsud. As a consequence Mifsud can guarantee 25 to 30 of the 106 votes. While the dispute unfolded Mifsud flew to Sweden, allegedly to ask

UEFA President Lennart Johansson to remove Darmanin-Demajo from all UEFA business. Many within UEFA praised Darmanin-Demajo's work as a ground delegate. Nobody at UEFA or FIFA enquired into the allegations against Mifsud.

When Darmanin-Demajo expressed his reservations on a variety of outstanding issues, he was asked for his resignation. Mifsud then accused Darmanin-Demajo and others of seeking to destroy him. The matter was then played out in public and the former MFA President Dr George Abela, who was brought in to mediate, announced there was little room for meditation and stood down. In a TV debate, Mifsud reiterated his accusations that people were out to destroy him, and described graphically how certain people wanted to 'vomit all over me'.

As a footballing 'super big-man' Joe Mifsud has broken nearly every assumption about the activities of local football benefactors. While it is assumed that footballing 'big-men' will stretch the limits of both etiquette and the law in pursuit of glory for their local teams, and that this glory will feed out from the field of football into other areas – political office and business success – Mifsud instead appeared to work in pursuit of the glory of the MFA itself, often against what the clubs perceived to be their own interests. That this gave him opportunities outside Malta to expand his networks and benefit both financially and politically sees him regarded by some as *galkbin* – a turncoat or traitor – corrupted by the corruption of the global game. In Chapter 4 we explained that corruption, although seen as endemic within Maltese society – and so Maltese football – is also renarrated as a property of 'the foreign'. This pits a perception of local corruption and illicit practice for the common and local good against a more individualistic – and globalised – corruption that benefits only those who pursue it. Thus, although the 'big-man' practices a moralistic corruption, the 'super big-man' is immoral – corrupted by scale.

This globalisation of local footballing practices is the theme of the next two chapters. First, we examine the escalation of migrant football; the increasing numbers of players arriving in Malta from non-European countries – mainly sub-Saharan Africa. These arrivals to Malta come under a different logic from that of the earlier, mainly European, foreigners. While the earlier migrants were intended to boost the quality of the local game, these newer migrants are also envisaged as providing a transfer income, as young players come to Malta before being sold on to mainland European clubs. In this respect, the envisaged movement of footballing talent from outside the EU into it mirrors the illicit trade of illegal migrants, who use Malta as a 'gateway' into Europe. Second, we move, in the final chapter, back to the fans, and the globalisation of footballing fandom, through the phenomenon of Maltese fan clubs for foreign – European – clubs.

8 Getting into Europe

Global flows of talent

New arrivals: Malta March 2005

Malta has since antiquity received globalisation by virtue of people who visited the island both in peace and war. Malta has always had irregular immigration. Some have entered and overstayed their authorised stay. Some arrive without the requisite documentation. Others arrive in an irregular (illegal) manner. In the past decade most of the latter category once in Malta apply for the status of refugee. The financial or human costs of the arrival of such people invariably from the south have altered the political spectrum of Malta. The most visible representation of the black African migrants are the footballers who arrive mainly legally but whose position once in Malta is somewhat precarious depending on their ability.

The African market in football has in recent years expanded rapidly as the players can be bought for relatively small sums and are paid very little. These players are rarely very well educated, so they are easy targets for unscrupulous chairmen. Many players have complained about not getting paid regularly. This is also a problem which affects the Maltese players but as they have other jobs they suffer less than the foreigners who depend solely on their wage from their club. The idea of unscrupulous trade became pronounced when a story was broken by a Maltese journalist which revealed that more than 30 professional footballers had not complied with the local regulations as per the Immigration Act and were playing without work permits.

In 2002 and 2004, the number of immigrants arriving in Malta increased sharply on earlier years. In 2001, 2,204 people were refused permission to enter the country; some 60 immigrants arrived in Malta irregularly. In 2002, 21 boats landed in Malta bringing 1,680 immigrants without personal documents or means of identification. This number represented almost half the birth rate of Malta. The government was caught unprepared. Seeking asylum status, the newly arrived had to be dealt with by the Refugee Commission (REFCOM) established just a few months before their arrival. The influx continued in 2003 with 497 arrivals. At the beginning of 2004 just 100 immigrants remained in the various detention centres. The numbers increased in the middle of the year with over 1,300 *clandestini* (illegal immigrants) arriving in Malta. These are the

fortunate: from 1988 to 2006 over 1,880 are believed to have died at sea in the Sicilian channel between Libya, Malta and Italy.

Naturalisation is available to foreigners who meet specific requirements which are defined by the Citizenship Act. Among the eligible people are those who can prove to have resided in Malta for at least five years, a person born abroad whose father was born abroad as well, but whose grandfather and great-grandparent were both born in Malta, and a child of a Maltese citizen. Granting of such a status however is discretionary. Non-Maltese born played a significant role in the history of Maltese football but the newly arrived of the twenty-first century brought to Malta the issues of control and debate which post-independence Malta had never had to deal with before.

Inaccessible by public transport, and lying amidst an ugly industrial estate in the district of Hal-Safi exists a structure housing Malta's unwelcome visitors. Only a small handwritten sign attached to wire mesh indicates to the inquisitive the existence of this refugee camp. Built a century ago, and once housing foreigners in military uniforms, the one-time barracks of the British Army have, since the latter's departure in 1979, been used for various purposes. Some structures house industry, and one is the administrative arm of an educational office. However, in 2004, one block housed dozens of men drawn to Malta from their homes in Africa and the Middle East who, while arriving in peace, caused consternation to their hosts.

Popularly referred to as the clandestini, these men, numbering 60, arrived by boat and were either washed up on to the beaches or rescued at sea by Maltese naval personnel. Dozens of small vessels with their human cargo float perilously in Maltese waters and have done since the mid-1990s. Invariably aged between late teens and early forties, their presence troubles the conscience of the Maltese. Humanitarian considerations forced the Maltese government to provide these dispossessed and dishevelled with elementary shelter and sustenance, as such people seek to make their way to mainland Europe to destinations unknown to both their Maltese hosts and probably even themselves. On Christmas Day, 1996, some 270 drowned when their boat capsized in the seas between Malta and Sicily. Rumours abound in Malta about how the refugees' boat was deliberately rammed by the gangsters who had taken their transportation money. Some of the drowned bodies washed up on to Maltese beaches and into Maltese fishing nets. The island carried rumours of the involvement of gangsters, police officers, government ministries and well-known businesses in the profitable movements of the clandestini.

Hal-Safi meanwhile is a byword of political contention. The pursuit of EU membership required the Maltese authorities to show mercy to these newly arrived, but the populace and the politicians know that Malta is not a place of infinite resources. The migrants are held in custody 24 hours a day by uniformed police, charged with ensuring that those detained do not escape. The sanity, health and goodwill of the migrants are their concern. They have however no training for this unprecedented humanitarian problem. Meanwhile the Maltese authorities seek to ascertain who their visitors are.

In the absence of any identifying documents, many of the black Africans claim to be Liberian. This is a politically astute claim on account of the prolonged civil conflict the country has suffered since 1990. This nationality qualifies those fleeing with the

status of 'war refugees'. The Maltese however are sceptical that all who claim to be Liberian really are. As a consequence they are detained – with no date of release. They remain human cargo, stored and funded by the Maltese government, assisted further by Maltese charities and EU funding. Escape attempts are made; some migrants have scaled the walls in the two years the camp has been in existence, only to be captured and returned. One man left in a body bag having killed himself, perhaps seeking a better existence in the next life.

An electric doorbell summons the slightly built custody sergeant who walks across a yard in civilian clothes to the gate. The 25-metre walk to the building's entrance requires negotiating discarded clothing and a pool of oil. Inside the building, uniformed police stand around smoking. The sergeant's room, complete with desk and chair, gives little indication of what the building is for, but a handwritten note informs a reader that permission must be obtained from the rank of Inspector or above to summon a detainee. An adjacent glass-panelled cupboard is padlocked to prevent unauthorised access to several rows of pharmaceuticals. Along the corridor two sets of iron bars are evident from floor to ceiling. Behind these, the migrants sleep in dormitories and relax with a TV. Outdoor recreation is permissible in an adjacent yard, some 15 by 30 metres in size. The 12-foot wire mesh is topped with barbed wire. A three-a-side football game breaks the monotony for some.

In the company of a lawyer, the meeting is held with a detainee called David. Having been woken from his midday slumber he is red-eyed and hostile to his two visitors. Insisting he is Liberian, he is unable to name the capital city of that nation or to answer a question about Liberia's most famous citizen, the footballer George Weah. This inability increases his hostility. In turn he demands an end to his two years of detention and his dependence on sleeping pills. Three days previously he had returned to the camp from a stay in a local psychiatric hospital. His appearance is dishevelled, his clothes dirty. He tells us angrily that he has nothing more to say and returns to the confines of the dormitory, ignoring the protestations of the lawyer.

Two others are sent for, chosen by the custody sergeant. They enter the dark and dirty adjutant room and, avoiding eye contact with the two visitors, stand to attention next to the formica-topped table. John is in his early forties and greying at the temples. His companion who is in his mid-twenties has a scar running along his right cheek. They wear T-shirts donated by a local football club. The younger of the two is from northern Liberia, who fled the militia of Charles Taylor and ended up in the Ivory Coast. He is from Nimba county and his surname is a popular one in Liberia. His family are dead or estranged and, in fleeing his country, he took a boat to Guinea, where he painted and decorated for years and then took a boat out of North Africa to Malta. He is seeking to get to the USA where he hopes the Liberian diaspora will care for him. He informs me discreetly that his companion is also Liberian. The unique Liberian handshake confirms his nationality. Upon hearing the click of the tip of our middle fingers, he smiles and pats his heart with his fist, and exclaims 'Liberia!' With his eyes to the floor and tears in his eyes there is no more to say, and the pair return to their detention.

The Liberian consul in Libya had flown to Malta two months previously in an attempt to ascertain who among the detained were Liberian. He stayed at the camp for

a few hours and promised the custody sergeant that most were not Liberian nationals. The Maltese however realised that if people were exiles from the regime which he represented he would not be particularly sympathetic to their plight. The custody sergeant assures us that he knows the two are Liberian and he volunteers that they are his eyes and ears. They control the others: one by his physicality, the other by his age and wisdom. The gregarious sergeant reveals that he brings food from home for those in his care and buys six Lm2 phone cards weekly for the men who make his life easier. What trouble occurs is usually from the Algerians or Libyans who in his opinion are falsely claiming to be Palestinian. His manifold states that those in custody number Ivory Coast, 3; Ghana, 2; Sierra Leone, 4; Liberia, 22. This is nearly correct. The Liberians explain that there are 20 of their nationals and six from Sierra Leone.

In March 2005 the Hal-Safi detention centre was decreed out of bounds to all media by the deputy Prime Minister Tonio Borg. Access could only be authorised in 'extraordinary circumstances' which were never defined. A variety of NGOs, local voluntary organisations, the Jesuit refugee service and the UN High Commission for Refugees had been scathing in their comments about the conditions of detention. In September 2003 the conditions the migrants were living in in Malta were described as 'shocking' by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Refugees. Hunger strikes were regular and suicides not uncommon. Physical abuse of the migrants came from the Maltese security personnel. Intra-refugee fights were regular and social workers felt intimidated, and were abused on their visits. In January 2005 a large-scale protest by the immigrants was violently suppressed by the armed forces of Malta in full riot gear. Twenty-seven immigrants were hospitalised in a disturbance captured by a TV crew filming outside the wire.

In April 2005 50 detainees of Hal-Safi were released. Nearly all were African males aged between 18 and 43 and originating from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Sudan, Cameroon and the Congo. Housed temporarily in the newly established 'open centre' in Hal-Far, most declared their desire to depart Malta for Italy. Their release coincided with the end of a hunger strike by other clandestini elsewhere on the island. The release also occurred on the same day that 39 other illegal arrivals landed on a beach having travelled from the Horn of Africa.

Today the typical MFA Premier League club would rarely contain three local (i.e. village)-born players out of a squad of 20. However, the term 'foreigners' – *barranin* – in Maltese football applies to players who arrived from other countries. These have proven, in origin, to be as diverse as Yugoslavia and its former states, Northern and Central Africa, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Australia, England, Portugal, Italy, Iceland, Libya, Tunisia, and even Argentina and Brazil. Only three foreigners per club are officially sanctioned, but many more are taken on board by clubs who have, at times, obtained Maltese citizenship for them. Some become eligible for this status by virtue of having lived in Malta for several years, others by marriage to Maltese women. Others arrive, play for years and only after their departure or retirement is a work permit actually produced. Those in such circumstances lament – often with a smile – the snail's pace of

bureaucracy that is evident in the Maltese civil (and immigration) service. In this milieu of scarce talent and the pursuit of local footballing glory, nearly anything goes.

The migratory processes that have influenced Malta football have occurred in four stages. The first, in parallel with the beginnings of the game in Malta, was bound up with colonialism. British servicemen and British civilian workers of the Empire played for both the regimental and organisations that provided the infrastructure for Empire. In later years some British personnel joined Maltese teams. Mixing with the Maltese on a field of play was not a straightforward procedure. These various personnel needed permission from the colonial authorities to accept invitations as guests of Maltese football teams. Requests to play were withheld according to how tense the local socio-political situation was. Until the 1930s football coaching in Malta was a practice learned primarily from British Army physical training instructors. This was the case until the arrival in Malta of Austrian-born Leo Drucker. An excellent centre-half, Drucker was spotted by Floriana while playing in a Malta Tourney in the early 1930s. He was contacted in his native Austria and agreed to a contract with Floriana. He was later to coach Melita FC. In this pre-war era Malta all good foreign players were with either Sliema or Floriana.

Drucker impressed upon Maltese club owners and trainers that a team must have some form of pedagogic instruction and in doing so had a great influence on two individuals – Joe Griffiths and Frankie Tabone. Cospicua-born Griffiths was a former national player-turned coach of Melita FC.

A second influence on the Maltese game was a product of the rise of European Fascism. The mid- to late 1930s saw a variety of players arrive in Malta as exiles from the Nazis' advance on Austria and Czechoslovakia. Footballers of Jewish origin – such as Drucker – arrived in Malta on their way to a new life in the Americas or South Africa. Often first-class players, Maltese clubs signed them up (Sliema had five Austrian-born players in the 1930s) and paid them well (Sliema paid the Austrians Lm60 a month), but, in the pursuit of glory, more or less bankrupted themselves. The war however took good foreign players away either to fight or to seek refuge elsewhere. Their post-war replacements were British servicemen. Griffiths' sides were to win the Malta championship four times in the early 1950s. Griffiths was instrumental in starting the first coaching school in Malta and became the first President of the Maltese Football Coaches Association, and is referred to in dispatches as the father of coaching in Malta.

Frankie Tabone was a Maltese-born full-back, who had played many games against British service teams. He is, however, remembered in Maltese football folklore for his team by the name of Floriana Ajax. This team of youngsters were phenomenally successful in the 1940s based on procedures introduced by Tabone on and off the pitch. On the pitch Ajax played the short passing game previously unseen in local football. Off the pitch Tabone used elementary sports science to prepare his players. On cold days in Gzira stadium he would insist his

players huddle together in the dressing room to create heat, which kept their muscles warm and supple. His preparation was effective in that Ajax still holds the record of the best performances in the Maltese League.¹

From the mid-1940s British servicemen were given permission more easily by the military to play for the local teams, but they played at their own risk, as the Services and Colonial Authorities would not provide the requested insurance in case of injury. The post-war decades also saw local clubs experiment with footballing formations. Some clubs emulated the close control and short passing game of visiting Czech and Hungarian sides of the 1940s–1960s (see Griffiths 1985; Baldacchino 1993). Others favoured the Italian system of the double stopper and ‘Liberò’, and the ploy of deep defence with counter-attack known as *catennaccio*. From the late 1950s and the advent of televised matches from Italy, local coaches were able to watch and practise new ideas. The post-1961 participation of Maltese clubs in European competitions widened technical and tactical possibilities even further. The post-war Tournaments saw any number of coaches, players and visiting teams begging local club chairmen to be hired in their attempt to escape the Communist regimes of the Eastern Bloc. The salaries available to them in Malta were not good, but the living conditions on Malta were certainly preferable to the grim military-industrial conurbations they sought escape from. One arrival was Hungarian-born Janos Bedl who joined Sliema in the 1960s. Bedl had once been coached under Helmet Schon, who was to coach the West German World Cup winning side of 1974. Finishing playing, Bedl then coached Sliema to the Malta championship. At the same time, random migration occurred involving British-born players; thus Ted Phillips, a former Ipswich player, turned out for Floriana in the 1960s and Donald McDunda was player-coach for Rabat.

From the late 1960s Malta became the last payday for players, both famous and unknown from Britain. One local sports writer, interviewed by the authors, compared foreign players as similar to the horses imported for racing. The horses were apparently ‘mostly on their way down and about 7–8 years too old’.²

Top-class players will not come to Malta. In what was regarded as an admission of this fact, the President of the MFA in 1994 implemented the two foreigners-only rule for Premier Division teams (the permissible number at Under-18 level is five) believing that foreign imports were stopping the progress of local football talent. In the 1995/1996 season there were 26 foreign-born players in the ten First Division teams, drawn from England (5), Yugoslavia (4), Albania and Bulgaria (3), Libya and Nigeria (2), and one each from Bosnia, Italy, Iceland, Hungary, Montenegro, Sweden and New Zealand. For all the newly arrived the longest-serving and most successful foreign import is Mark Miller, a relative unknown in the English game, playing a few games for Newcastle Reserves in the mid-1980s before two years at Gillingham and later stints at Doncaster and Darlington in the English Fourth Division. When forced by injury to seek a lower standard of football, an agent took him to Malta in 1986

where, over the next six years, he played for teams that won the Championship three times and the Cup twice. Miller later managed Hibernians, and was made manager of the Under-21 national team in 2003.

The third stage was a product of the post-colonial milieu of the 1980s. This saw some retreat to that best known, while others sought new fields from relatively unknown footballing cultures. Victor Tedesco, President of Hamrun Spartans FC, favoured English players, and his financial outlay on British players was undreamed of by previous club presidents throughout Malta. Former England Internationals Paul Mariner, David Johnson, Peter Barnes, Tony Morley and Bob Latchford appeared in Maltese club line-ups. Others came as coaches. Former Arsenal centre-forward Alan Sunderland, and Arsenal's and England's Brian Talbot tried their luck in club management to differing degrees of success.³

The signing of foreign players in this era was farcical at times. One Premier club secretary was candid about the unusual circumstances that provided his club with two foreign players in the 1990s. A Scottish-born player, who had played for a Scottish First Division Club for three years, came to the Malta club's notice when, on vacation, he walked into the club's training ground because the name of the club was the same as his Scottish neighbourhood. Asking for, and granted, a trial, he made a disastrous start, but was to become a regular in a championship-winning side. A couple of years later, the same secretary signed three Nigerians. One was to return home soon after, one was to prove a very good player; the other was hopeless. The latter had sent a false curriculum vitae; the decent player was under registration to a Nigerian side, which wanted a sizeable fee for his release. Unable to play for the team, the secretary did not have the heart to send them away, and so they were housed courtesy of the club and paid an income for over a year.

An unprecedented form of player migration occurred in the mid-1980s, courtesy of visits by the President of Malta, Agatha Barbara, to Bulgaria, seeking trade relations with the Eastern bloc. This resulted in the arrival of Bulgarian players and coaches. Paid poorly considering their footballing pedigree, such men arrived seeking to improve the local game (and take home hard currency) in a system that seemed to work well for both sides.

This fourth stage of player migration is synonymous with a dendritic form of capitalism. Over the past decade cheap (footballing) labour has been brought to Malta from sub-Saharan African nations in the hope of selling the personnel on for considerable profit to North European clubs. Such a model has financial potential; its realisation, however, has proven hard to attain. Those behind the idea despair as they watch their protégés become Maltese in their approach to the game.

The end of the twentieth century saw a change in foreign personnel with the arrival of Nigerian players. One source was a Nigerian-born agent by the name of Henry, who conveniently lived in Paola and approached the local club president Tony Bezzina about taking talented youngsters from West Africa. In Bezzina's memory the situation began in the following way:

Henry came to me and told me of a good young boy ... he came and Birkirkara didn't want him. We took him and he's been with us eight years. Others followed ... then six years ago Henry brought a 12-year-old called Ugo. He needed parental permission to make Henry his legal guardian. We schooled him and he's been in our nursery since 14 and is now a first teamer.

Victor Zammit was the first football President to bring a Nigerian player to Malta when in 1990 he bought the 16-year-old Chucks Nwoko from an Italian Serie 'C' club. His arrival provoked great interest as he was considered a certainty for the professional game in Northern Europe. Trials were arranged for him in England but came to nothing. A proposed Africa Academy, funded by Zammit and his counterpart in Reggina of Sicily, where 30 Africa youngsters would live and learn while playing football in local minor Leagues as a shop window for Europe's bigger clubs, failed to get off the ground when the MFA refused to support their visa applications.

None of the African talent ever left Malta permanently for a big fee, as the Presidents hoped. This new cash-cow failed to deliver. In Zammit's logic: 'The standard here is too poor – you know, walking football. They need more competition.' Why is this? 'It's the way we live, the climate, our mentality is all against succeeding.' The Naxxar President, Michael Zammit-Tabona, had a typically different take on the matter. They all too quickly adapted to the local conditions, he said: 'fucking the first Maltese girl they found and getting them pregnant.'

The most significant implication of Malta's EU membership for footballers and football clubs was the Bosman Rule, i.e. the right of a EU-residing player to work abroad without restrictions on his trade.⁴ In 1995, the European Court of Justice held that the principle of free movement of workers applied to professional football players within the European Union and the European Economic Area (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein). This right could not be restricted in any way. In negotiations on free movement of workers generally, Malta, when seeking to join the EU, obtained a special arrangement; Maltese citizens could seek employment in the EU from the first day of its membership, but EU citizens may be refused work in Malta if their influx constitutes a 'serious threat' to the local labour market. It was not expected that this perceived threat could materialise in the area of sports, mainly due to the relatively low standard of local sports, be it in finance and facilities. But it remains an agreement which can be activated if circumstances change.⁵

The proliferation of foreign players in Maltese football since its inception has a Janus-faced appearance. On the one hand, the standard of play has, at times, undoubtedly increased and some teams have become more attractive to watch because of it. However, exceptions are always evident and the two Premier clubs in 2001, which had the most foreign-born players within their ranks, namely Gozo and Naxxar Lions, both fared badly in the League. The foreigner, as the Maltese found out, is not always better.

A game that would pay?

In mid-2003 Maltese football was in dire financial straits. None of the banks on the island would lend to football clubs. Two clubs, Valletta and Birkirkara, were bankrupt to the sum of millions of Maltese Lira. Floriana had huge debts and an unsolved leadership struggle. Sliema and Hibernians, while not in debt, were each bankrolled by one individual who would create a crisis should they withdraw their patronage. Fortunately for the clubs, any debts owed were to individual supporters. In this milieu, the MFA agreed, in conjunction with the clubs, a monthly maximum playing salary cap of Lm250 a month. Despite this public declaration everyone in Maltese football knew salaries of up to Lm800 a month were being paid in pursuit of footballing success. Some players even had free motor vehicles and children's school fees paid by the clubs on top of their basic income. Local football, while a vehicle for domestic and parochial glories, was played out for the economic glory offered by entering European competitions. Thus clubs would burden themselves with massive debts as a consequence of players' wages in the hope that the players would get them into Europe, wherein 2003 payments from UEFA of Lm22,000 in the preliminary and Lm75,000 in the second stage could then be used to pay wages owed, sometimes months or even years behind. Failing to get into Europe meant that players had to be sold.

The game in Malta has never been reliant on sponsorship or TV monies. The first sponsorship for the Maltese First Division came from Johnny Walker whisky (synonymous with a chic social status in newly independent 1960s Malta). The Johnny Walker Cup competition began in the early 1930s. In seeking monies to support the game the Football Association sought further solace in the bottle when Fr Hilary and George Abela contacted Captain Morgan Cruises (named after the rum company) to sponsor the First Division. The alcohol brand agreed at the talks to provide Lm500 (plus a crate of spirits)⁶ for the champions. Later, drink of a different potency proved beneficial when in the 1980s the Council for Sport approached the Coca-Cola Corporation for football sponsorship. Their response was an agreement to sponsor the First Division to a sum of Lm10,000, to be divided, at the end of the competition, between all clubs according to final ranking. This was a significant level of sponsorship for local football and many would argue that the ranking-reward system increased competitiveness.

In the late 1980s a new sponsor was again found in the shape of Central Cigarettes Limited, which gave the local game the Rothmans Football League. The sum given to football however was around Lm10,000 p.a. In July 2005 the Bank of Valletta became the League's new sponsors. Monies also came into the game courtesy of the FA Trophy being newly sponsored by Malteo Lotteria (U-Bet) in actuality a Greek-based gambling organisation. While no doubt useful, such a status was in reality nominal. The game had to be funded by individuals who were usually more prepared to lose tens of thousands of their own money. For what return?

Power and glory

Football is about many things; belonging, romance and glory are just a few. But the ultimate indication of a club's existence is winning trophies. How this is achieved is open to debate. Some attempting a rational analysis see the answer to the search for footballing honours in demographic determinism. The bigger the city/town the bigger the crowd and financial income; high wages are thus able to be paid to the best players. Others might stress the importance of developing local talent, and therefore put the onus on nursery-level coaching abilities and talent identification. In the Maltese context, one might argue, a system of dependency (patronage?) is always evident at all Premier League clubs by virtue of the investments of wealthy (usually) local-born individuals prepared to risk personal fortunes in attaining local footballing glory. One might consider this a typically capitalist form of production, except that footballing success is rarely if ever accompanied by the pursuit of financial profit. The former Treasurer of the MFA Norman Darmanin-Demajo describes such men as 'sugar daddies' and likens their motivations to that of paramours who, having won a trophy, lose interest and pull their money out:

It's like chasing an unobtainable woman, you'll spend a fortune wooing her and then when you've slept with her you get bored and move on.

One president in recent years was so obsessed with success that following a good performance he would enter the dressing-room and tell his players that each of them would receive a bonus of Lm1,000 – when the coaching staff were taken into consideration the sum was Lm20,000. Consequently, there are aspects surrounding investments in local football that require understanding.

Across Europe there has been a growing trend towards clubs becoming public companies. In Malta this has proved very difficult, as the MFA have regulations in place that restrict clubs to being run by annually elected committees. However, on 6 December 1996 Birkirkara FC registered itself as the first footballing public company in Malta. The funds gained from the new shareholders were used to finance several projects. The system of having an elected committee however is inherently flawed. It has led to chronic under-investment from the clubs themselves because they don't want to risk putting their money into a venture and then getting outvoted in one year.

A final source of income for the clubs is the UEFA Development Fund. This fund is distributed to smaller nations to improve facilities in the nurseries. The amount that each club receives is dependent on the classification of the nursery, which is designated by the MFA. This money may be withdrawn at any time and therefore the clubs are unable to include it in a planning budget. This money can be as much as Lm13,000, which is a substantial sum for any nursery on the island. However, it remains a point of debate as to where this money goes. Norman Darmanin-Demajo, the former Treasurer of the MFA claimed:

in my opinion it never reaches the nurseries, it stays with the main committee and it is spent on acquiring players. It is spent on the first team. The priorities are all wrong.... Everyone says how important it is to have grass roots and all that crap ... that everyone talks about, but when they come to deliver it is a pittance what's arriving.

Clearly Maltese football is under-funded in many respects. Yet money flows into the game, although the payments are staggered and the outcomes modest. Why men are prepared to lose personal fortunes in sustaining small clubs is best understood by considering the notion of status in a society with few positions of glory and accolade. History might offer some explanation here. Under British rule, the Maltese were generally poor and uneducated. A large proportion of the population was employed by the British forces, mainly in manual dock work. When the British left, many such jobs disappeared. A gradual change in the working landscape followed. Most of the population in the 1980s became involved – in some capacity – in the tourism industry. This switch from predominately secondary to tertiary industry required dramatic changes in levels of education. The 1995 census showed that the adult literacy rate rose from 66.6 per cent in 1948 to 88.76 per cent in 1995. With the change in economy came a new ethos in education and social mobility. Boissevain (1974) noted in the 1960s that non-manual occupations had the highest prestige, manual occupations the lowest. On an intimate island, wherein social standing was of the utmost importance, the term *edukat*, 'educated', was an index of respectability (cf. Mitchell 2002a). Football in the Maltese mindset however is a manual occupation. Being a professional footballer in Malta does not bring the kudos it does in other European countries. However, the position of club President can bring status to men denied the formal position available in the Church, professions and politics. So why are men prepared to gamble a fortune and use their leisure time in the minutiae of Maltese football? The answer is a love of the game and the intrigue involved.

Playing away: out-migration

Malta has not produced a significant number of football migrants. One of the main reasons for this was that until 1 May 2004, Malta was a member of neither the EU nor the EEC before it, so Maltese players still required work permits to play in other European countries. Work permits could only be obtained if a player had played in 75 per cent of his nation's international games over a two-year period. However, another criterion taken into account was the standard of the national team. Because of this few Maltese players were ever given work permits. A further problem was that UEFA placed a limit of three non-EU players on every club within the EU. With only three players allowed, clubs were unlikely to take a chance on a young Maltese player. Furthermore, as the Maltese have no reputation for being capable footballers, few people have taken an interest in their players.

A logical solution to improving standards in Malta would be for good native players to play in good foreign Leagues and return with knowledge of techniques and tactics. However, Maltese players in foreign teams are a very rare occurrence. Since the 1940s Maltese players in Europe have numbered only a handful. If one looked at this from the perspective of the English professional League, the number of Maltese who made a living out of the game between then and mid-2006 number just three. The first was the figure of Joe Cini who, in the late 1960s, played seven games in the English First Division for Queens Park Rangers. The next Maltese player to play in England was John Buttigieg, who had three years with Brentford in the English Second Division in the late 1980s. In recent years (2003–2006) Luke Dimech spent three years in the bottom division of the English League with Mansfield Town and later Chester City (he currently plays for Macclesfield Town). The longest lasting player in a European League was Carmel Busuttill (Busu), whose five years with Belgian Club Genk saw him as captain for two seasons. On the recommendations of an Italian player, who spent a season in Malta, ‘Busu’ was bought by Verbania in the Italian ‘C’ division. Then the Maltese national coach, Horst Heese, recommended him to Ghenk. All were to return to finish their football careers with Maltese clubs.⁷ The most outstanding Maltese performer abroad, however, is Michael Mifsud, whose brilliant performances with the Under-21 Malta national team in 2000 saw him brought to the attention of the German *Bundesliga* club Kaiserslautern on the recommendation of Horst Heese, where he was to spend two seasons before returning to Malta, only to leave six months later for Norway to join Lillestrom. Mifsud’s story is complicated by the number of rumours circulating about his departure from Germany. Some sources claim that, having signed a contract in June, Mifsud was dismissed in September because of repeated trips to Malta. Mifsud himself claims he would not sign a new contract and returned home of his own free will. Whatever the cause of his departure, it is clear that Mifsud failed to settle in Germany. He explained his predicament: ‘if I’m bored here I go home; if I’m bored there I go swimming, if I get bored swimming I go to Paceville.’ Mifsud grew up on a small island where everyone is sociable and he had many friends. He then moved to industrial Germany and struggled to cope. He was to resume his successful career through a move to Norway, where he attracted the attention of British clubs following good performances in European competition. In 2006 Mifsud signed for English Championship side Coventry City, and at the time of writing had gained a regular first-team place.

Why so few Maltese ever succeeded abroad provoked the following cultural analysis from a respected Maltese coach:

We’re a small island and we don’t have scouts coming over to see what’s available. Then there’s the island mentality – who wants to leave here? The Maltese are big family people, they like intimacy – who would go somewhere cold in Europe and be alone?

Few young men wish to leave the warmth, both literal and actual, of the Maltese islands for what would be for them the poor climate and loneliness of the North. While this rationale evokes the emotional, the financial reality also impacts. Many top players in Malta in the twentieth and early twenty-first century were relatively successful businessmen. Shrewd in negotiating contracts, assisted by the rise in football agents, such individuals proved successful in both import businesses and retail outlets. One well-known international imported beer and held the rights to be sole import agent for a few other products; another high-profile player owned a wine bar, yet another had fishmonger outlets. Such business could play into Maltese football loyalties. Club supporters would buy products from 'their' players, thereby assisting in the early stages of their emerging businesses. Well paid by local standards, many a decent Maltese player could boast the essential items of consumption synonymous with football stars the world over. Expensive cars, boats and fine houses were their dues. Somewhat inevitably, in 2004 Miss Malta was dating a centre-forward; another player was an in-demand male model. Former Malta Captain Carmel Busuttill was frequently the face for consumer adverts on TV and was the first footballer to receive the Medal of the Republic in 2001, awarded to him by the President of Malta in recognition for all that he had done for his nation.

The arrival of the Africans

By 2005 there was no Maltese Premier team which did not contain African-born players. Some 15 African-born men played weekly at Premier level. Seven more played in Division One. Ten played in the Gozo Leagues. All but three (Congo-born) were from Nigeria, and were a product of the entrepreneurial skills of one individual forever in the Maltese public eye by the name of Damien Iweuke. This Nigerian-born 46-year-old librarian turned general fixer had Maltese citizenship by virtue of his marriage to the second niece of Malta's first-ever President.

The first black African player to arrive in Malta, however, was a product of trade relations. Chucks Nwoko, who arrived in 1994, was a product of a trade friendship between the Birkikara President, Victor Zammit and his counterpart from the Italian club Reggina, who had spotted the Nigerian player's potential at an Under-17s International. Having taken him on trial for a year, the Italian did not think him capable of adapting to the demands of the Italian Serie B League. Nwoko was to move south and become a success in Malta, attain citizenship via marriage, and was to play for the national team. He was also to appoint Damien as his agent.

Calling himself a 'natural entrepreneur', the Catholic-educated Damien originates from the Ibo people, whom he calls the 'Jews of Nigeria'. From a family that was both hard-working and enterprising, Damien graduated in Nigeria and won a Finnish government scholarship to study librarianship. While in Finland, he became friends with a Maltese national, who had a family connection with the Under Secretary of Education, who then became the Permanent Secretary of the Government Ministry. Invited to holiday in Malta in 1988, Damien

remained for months, helping at the library of the University of Malta in return for a stipend. Establishing friendships and enjoying Malta, Damien eventually turned down the offer of a Masters degree at Loughborough in England, only to be offered permanent, paid employment in Malta, and soon after he married a local girl. Following his marriage, he enlisted and studied International law at Malta University.

By his own admission, Damien had no skills in playing football and had little interest in watching the game. However, having a great nose for a business opportunity meant that a football passion could be kindled. It was the World Cup of 1994 held in the USA that inspired Damien to move into football, when he realised that the whole of Malta had been engrossed in the Italy versus Nigeria fixture. He realised that African football had come of age and was attracting massive interest among European football enthusiasts. Working at the Foundation for International Studies as a librarian meant that he met daily with a variety of senior politicians and businesspeople. Inevitably, their conversations focused on the Nigerian football team, and led to him being asked about the availability of Nigerian footballers. The local game, at the time, favoured imported players from Bulgaria and Libya; however, the strength and speed manifest by the Nigerians in the World Cup was what many Maltese clubs were seeking. The arrival of Nwoko had impressed onlookers and, as a consequence, it became fashionable to seek out Nigerian players.

Taking the initiative, Damien wrote letters of introduction to all Maltese Premier clubs offering to provide them with Nigerian-born players. The players he was to bring to Malta were recommended by either friends or family. On occasions, players approached Damien, asking him to 'carry them' to Europe. The first player was Chris Oko, who was brought to Damien's attention when the player made himself known to Damien's uncle in Nigeria. Playing for a small amateur club, Oko was considered to have, as yet, unappreciated potential; the gamble paid off. While his arrival and first year with Floriana was not a success, in later years he was to represent Malta. In 1996 Floriana terminated Oko's contract, but Damien retained faith in what he considered to be a very young boy unused to the cold of a Maltese winter. He also believed that there was more to the situation than met the eye, in that by cancelling Oko's contract, Floriana were thereby avoiding paying the agent, i.e. Damien. The matter was still in court some nine years later.

His second import proved to be a success story. Visiting Nigeria, Damien watched a tournament and brought the tournament's best player, Uwa Ogbodo, to Malta. This player was already established with the respected Nigerian Rangers' team, and had played for the Under-21 national side, and been a trialist with the German club Schalke 04. While evidently talented, his Nigerian club had tired of his drinking, womanising and poor discipline. Hence at 19, Ogbodo found himself in Malta with the Xjara Tornadoes, who were newly promoted to the Premier and whose President was a drinking partner of Damien. This tiny club paid nothing for Ogbodo, but were to sell him three months later for Lm25,000 to Sliema. Lasting one year with Sliema, he then dropped a

Division to play with Qormi, and eventually played in the Republic of Ireland before returning to Malta to play with Marsaxlokk.

In the course of our conversation, Damien took calls from football representatives elsewhere. He was currently negotiating for Nigerians to play for the team owned by the son of Colonel Gadaffi, and had also placed Nigerians with clubs in both Tunisia and Sweden. Damien had literally changed the face of both domestic and international football in Malta, and his methods, while potentially controversial, appealed to many Maltese seeking footballing glory. In 1997/1998 the Naxxar Football Club led the Premiership for nearly three months and contained four Nigerian-born players. The two attackers, Chris Oranton and Orosco Anonam, proved to be a highly successful partnership and were a product of Damien's agency. However, the four, plus another Nigerian, meant that the Naxxar team had more than the three requisite foreigners; this did not prove to be a problem for either Damien or the Naxxar President. Learning that three of the five had Maltese girlfriends, Damien met the happy couples and each of the girls' parents and negotiated a Lm2,500 cash payment each, paid for by the Naxxar President on the completion of their hastily arranged marriages. Reasoning with the parents that, if the couples loved each other now, they would do so in years to come, the marriages took place soon after and, through government contacts, the three Nigerians became Maltese citizens 48 hours later. Now Naxxar could play five Nigerian-born players. As the Naxxar President, Michael Zammit-Tabona, confirmed on *The People on Sunday* (14 March 1999), the investment in Nigerian players is a good business venture. For such players, he argued, Maltese football is a stepping stone to bigger European countries where there are greater riches. The aforementioned Anonam proved to be the most lucrative of the Nigerian imports. After Naxxar he was to play for Sliema, following a Lm25,000 transfer, and obtained three International caps for Malta. He was to leave Sliema for the Hungarian club Vasas for \$80,000 then move to the Cypriot club Apoel for \$100,000, and play in the Champions League preliminaries. In 2005, aged 26, he still had many years of football and transfers ahead of him.

Damien admits to being business-driven in his football transactions. Every Nigerian who comes to Malta comes with the expectation that this is a stepping stone to bigger salaries available elsewhere in Europe. The same applies to the club presidents, who see the Nigerians as cheap labour which, if nurtured properly, can be sold on for huge profits, but for all involved this potential has not really been realised. Aside from Anonam, the expected big pay-days have not yet arrived. In Damien's opinion the Maltese game is not professional enough and the island provides too many opportunities for merry-making and laziness. For the single, young Nigerian with money in his pocket, Malta has too many temptations. Seeking to address this issue, Damien had discussed with some of the club presidents the necessity of strict agreements as to what players can and cannot do socially, but found, to his frustration, that as long as the clubs were winning domestic games, they cared little about what the players were up to when not on the field of play. Admitting to falling out with most of the players

he brought to Malta at one time or another, he assures me that all eventually dropped their disagreements and resumed friendships. The issue for Damien is the attempt by football clubs to take control of the players Damien brings to them. He believes that their unwillingness to pay him his agency fees sees them involved in character assassination wherein stories abound about the extent of monies that Damien is making from his protégés. As Damien explains, 'If he's no good he's Damien's, if he's very good, he's not mine.' Many players did complain that Damien's cut of their wages was as much as 20 per cent, but the problem lay in their reliance on him to get them to Malta, a reliance which, annoying to them when successful, also saw them seeking his help when the clubs sought to rescind their part of agreements.

At the time of the interview, in late 2005, Damien had pending court cases with four Maltese and Gozitan football clubs. All the issues were around non-payment of fees, and all of them had dragged on for years. Damien told me of how one court case saw him win a player the balance of his contract and had resulted in the freezing of the bank account of one of Malta's richest club presidents. Damien won Lm7,000 from another president whom he had taken to court when he failed to honour a contract. He also feels responsible for one player's potential transfer which he scuppered and which could have made a six-figure sum for a local president, who at the time was in court with Damien. As the first FIFA licensed agent in Malta, Damien had pioneered a status, which by 2005 had attracted another Nigerian, and a Maltese-born individual. However, in terms of contracts, the other two could not compete with Damien, who was the agent for 22 African players and four Maltese. His entrepreneurial abilities had bought him a splendid house in the centre of Malta and a good life. It had also brought him the enmity and anger of a number of football figures in Malta, including the MFA President, who had phoned him telling him he would have never supported his application to be an agent had he known he would have embroiled local clubs in so many court cases.

Damien's success was, in his opinion, being able to outmanoeuvre the Maltese at their own game. The club presidents needed him in their pursuit of success, but when the financial situation did not suit their supply, Damien did not roll over. Learned in the law, he was able to represent himself in court and stood up for what he believed was his. Never one to avoid self-promotion and publicity, Damien was the most identifiable African in Malta, and could not take coffee publicly without being acknowledged by dozens. His driving of an RX7 sports car added to his legend, but also attracted the attention of the police.

Damien seemed to exist as a continual *agent provocateur* of Maltese society. In 2002, upon being refused entry by security personnel to a well-known night club, Damien took the club owners to court on grounds of racial discrimination. The case became a *cause célèbre* in Malta and was even reported in the USA. The case was eventually dropped, but Damien takes credit for the subsequent non-discriminatory door policy evidenced by this and other clubs in Malta. Around the same time, Damien attempted to launch a sports magazine entitled

Prime Sport, which lasted for six editions and was infamous for its awful standard of English and photographs of scantily clad East European female tourists. In 2005 this latter interest saw Damien produce Malta's first-ever nude calendar, which was published by a local printer who wished to conceal this fact under the proviso 'Published in the EU'. Sold to government ministers and senior police officers, Damien also branched out into stag-night entertainment and was able to provide exotic dancers, usually of former Eastern bloc origin, for a variety of Maltese occasions and for people who were to pronounce on morality while paying for the services Damien offered.

In 2004 Damien stood in the MEP elections and pulled 157 votes, which he claims made him the third highest Independent candidate in Malta. Damien decided to run as an Independent with two slogans: 'Why not?' and 'Adding colour to the EP elections'. His agenda focused on minority rights and included women's rights, single parenting rights, gay rights, children's rights, and better conditions for sportsmen and sportswomen. He also hoped to polarise a protest vote against the government and parties' politics. In a press conference announcing his candidacy he stated:

I will use my influence as a FIFA agent to attract businessmen to invest in Maltese football... I also want to attract foreign insurance firms to set up shop in Malta to get rid of the monopolistic local firms to give people a choice. I want to attract foreign investment and I want a better relationship with our southern Mediterranean neighbours to foster peace in our region... Your vote for me will be a protest vote to show the parties that you are sick of their ways. I am appealing for the votes of all those who do not trust politicians; youths, men and women who believe in a multicultural Europe, gay people, small business owners, the disabled who are sick of being forgotten, foreigners in Malta, sportsmen and women.

In his view, his standing for election shook the island, not only because this black Nigerian had the audacity to join the Maltese electoral system, but because he did so at a time of massive fear and prejudice against sub-Saharan migrants arriving on Malta's shores. As Malta's most prominent black public figure, Damien was to receive invitations from ministers and the Prime Minister to sit on the Commission for Refugees in Malta. This imperturbable man thus lived an existence, which saw his car damaged regularly by enemies, being subjected to abusive phone calls and invitations to dinners in his honour, which upon arrival did not exist. At the same time he was to grace ministerial tables. His remarkable business ability and persona also changed the colour of football in Malta from the mid-1990s and saw the demise of the previous dominance of the Bulgarians. Damien's good fortune escaped him in mid-2006 when he was dismissed from his librarian job at the university. The footballing protégés, many of whom had only evening training to occupy their time, became a permanent fixture at the library to the annoyance of some scholars. When challenged as to their legitimacy to enter such premises Damien got involved in an

altercation with a senior academic which ended with an allegation of assault. Damien lost the appeal against his dismissal which he claimed was further evidence of racism in Malta.

Damien is unique in his status as an overseas-originating entrepreneur who has managed to establish himself as a 'big-man' of sorts through his trading of African players. He has used this position to launch for himself a potential political career, and to campaign for social reform in this traditionally oriented Catholic country. In many respects his activities mirror those of the local 'big-men'; and indeed those of football agents the world over. There is an irony, though, that despite his opposition to what he regarded as Malta's entrenched racism, he has specialised in a trade that has collared a racial market. His trade mirrors that of the less scrupulous traffickers of *clandestini* – who like his footballing migrants see Malta as a stepping stone to wealth and security in mainland Europe. That said, his position as spokesperson for anti-racism is timely, as the spectre of far-right politics has begun to emerge in contemporary Malta.

9 Foreign fan clubs

The global in the local

In this final chapter we return to the fans – not of the local clubs or national team – but of overseas club teams. Given the historical dual influence of Britain and Italy, the preponderance of such support lies with teams from England or Italy. In a situation in which the home game is universally acknowledged as hopeless, and local teams, while supported passionately, are dependent on the patronage and political acumen of the ‘big-men’, foreign club teams offer both quality and participation in a genuine sporting spectacle. That this spectacle is largely virtual – mass mediated, vicarious – is a product of the new international sporting *ecumene* (Hannerz 1996); a sporting *mediascape*, or *sportscape* to match Appadurai’s vision of the new global world.

As with all such global scapes, its manifestations are locally specific. Hence, access to the globalised consumer products that are the big European teams is mediated by local figures with the organisational and business abilities to set up Associations and to run clubhouses or bars which can accommodate enthusiasts and – all-importantly – large-screen satellite broadcasts of the teams in action. By 2005 six clubs, three English, three Italian, had dedicated premises for their supporters. Others had to rent space, others simply agreed to meet and in effect colonised bars willing to take their money while tolerating their enthusiasms. The ‘big-man’ politics of connection and clientelism is as much a property of the foreign fan clubs as it is of the local football clubs. Indeed, the linkage of the club presidents and the fan club chairmen is particularly clear when the fan clubs organise trips to Malta by their dedicated team – a long-term Maltese practice which has gained particular poignancy in the Mifsud MFA era.

Technologies of mediated football

Football in the decades 1930 to 1960 existed mainly in the personal imagination. In 1936 the British-owned Rediffusion broadcasting company offered Maltese listeners two channels: one broadcast in Maltese; the other, in English, was provided by the BBC. Italian radio, available from the mainland via powerful receivers, was indispensable for Maltese Italian football enthusiasts. There was good reason to follow the Italians. In 1934 Italy had hosted (and won) the World Cup; in 1936 Italy were Olympic champions, and in 1938 they won the

World Cup. England did not appear in these tournaments, but did play Italy in the San Siro Stadium in 1939, drawing 2–2 in a match shown days later in Maltese cinemas via Pathe News footage.

Live radio football commentary of the English League began to be broadcast globally by the BBC World Service from the 1950s, while pro-Italians could listen to the Italian equivalent on RAI (Italian state broadcasting) programmes. It was common from the 1950s onward to find Maltese watching Sunday afternoon domestic fixtures with radios pressed to their ears listening to the news from the Italian Serie A. Fandom was primarily a solo affair; the listener sat with his radio albeit some did meet informally in small bars to listen together, which was the earliest manifestation of collective foreign football fan identity.

The football imagination was soon to be visual as well as aural. Television sets arrived in Malta in the late 1950s; many recollect the first TV set in Zachary Street, Valletta, bought in 1958 following a trip to Sicily. The *Match of the Day* programme was first broadcast in Malta in the late 1960s, usually two or three days after the matches had been played (and broadcast) in England (Baldacchino 1995: 43). The TV set offered the Maltese their first chance to see great footballers live in action. By the late 1970s the Maltese could watch a variety of programmes such as *Star Soccer* and *Big League* which broadcast English games three days after they were played in a 50-minute programme. This visibility saw the beginnings of the critic-fan. This encouraged indigenous punditry and the development of the fan as critic, particularly with the advent of Italian programmes such as *Pressing* and *Il Processo di Lunedì*, a discussion programme hosted by Aldo Biscardi. This led hundreds of football fans to congregate outside the house of TV owners in the hope of being able to watch live games.

From 1990 to the present day appears what we will call postmodern fandom (cf. Giulianotti 1999). Melita Cable TV, begun in 1991, was granted a 15-year licence by the government to provide 57 cable channels to its Maltese audience. By 2001 68 per cent of the population had subscribed to this, and by 2004 the Maltese could watch both Italian and British channels dedicated to sport and one channel dedicated to Premier League football. One could not enter a home, a bar, a hotel or a restaurant in Malta without facing live football broadcasting. In many instances consumption of foreign football was once again an individual pursuit. The consumer sat at home in a passive capacity receiving the metanarratives (physically and literally) of the football experts. This consumer fan, bombarded with images, may well care little for the distinctions of the teams before him that sees football as a circular process, a hyper-real simulation (Baudrillard 1983). This was an anomic fandom, with technology cheap to install and with little maintenance required.¹

At the same time the mass of new images brought by cable introduced a structured and bureaucratised fandom. Fan clubs appeared, accompanied by gradations of membership, social structures and bureaucracies, which at times sought to discipline the bodies of their members. A number of stories tell the tale.

Club without a home: Malta Roma

The Malta Roma fan club first met in February 1973. By the year 2000 it had close to 150 members. The founder was Noel Enriques, who became a Roma fan in his early teens, despite his father following Juventus and his uncle following Lazio. Noel's passion for foreign Italian football was thus partly mediated by male family members and partly a product of a fascination with Italian radio football commentating, and his reading of reports on Italian football in the *Times of Malta*. His choice of Roma was in part religious, a product of the presumption that this must be the team supported by the Pope, the most famous resident of the Italian capital. A further fact was the Roma team strip of scarlet and yellow, which was similar to that worn by his home town team of Birkirkara. A further enforcement – as if it was needed – to the choice came in 1958 shortly after his father had purchased a TV set for the first time. The first football game the family ever watched saw Roma beat Napoli 8–0.

Only one other Roma enthusiast was found at Noel's school; two years younger than him, his name was Victor Zammit. Zammit was to become President of Birkirkara and win them their first-ever Maltese championship. The pair found half a dozen other members and held their first fan club meeting in Zammit parent's home in 1973. The two continued their enthusiasm when entering the world of work, Noel into a clerical position in the Department of Education, and Zammit initially into social welfare. On accumulating a grand total of six members Noel wrote to the official Roma fan club seeking recognition for his Malta entity. This came in April 1973 with a front-page story in the Roma monthly magazine *Giallo Rossi* (Yellow and Red). Photographs sent in by Noel were published. The following year a banner announcing 'Roma Club Malta' was made by Noel's wife. Such a banner proved iconic in being the first ever produced for Roma by a non-Italian fan club. The banner appeared at the Olympic Stadium Rome for the Roma–Milan fixture, held by an on-the-spot custodian. The Malta club advertised in the Roma magazine for an '*alfiere*' (the one who holds the flag). The chosen man from the four applicants was by virtue of being in his forties considered the most mature. In 2000 he was nearly 80 years of age, but still held the banner, which at every home game is placed in a reserved place on the stadium wall. The same man represents the absent Maltese at supporters' clubs meetings as well as booking tickets on behalf of visiting Maltese. In return he receives free entry into the stadium.

Two years after its formation, the supporters' club had a mere 12 members. Matters changed in November 1977 following the first publication of *Ital Football* – a magazine written in Maltese dedicated to Italian football. The editor was John Bencini, then President of the Malta Union of Teachers; the deputy editor was Noel. Costing 15 cents, the publication sold 500 copies in Malta. Publication ceased in June 1986 when political strife was at its height in Malta, and advertisers would refuse to buy space in publications, if those they considered political enemies were similarly advertising. The magazine, however,

kick-started an interest in Italian football. The Malta Juventus President used the magazine to re-create his ailing supporters' clubs. Other clubs were founded via advertisements in the magazine. The magazine was never revived; the new job the editor accepted prevented him from completing the laborious task of compiling the publication, and innovations in information technology made the printed word moribund.

Further recruitment to the Roma cause came naturally when in 1982 the Roma club won its second-only *scudetto* (1942 was the first time). The Malta club donated a trophy to the Champions and the Roma club acknowledged their kindness by letter. The previous year the then President of Roma, Dr Dino Viola, awarded the Malta club a trophy for their 'dedication', which the Maltese saw as a supreme achievement considering they were chosen out of the 150 Roma fan clubs. A further trophy came their way in 1986 when Roma Malta won a seven-a-side football tournament for Italian fan clubs in Malta – a tournament arranged by the Cagliari club in conjunction with *Ital Football* magazine. Involving six teams it was the only one of its kind ever held. In 1988 Roma visited Malta to play an exhibition game against a Malta XI. A crowd of 7,500 saw the visitors win 2–1. Funded by the MFA, the visit saw the Roma fan club given four VIP tickets whereupon they were able to meet with Roma officials headed by Dr Viola. Gifts were exchanged between supporters and club officials and a meeting held with two of the star players, Bruno Conti and Guiseppe Giannini.

By 1992 a lapel badge had been produced based on a design dreamt up in the office of the Roma and Malta presidents, wherein the 'Lupis' head, based on the image of the origins of Roma, was imposed on the Maltese Cross in red and gold colouring. The following year a newsletter produced on Noel's computer and written in Maltese informed all those interested of the history of the club and future events. This generated new members such that by 1999 there were 142 paying a Lm2-a-year subscription for which they received the newsletter and any memorabilia the Roma club sent.

Excursions to watch Roma were always modest affairs. Noel visited Rome for the first time in 1976; eight years later he was one of nine Maltese who attended the European Cup Final against Liverpool. At most only 12 had ever been to Rome as part of an organised football tour. As President, Noel presided over a board consisting of four other members (a President, a Treasurer, a Secretary and a Membership Secretary). His position as President had never been contested, which he admits worried him because at the age of 53 in 1999 he could not see a natural successor. An AGM elected the committee, which prior to 1988 attracted 30 members, and was held on the premises of the Ministry of Education by virtue of Noel working there as Assistant Director of Human Resources to all government departments. Post-1998, less than 10 per cent attended the AGM because Noel believed most members were happy merely to watch matches and did not worry about committee politics. Two of the five committee members were not proficient in Italian; more important was their commitment to the cause. Commitment was integral to the Malta Roma club

because their statute stated that three consecutive years of membership arrears meant banishment. Over the years 40 members had been lost in this way. Two years previously, on the 25th anniversary of the club's foundation, Noel wrote to all lapsed members inviting them to return to the fold, but received only five responses.

The Malta Roma club had no premises of their own. In 1998 the members agreed on the need of premises, wherein games broadcast from Italy could be watched for payment of a nominal fee. A small bar in Marsa facilitated their Sunday meetings, and enthusiasts could watch the game for a payment of 25 cents – a figure waived at Easter and Christmas. Averaging 50 per match, the arrangement was non-profit; Noel saw it as a hobby which cost him only his time, and was his only vice in the absence of smoking or drinking.

La Dolce Vita: Inter Milan (Malta)

A stairwell from street level takes the visitor to the two floors that constitute the club. Purpose built in 1996 and assisted by a cash donation from the club's honorary president (and President of Valletta FC) Joe Caruana-Curran, the club had a membership of 1,200 in 2004 and was open five nights a week, all day Sunday and every time Inter played a game. Match days could attract upward of 500 people and Sundays would see up to 400 enter in the course of 12 hours to reaffirm their Inter loyalties. The first floor hosted a social club and bar, and provided 150 blue and black chairs from which to view the game on two TVs. The bar area displayed a trophy cabinet, Milan apparel, and photographs of past Milan teams with pride of place being a framed shirt once worn by the Brazilian Ronaldo. The second floor is home to the committee room adjacent to which is the Secretaries' office and a room dedicated to a variety of electronic games, which provided a useful income.

The original Inter Malta club was founded in 1978; meetings were initially held at either band club premises or at members' homes. As far back as 1978 the club was affiliated to *Centro Co-ordinamento (CC)* – the official fan club organisation of Inter. In 1982 the club rented two rooms for meetings in Floriana. Eventually in 1996 the club bought the land upon which the clubhouse now stands. All members of Inter Malta boast that they are the biggest Inter fan club in the world – bigger even than any Italian-based fan club.

Enthusiasm for the Italians preceded the formation of the club, particularly in the Sliema area where, throughout the 1930s to the 1960s, empathy was accorded the Italians by virtue of their blue and black kit, which paralleled that of Sliema Wanderers and, significantly, the colours of the Nationalist Party flag. John Zammit, the President of the Inter Club in 2005, was Sliema born and bred, and his early football loyalties ran parallel with the resentment towards the British colonists. As a boy he resented being unable to play football on the pitches at St Patricks, St Andrews and Manoel Island, because they were occupied by British military and British religious personnel. Growing up in the 1960s, his enthusiasm for Inter was fired by the 1964 Championship victory

and, a year later, by their, once again, winning the League plus the European Cup and the Inter-Continental Cup. Considering himself unique in his family in being an Italian football enthusiast, John laughs when he reflects that his grandfather favoured English teams, while his father disliked football. His enthusiasm for Inter was manifest in 1962/1963 by watching RAI highlights of one half of one match every Sunday evening, enhanced later in the evening by the Italian chat show *Domenica Sportiva*, which often showed the highlights of all the Serie A games. The technology, which enthused all foreign supporters' clubs, was mostly from the Italian RAI, and later from Malta TV. Some 30 years later, the President can reminisce about the RAI radio commentators, Enrico Ameri and Sandro Ciotti, on the *Tutto Calcio Minuto per Minuto*.

The solitary enthusiasm for Inter, mediated through the airwaves, became more communal in the late 1970s when, in 1978, two men founded the Inter Club. The two, Joe Briggelli, a government ministry worker, and Lawrence Cutujar, then a police officer, published a letter in the monthly *Ital* football magazine seeking fellow enthusiasts. Meanwhile, the former contacted the Inter Club seeking official recognition for a Maltese supporters' club. Following the advert, a friendship grew between Joe and Lawrence and, through this friendship, a first meeting was called at the Civil Service Club in Valletta. Over the next few years, the emerging club met both in the original establishment and in the La Valette Band Club until, in 1982, they rented premises in Cappuccin Street in Floriana with the rudimentary attractions of a bar and TV. A formal premise required the establishment of a constitution and a committee, the structure of which was borrowed from pre-existing fan clubs of Inter in Italy. By 2001 employed as Police Inspector, and aged in his forties, Lawrence describes his full-time occupation to an inquisitor as Club Secretary to the Inter Milan (Malta) supporters' club. Looking after its 360 fully paid-up members was, at times, a full-time job, but it was not an identity the Secretary wished to conceal. On the day we met he wore a tie and a wristwatch, which proclaimed his Inter loyalties.

In Lawrence's opinion Inter fans were born not made. At the age of two his parents recognised in him a particular enthusiasm for the blue and black strip of Inter. This defied parental logic because his father supported English football. When questioned as to his opinion of AC Milan, his response was vehement: 'shit, absolute shit', with the added explanation:

We used to have an annual football match with AC fan club, but there was too much fighting. We have good relations now at committee level, and two months ago the President of Juventus visited here. Fans of other Italian fan clubs do visit because we have a good bar and food, but many of our members are not happy when they are on the premises. On match days only Inter fans can enter; we had one guy here from Cagliari, who cheered when they scored, and trouble began.

Lawrence has held his position for some four years; he was proud of his status and particularly proud as Treasurer as he was obviously trusted with money. A

receipt for every pound spent was kept and entered into a book. For people like Lawrence the club is not just a hobby but an essential part of their lives. For Lawrence his hobby costs him around Lm600 annually and his duties bring him into the club nightly and most of Sunday. Two nights a week he is accompanied by his wife and children; for this reason he ensures that the club premises are impeccably clean and that the premises are appropriate in many senses for a family visit.

The enthusiasm for such a club was made flesh in 1978 when Inter were drawn against Floriana in the Cup Winners Cup. The Inter visit saw the club's General Director, Sandro Mazzola, and the President, Ivano Fraizzona, meet with the Committee of Inter Malta with the visitors bringing a variety of apparel for Maltese Inter fans. The visit of Inter and the attitude of their two diplomats saw a huge surge in support of Inter Malta. This brought the realisation that the premises in Floriana consisting of two rooms was inadequate. In 1994, after 16 years as President, Joe Bugelli was replaced, following an election, by John Zammit. The new President set himself three targets; the first was to find other premises, the second was to increase membership and the third was to improve relations with the Inter Club. In pursuit of the first, Zammit arranged a loan with a bank and negotiated to buy a plot of land. Planning permission for a club was then obtained, and further funding was received by his seeking donations from members, and five-year loans of between Lm150 and Lm200. The existence of no fewer than six honorary presidents of the Inter Club in 2004 not only reflected the great service provided by some of those named, but also the generosity of others in the founding of the premises. The club cost Lm100,000 to build, for which the Bank of Valletta provided a Lm60,000 loan. By 2005 the loan was almost repaid.

The Inter Club rents out the bar annually and in return dictates to the proprietor when he opens. A busy Activities Secretary arranges Maltese nights, wine and pizza nights and other social events assisted by an Inter enthusiast, who runs a catering business. A lottery and raffle on match day also bring in money. The cost to members entering the premise on match day is Lm1; in return they receive a raffle ticket at the door and a chance to win a Milan-related item. A season ticket, giving entry to all games throughout the season, costs Lm25 and, unique among the supporters' clubs in Malta, the Inter Club will allow an enthusiast to purchase a reserved seat for Lm70 a season. Some 280 fans had taken advantage of this offer. A good turnout would see between 500 and 600 watching games in one of the two rooms. The outlay for the Club was the pay-per-view, which required a satellite dish bought from Italy, which broadcast all Inter's home and away games. A decodifier was required; the full circumstances of this was a somewhat grey area.

The membership fee, which Lawrence collected, costs Lm7 per annum, most of which went to the *Centro Co-ordinamento* (CC); in return members receive souvenirs and mementos. Every two months a magazine is published which is distributed free to members; such publications have existed since 1978. By 2001 the magazine was a 56-page entity; in 2000 a website was set up. The club exists on donations from enthusiasts and membership fees. An educated professional,

middle-class membership, which includes a considerable number of lawyers, means that generous donations were not difficult to come by.

Despite being the largest Inter supporters' club outside of Italy, tickets for games have not proven problematic.² To the contrary, such is the allocation they receive, by virtue of a pro-rata system, that even Italian-based supporters clubs seek tickets from the Maltese which, at times, they are unable to obtain. Two positions on the committee are for public relations and social activities. Sometimes the two combined their abilities particularly for the trips to Milan, which occurred on an average of three times a year. An average excursion would see 50 enthusiasts travel, but for a game against Manchester United in 2000 150 journeyed, and in 1998 140 travelled to watch the UEFA Cup Final. The Milan club provide good seats; in fact, they believe they receive preferential treatment above many Italian-based clubs. That said, on some visits to Milan the club did not allow the visitors to watch the team train, and at the 2000 AGM members suggested the club leave CC. This was not carried due to the belief that disaffiliation would provide problems in obtaining match tickets. In July 2000 Milan, with a 21-man delegation, visited Malta; a dinner was held for them in the clubhouse. Consisting of four players who were injured plus a variety of medical and club officials, fans could watch the players train at the Marsa Stadium. The hotel accommodation was given free by the Corinthia San Georg hotel chain in return for what they considered great publicity, and Air Malta provided flights. A previous visit in 1995 saw just two Inter players visit the clubhouse.

The club is run by a board of directors, at the top of which is the role of President. The President has to be nominated and seconded. If it is contested, a secret ballot would be the preferred method of voting, but as yet no situation has arisen which has seen the presidency contested. The main criteria for president was proficiency in Italian, the ability to speak in public, and to maintain discipline. Elected for a two-year period by the club committee the committee in turn is elected by an AGM. The 13-man committee has been in existence since 1978. The show of hands by which the AGM elects the committee requires (in theory) two-thirds of club members to see a change in personnel. The quorum nominally is one-third of members, which would mean AGMs of at least 400 people; however, the AGM – called at 7.00 p.m. – usually attracts some 200, and the meeting proceeds by the consensus that this is a mandate to legislate.

The club statute forbids political debate, which is just as well because in 2000 the committee was split evenly between Labour and Nationalists. The reluctance to promote politics is taken seriously to the extent that politically owned TV stations are not allowed to be broadcast on club premises. Furthermore, committee members are not permitted to have connections with Maltese political parties. While political tensions are subsumed, the perennial complaints of unequal commitment to the Inter cause will surface.

The Inter Club was, of all the foreign clubs in Malta, the cleanest and best furnished. For John this was a reflection of his standards as President. His aim

was to produce premises that would attract families and, to this end, he was willing to force confrontations with those whose behaviour fell below the standards that he and Lawrence expected. In John's absence some members had taken advantage and been vociferous in opinions and, when this was related to John, he was forced to admonish the people and warn them as to their future conduct.

On match days, John and Lawrence on occasion spent as much time watching the audience as the game, and would reprimand those using profane language; even throwing cigarettes on the floor brought their wrath. For John, a manager with a wine and spirit company, standards in public life were something he took very seriously, considering himself disciplined and well brought up, and reminiscing about his time in the Salesian's Boys Brigade. He accepted the accusations from members that, on occasions, he was too strict in enforcing standards. That said, he considers the barring of more than two people annually as a testimony to the work of the Committee. Others, he admits, had been brought in and had to face him and Lawrence and receive a verbal reprimand.

Fans from rival supporters' clubs were not encouraged to attend the premises. Non-members paid Lm2 and were not allowed to pass comments or create any form of conflict between members. On occasion, Juventus fans caused problems, but this was mainly via abusive phone calls or motorcades passing by the premises. Inside the two rooms, Inter fans could choose the nature of their involvement in the football spectacle. The larger of the rooms was added in 1999 when an adjacent building was bought. For four years John enforced a 'no drinks' and 'no smoking' policy in this room and also insisted all spectators sit for the game. The no drinks policy was rescinded, but the no smoking remained by virtue of its being the law of the land. The other smaller room, which contained a bar, was referred to as a place where the 'Ultras' spectated.³

Relations with other football entities were somewhat strained by 2005. An annual football game between Inter and AC Milan proved a disaster, mainly because of abuse from respective touch-lines towards opponents. Furthermore, the sympathies towards all things Italian were not particularly forthcoming from the Inter Club. This was not always the case, but the final game of Serie A in 1998 changed matters. On this day Inter lost to Juventus and, therefore, lost the Championship. The referee was accused, in the Italian Parliament, of favouring Juventus. Furious with what they perceived as corruption in Italian football, the Inter fan club withdrew its support of the National team, and are only enthused when Inter players are on the team. John even expresses quiet pride in claiming to be the only Italian supporters' club who do not follow the Italian national team.

A theatre of dreams: Manchester United (Malta)

Founded in 1959 the Manchester United Supporters Club (Malta) is the oldest foreign fan club in Malta. Two men can claim credit for its origins – Joe Glanville and John Calleja. The former placed an advert in a local paper

seeking to meet with like-minded United enthusiasts. The latter responded by informing him that such a club existed and he had started it. Aged 68 in 2007, Calleja holds the title of Honorary President for life. His other claim to fame is being coach of the national football team between 1976 and 1978.

A photograph of Manchester United in a gazette given to Calleja, as a ten-year-old by a British former RAF pilot who had married his cousin, began Calleja's love affair with Man. Utd. After the war ended, Calleja wrote to the Manchester United Manager, Matt Busby, and received a club programme and souvenir in response. Two years later United won the 1948 FA Cup. Having no one to celebrate with, Calleja considered the need to establish a venue wherein those like him could meet and share their enthusiasm. Some nine years later Calleja, once again, wrote to Busby enclosing a copy of the letter he had sent him as a ten-year-old. The response was an invitation to Old Trafford. The Chief Scout of the club, Mr Armstrong, was sent to meet Calleja at Manchester railway station. Aged 19 he was allowed to train with the squad, and was picked up and taken to his hotel, courtesy of Manchester United. It was a dream come true for a 19-year-old from Malta. A few months later half the Manchester United team died in the Munich aircraft disaster of 1958. Months later, visiting Old Trafford to offer his condolences to Matt Busby, Calleja suggested the idea of a Manchester United supporters' club in Malta. Busby promised to help in any way he could, as did the club secretary, Les Olive.

In January 1959 the first such meeting took place in a youth centre in Sliema. Some 80 people attended in response to Calleja's adverts in the sports pages of local newspapers. A month later, on the first anniversary of the Munich disaster, the Malta supporters' club was formally established. The first meeting voted in a six-man committee and a president. The committee met fortnightly and three meetings were held annually for all members. A two-page news sheet was produced by the President. Membership was half a crown in British sterling currency, which saw a return in the shape of souvenirs and mementoes periodically sent courtesy of Old Trafford. The Malta Club takes great pride in being the oldest surviving Manchester United supporters' club in the world. Others existed in Manchester pre-1959, but have since folded.

Until his marriage Calleja visited Old Trafford annually. Allowed, when young, to participate in training sessions with the first team squad, Calleja began a friendship with Jack Crompton, the United goalkeeper, who visited Malta annually in later years. The club maintained good personal friendships with Manchester United officials. The wedding of Alex Ferguson's son saw two of the Manchester United (Malta) Club present and the marriage of the daughter of Joe Glanville in 2003 saw Alex Ferguson attend. Indeed, one of the books profiling the life of Alex Ferguson mentions the special place Malta holds in the hearts of so many at Manchester, and the three trophies won by Manchester United that were brought to Malta in 1999 were not allowed to go to any other country. The fans came in their thousands to be photographed with the trophies in the supporters' social club in St Venera.

Considering the premises exist in homage to the world's most popular football club, the view from outside is modest. One enters the clubhouse on match day from street level up a steep, narrow staircase. At the top a visitor is greeted by two officials who sell raffle rickets for a half-time draw. Told in hindsight that admission was free, getting past the ticket seller costs the prospective viewer Lm1. The big room is dominated by a giant TV screen in front of which are set out some 200 chairs. A no-go area in front of the screen reveals a small platform, which is useful for the announcements made in the course of the night by the club officials. The evidence of a club hierarchy, the altar before the screen and the seating arrangement designed with an aisle, suggests a quasi-religious gathering.

Closer scrutiny reveals a symbolic universe of semiotics alongside unabashed kitsch. A huge banner on the back wall reads 'Fergie's Army in Malta', and further homage to the team manager is evident in the left-hand side of the room with its 'McFergie Bar' and its 30" TV. A bar at the opposite side of the room also has a TV above it as does a pool table located in a corner. For those not overcome with images, the glass panels of the souvenir shop provide for a perusal of all things Manchester locally available. While awaiting kick-off, the huge screen broadcasts MUTV. On this exciting night – a Champions League semi-final in 1998 – the appearance of the eponymous Fergie and his team met with spontaneous applause from those gathering some 75 minutes before kick-off. Those seated are a different demographic to their equivalent number standing around the perimeter of the room. The seated include more females and more teenage males. They number 200 and have a male-to-female ratio of about 10:1. Elsewhere stand older men and the occasional woman. Those seated are animated, and cheer when the team are televised entering the pitch; elsewhere the game is watched with minimal conversation. As the beer (both local and foreign) is opened and the hobz-biz-zeit (bread with olives) and burgers and chips are consumed, the din grows louder. Shortly before kick-off, assisted by a microphone, one of the Committee speaks to those sitting in front of the big screen. In Maltese he urges their support and best behaviour. When United take the lead the assembled 500 cheer; those sitting down jump up. The celebrations are akin to that of a 'real' football crowd. The half-time lead sees bladders emptied, bottles replenished, and the same official resume his sermon on the platform.

Be controlled in passion. . . . Do not behave improperly. We must show them we are good supporters. (Issanaridu noruwhom li hana supporter tajbin). Don't give them [the other fans] satisfaction.

The passion dies as Real Madrid get back into the game. The room is then silenced by one of the most sublime moments in footballing history when Real's Argentinean winger, Redondo, leaves the Norwegian-born United full-back for dead with a movement no one in the room has ever witnessed before, and crosses for his colleagues to put Real 3–2 ahead. The silence is broken by a

shout for the Norwegian, Solksjaaer, who is currently sitting on the substitutes bench. The solitary voice provokes a multitude of contrary opinions as the disgruntled attempt to alter the thinking of Fergie. Nothing works. The crowd depart some 20 minutes later, grumbling, disconsolate and without ceremony.

Membership of the club has fluctuated with the fortunes of Manchester United. When relegated to Division Two in 1977 membership, contrarily, remained high. More joined when United returned to Division One. By 1986 the club had obtained its own premises in Valletta. Prior to this, the well-attended general meetings were held at the Anglo-Maltese Club in Valletta; the annual social event was hosted by any restaurant considered suitable. The Valletta premises, chosen because of its proximity to all things commercial and social, came with the purchase of a video recorder and TV screen. The occasions for meeting thus grew; videos of all United's games were shown days after the match upon their arrival by air. Videos of older games were shown from 9 a.m. on Sundays as members filed in for drinks. A growing membership had reached 500 by the late 1970s. The perennial problem of car-parking in the Capital made visiting the premises frustrating for many a fan. New premises were found in 1990 in St Venera in a former wedding hall; a rent was agreed. The bar was run on a lease. Eventually the premises were bought by the club and decorated to their specification.

In 2000 the annual membership fee was Lm8. Over 1,000 members had paid. The statute that proved the club existed was drawn up by John Calleja, borrowed from the official United supporters' clubs in England. The Maltese version was sent to the United club secretary, who accepted them as a recognised fan club. Two updates to the statutes were later made. In Calleja's time at the helm no aspiring supporter was ever refused membership, and only one was barred having been found 'fiddling with money'.⁴

No other Malta supporters' club has such a good relationship with the club it follows. Manchester United personnel visited annually. Visits by the players began in the 1970s with Jack Compton. In the late 1970s Gordon McQueen and Martin Buchan visited as guests of honour at the supporters' club end-of-season dinner. In the 1970s the supporters' club hosted visiting Joe Jordan and Sammy McIlroy. In the 1990s Paul Ince was guest of honour shortly before joining Inter Milan. The Manager, Alex Ferguson, visited annually in the late 1990s. The midfielder, Paul Scholes, took a summer vacation in Malta in 2003.

Touring Manchester United teams visited Malta in 1961 – Matt Busby had promised to bring them following the establishment of the supporters' club two years previously. A game against a Malta XI saw the visitors win 2–0 in front of 28,000 before the squad left to tour Italy. A 'nominal fee' paid by the MFA to United secured their visit. The MFA entrusted the visit to the supporters' club. Following a training session the squad mixed with the fans for two hours; all the team attended and social events were laid on. Members of the supporters' club doubled soon after. A similar upsurge in membership came about in 1968 following the two-legged European fixture which saw local side Hibernians play Man. Utd, and hold them to a 0–0 draw before losing 4–0 at Old Trafford. A

1987 visit to Malta was not entrusted to the supporters' club. This was brokered between the club and the Naxxar-based Maltese entrepreneur Michael Zammit-Tabone. The squad, however, did attend a United supporters' night. The visitors played a Naxxar Select and beat them 11–0. The visit was badly timed, coinciding, as it did, with the televised FA Cup Final and a Maltese general election; the early kick-off on the day attracted a disappointing 10,000 crowd.

Fans have travelled the other way since the 1970s. By the late 1980s excursions from Malta were taking place up to three times a year. The Old Trafford ticket office manager sent tickets to the secretary of the Malta supporters' club. The allocation of tickets, however, proved problematic. At times tickets were granted via a lottery draw of all participating (and paid-up) members. At one time a suggestion was made that tickets be allocated to those who were the most deserving by virtue of their longevity as members or unpaid work on behalf of the club. Eventually a first-come-first-served policy was adopted, but this was not straightforward or appreciated. Many lapsed members complained about the obscurity behind ticket allocation. Others among the 20,000-plus Malta–Manchester United supporters who had no formal connection to the supporters' club recounted how one of the club's most senior officials was found selling three tickets allocated to the club in the Barcelona Ramblas two hours before kick-off of the European Cup Final in 1999 between Bayern Munich and United. For this reason the club was not considered by all as a representative for them.

The Malta club exists in relation to other similar entities in Malta and to its equivalents in England. A banner proclaiming 'Malta Manchester United' was unfurled throughout the 1990s at United games in England. The UK supporters of the club know of their Maltese co-fans and dozens arrive at the Maltese club premises when holidaying in Malta. Entering teams in foreign supporters' club football competitions in Malta sees a public face which would suggest that members of all such clubs enjoy friendly rivalry. That said, abusive phone calls are received at the clubhouse from rivals on the island and, following the defeat by Galatasary of Turkey in a European qualifier in 1993, a box of Turkish Delight confectionery was found on the club doorstep next morning.

Domestic politics are banned as a topic of conversation in the clubhouse. Those who constitute the Committee have come from both sides of Malta's political spectrums. One story, which Calleja recollects of the 1960s, speaks volumes of the power of football:

When the Manchester United team came to stay at The Phoenicia [hotel] I went for a walk with the players. We walked along Republic Street in Valletta and outside the Labour Party Club hung a banner saying 'British Get Out'.... Now when they saw who was walking past their premises all the people in there came out and applauded the players and backroom staff.

Domestic pastimes seeking to establish *esprit de corps* and fund-raising are typically Maltese; a dinner both begins and ends the season. On Christmas Eve two

free drinks and free snacks are provided for all members in the clubhouse, New Year's Eve usually sees a disco, and members will participate annually in the Maltese tradition of *Fenkata* (rabbit stew). No one patron has ever been in a position to dominate policy. Instead, many people contribute money, offer reductions by way of reduced rates in travel or hotel accommodation, or in providing premises for events.

Of all the people involved in foreign supporter clubs, Calleja is unique in the level of commitment he has concomitantly placed in domestic football. At one time coach of Sliema, Valletta and Hibernians, Calleja progressed to coach the Malta national team for two years and the national youth teams for four. This Sliema-born teacher, who had to turn down an all-expense-paid trip by Manchester United to Real Madrid in 1968 because the college principal refused him time off, has, since finishing coaching, limited his football involvement to punditry on local TV and radio phone-ins.

On the initiative of Calleja three youth team players of Sliema Wanderers travelled to train with Manchester United in 1999. The United youth team coach, Enric Harrison, visited Malta for a holiday and at the invitation of the Manchester United club gave a coaching session at the Sliema Wanderers nursery. The three were funded by Manchester United, thereby building on what was begun in the early 1970s when Simon Tortell (a Sliema player) pioneered the route to Manchester. In the 1990s Alex Ferguson annually sent a scout to look at what might be available in Malta. He found little.

Aware that TV coverage of the English Premier is damaging attendances at Ta'Qali, Calleja suggests that the MFA move domestic fixtures to Friday and Monday evenings. At the same time he considers that non-attendance at domestic fixtures does not mean lack of interest. A great many fans of foreign clubs do follow the domestic football scene, but via the media:

We are a proud people, but we don't always show it. Football fanatics want to be associated with a winning side. Our local clubs and national side cannot qualify for anything so we associate ourselves with nations that can ... but when our national team does well everybody is proud.

By 1999 the President of the Malta Manchester United club held a different opinion of local football. Asking incredulously how the national team's Technical Director could be pre-appointed after being sacked six years previously, he poured scorn on the MFA for its filthy seats at Ta'Qali and for the profanities that were flung at Maltese football matches. His footballing nirvana was Old Trafford wherein comfort was at an apex and a man could safely take his wife. As a bank clerk who went into catering, managing a café, a bakery and catering franchises at the airport and a hospital and two bars in Malta's foremost holiday resort, John Buttigieg was a successful entrepreneur married to an English woman.

A personal friend of the man he calls 'Fergie' (and whom Buttigieg referred to throughout the interview as 'Boss'), he was also a friend of the parents of

David Beckham, and the Neville brothers. These two sets of parents had frequented Malta long before their offspring became household names. Photographs show the two 17-year-old prospective players on holiday with their parents. Today both Beckham and Neville own Maltese properties. The latter's wife went out to buy furniture with the wife of the supporters club President. Furthermore, the President was invited to the wedding of Beckham to 'Posh' Spice Girl Victoria Adams. He was also invited personally by 'the boss' to his Testimonial dinner.

Income streams and the United legends

The 13-man committee was headed by Buttigieg; below him in the hierarchy was a vice-president sitting alongside a treasurer and secretary, and below them are nine positions. The statute states that all committee men keep their positions for two years and that the committee vote in the President for a five-year stint. During his presidency, the premises cost Lm5,000 annually to rent. The rent of the bar and a weekly lottery meant that the rent was easily covered. The Lm8 individual membership (Lm5 to the under-16s and over 61s) rose to Lm10 for a family. All members received the *Maltese-Man. Utd* magazine free (produced eight times a year and begun 25 years previously), and free entry to the club premises for matches. Open nightly and all day Saturday and Sunday, the souvenir shop could make a Lm10,000 profit annually. The turnover in the year 2000 was Lm150,000. Finances go in the other direction, to a degree, with the club owning 50 original shares in Manchester United.

The Manchester United club was unlike any other in Malta. Not only did it have the biggest membership of all fan clubs at 1,200 members, in 1999 it was also the pioneer of distinction and segregation. The walls of the club displayed photographs and portraits of past and current presidents, and those on the committee went some way towards emphasising their exclusive status. They had their own executive meeting room, tended to dress formally when on the premises and drank spirits rather than beer.

The fanaticism the Manchester United football 'brand' could evoke provided for a reality of the imperatives of football club tours of the early twenty-first century. This involved the Maltese visiting Manchester and Manchester United visiting Malta.

In the role of broker Buttigieg arranged for the Maltese FA Secretary Norman Darmanin-Demajo and the MFA-employed Yugoslav fitness expert Drasko Tomas to visit Old Trafford to learn more about training methods. Later three players, including the then 17-year-old local boy wonder Michael Mifsud, spent two weeks at Old Trafford along with the Malta Under-21 coach 'Zazu' Farrugia, the visit paid for by Old Trafford.

Six tickets for every Manchester United home game are made available to the Malta club, yet visits of up to 60 are not unknown and tickets are somehow obtained for all. No less a figure than Alex Ferguson ensured the Maltese contingents of a stadium tour and was known to pull passing players and

instruct them to sign autographs. The one-time Club Secretary, Ken Merrick, was considered by many as a good friend of the Maltese Club.

In 1999 three plane loads of Malta Manchester United supporters' club travelled to Barcelona to watch the European Cup Final. One hundred and fifty-six fans witnessed an epic, which saw their team take the third trophy of the season to add to the English Premiership and the FA Cup. The clamour to be part of the celebrations saw John Buttigeig chartering an aircraft, and bringing the three trophies to Malta at a cost of Lm6,000. Later the same day David Beckham and Gary Neville flew into Malta, visited the club premises, and flew out the same night.

While the Hibernians–Man. Utd fixtures of 1967/1968 are the only occasions when a Maltese side has played a competitive game against the Red Devils, the absence of the team has not prevented the growth of support for the club, nor the growth of Manchester United-related commercial enterprises. By 1999 two soccer coaching schools existed in Malta, which attracted thousands of enthusiasts and brought tens of thousands of pounds profit. The first of these was the Bobby Charlton School, begun in 1971 and named after the famed centre-forward, who was brought to Malta by the entrepreneurial figure of Joe Gasan. Owner of the Sliema bus company, the Gozo and the pre-war Malta–Sicily ferries, importer of vehicles and real estate trader, Gasan had fabulous wealth and funded Sliema Wanderers. Gasan funded the visit of Charlton to launch coaching schools in his name. Still going strong 30 years later, the actual involvement of Charlton was miniscule, as the schools had become a franchise which, while normally headed by an English-born coach, was primarily a leisure resource for children of any ability.

Challenging the Charlton nomenclature from 2000 were soccer schools run in the name of Gary Neville. While the latter had a genuine affection for Malta by virtue of childhood holidays, the entity established in his name was a commercial venture run in conjunction with local business interests, originally located in the stadium of Hamrun Spartans. For a fee of Lm30 those attending received football kit, cap and ball, and two 90-minute coaching sessions, courtesy of local coaches, one of whom was the under-21 national team coach, the other the most capped player in Maltese history. As part of the deal Gary Neville had agreed to appear twice at the school in the course of the week. Despite public relations-led stories about Neville assisting the underprivileged of Malta, the school charged all who attended.

United in Malta: photogenic and profitable

In 2000 Manchester United visited Malta for five days. The cost, underwritten by various Maltese businesses, was in the region of Lm350,000. A plane was chartered for the team's use, accommodation was provided free at the Holiday Inn and two coaches were placed at their disposal. A match against a local XI was arranged at Ta'Qali out of which the MFA requested 15 per cent of the takings.

Commercial consideration underpinned the whole event. Shortly before the visit, the MFA had signed up Go Mobile (a Maltese Parastatal Company) for a huge advert at Ta'Qali Stadium. The sponsors of Man. Utd were a rival telecommunications company – Vodaphone. The latter spoke to the former to request that they remove their advert from the match, which they agreed to, but the MFA did not. Somehow the issue was resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Vodaphone contributed Lm40,000 to the trip and Rothmans cigarettes put in Lm10,000 on condition that the game was broadcast live to African TV channels.

The trip was a joint venture funded by the Malta supporters' club and local entrepreneurs, and Birkirkara football club Chairman Victor Zammit. Weeks earlier he had seen his team win their first ever Championship, in the year of their 50th anniversary. For him the visit was a continuation of the celebrations. Wary of ruining the event by making it a local club versus global club issue and, thereby, reducing the number who might pay to watch, Zammit organised the game to include players from three local clubs. He also attempted to bring in guest players with varying reputations.

The organiser of the event claimed that it broke even. The United contingent played their role to perfection. A one-hour visit to the supporters' club attracted thousands, who listened to a few speeches of thanks from the balcony. The more intimate surroundings of the clubhouse were limited to life members and those who paid Lm100 for the privilege. Others – over 300 – paid Lm1 to the supporters' club to watch one of the two training sessions that the club put on. The dedicated MUTV spent one day broadcasting the visit, and Gary Neville, accompanied by a camera crew, bought an apartment in the newly built Portomaso Marina complex, which suited the projections of the entrepreneurs that built the complex, the son of whom owned a hotel adjacent to McDonald's restaurant, which housed the Birkirkara supporters' club in Valley Road, Birkirkara. In return for pumping funds into the Birkirkara football club, the hotel was allowed to host a press conference for the visiting team.

Others benefited financially from the visit. Not least of these was a newly opened Vodaphone retail outlet which was graced by a visit from the team, whereupon they signed autographs for hundreds of waiting fans. The United Manager, however, visited a home for disabled children run by the Catholic Church. A family connection to the supporters' club President produced a request that some representatives of the club visit. A crowd of hundreds welcomed Fergie and the charity received welcome publicity.

The Malta officials had organised a near-perfect trip. Having escorted Manchester United to Malta, they had ensured their arrival was without incident. While thousands turned up to greet them, thereby defying media warnings not to, the plane was parked well away from the terminal building and the squad were taken away in a coach, which entered the runway and cleared the necessity of formal customs. The only blemish on the landscape was the behaviour of the players who, on their final night, enjoyed the delights of the night life of Paceville. Leaving the notorious 'Havana' night club, two household names were carried out by team mates unable to walk due to their excessive alcohol

consumption. Another was asked to leave by club security, having touched the backside of a young lady who did not appreciate such attention. The final job of the supporters' club President was a furious phone call denying the story as published in the local English-language newspaper. The Sheffield-born editor refused to rescind the claims and called for an exclusive with the players concerned. This was not forthcoming and the issue went no further.

The Old Lady abroad: Juventus (Malta)

On 30 December 1998, a Malta Select XI played the visiting Juventus team at the Ta'Qali Stadium. The Malta selection was chosen from three clubs: Birkirkara and Sliema, who offered their full squads, alongside two players chosen from Naxxar. The game was broadcast live on the Italian RAI Three station and to the Middle East, but the broadcasting fee was solely for the benefit of Juventus.

The visit began in the cockpit of an aeroplane on a domestic flight in Italy. The Maltese pilot had permitted one of his passengers, an Italian named Roberto Bettega, the President of Juventus, to enter the cockpit. While discussing aviation technology, the conversation turned to football. The captain, in his innocence, asked when Juventus might next visit Malta; the question met with a request for an invitation and an undertaking that the costs would be covered. Acquainted with the President of Sliema Wanderers Robert Arrigo, the captain's conversation saw Arrigo travel one week later to Turin to discuss the proposed tour with his Juventus counterpart. To play one game Juventus wanted Lm180,000; a deal was subsequently worked out. The Minister of Tourism gave Lm35,000; the Presidents of three football clubs contributed as did a hotelier and the manager of the largest sports apparel outlet in Malta. The MFA permitted the match to take place at the national stadium at a cost of Lm8,000, and tickets sold for between Lm10 and Lm20. The 3 p.m. kick-off saw a crowd of 16,000, and a claim from the tour's backers that they had broken even financially.

Not all football lovers in Malta were happy with the event. Players from Valletta, Floriana and the Hibernians were not considered. The latter two presidents wanted reassurances regarding insurance should any of their players sustain injuries; these were not forthcoming, so their players were not released. One president was offended at not being considered for this venture from the start, and so refused to send any players.

The visit, while a triumph for the organisers in getting Juventus to Malta, proved a disaster in other aspects. The arrival of the Juventus squad at the airport at 10.30 p.m. was met by 3,000 well-wishers. What few police were in evidence were crushed in the fans' attempts to acclaim the world champions. Some police officers contented themselves with taking souvenir photographs of the players. Some employed at the airport disregarded airline convention. The landing cards that each of the players had signed disappeared, taken as souvenirs. Even Zinedine Zidane's lack of a passport – he had forgotten to pack it –

proved no obstacle. As the Juventus officials argued, there was only one of him, and anybody in the world would recognise him. His importance was somewhat compromised minutes later behind a surge of people that saw him sprawled in a flowerbed. Nearby the Juventus coach, Marcello Lippi, fearing the crowd, asked a police officer for a piggyback ride. The dreadlocked Juve and Dutch Captain, Edgar Davids, rounded furiously on fans who pulled his hair. In hindsight many blamed the local media who, for days, had built up the arrival of Juventus as though it was the second coming of Christ.

Things grew worse. The tight schedule for the squad had included a 9.30 a.m. visit the following day to the sports apparel retailer who had supported the visit and, indeed, supplied kit for the match. The 1,000-plus crowd awaiting the arrival of Juventus were disappointed when the squad did not turn up. Two hours later a similar number were awaiting the squad scheduled to officially open the new Juventus-Malta clubhouse. The throng had to make do with three of the Juve backroom staff. A barbecue evening at the hotel, where the Juventus team were staying, saw 800 Maltese pay Lm8 for the chance to chat with the Juventus players. However, while the players did attend, their appearance was brief.

Local embarrassment provoked a national enquiry. The seating arrangement at the stadium was chaotic. Many tickets were duplicated; confused spectators were eventually told to sit where they could; the price differentials were meaningless. A goal after five minutes gave the Malta Select a surprise lead, which silenced the Maltese crowd, 80 per cent of whom were supporting Juventus. The response of Juventus was to score five goals, which made the majority of spectators happy. The Juve victory was not considered a defeat of a Maltese team. After all, many argued, this was not the National side and the Select XI included a Yugoslav and two naturalised Maltese, one formerly English and the other Nigerian; indeed, two of the substitutes were African-born. Not all were convinced by this reasoning. The letters page of the local press provided a debate over the issue as to whom the Maltese were, when the majority of the stadium was supporting an Italian club. Meanwhile, footballs signed by the Juventus squad and meant for a charity auction mysteriously disappeared from the Ta'Qali Stadium.

Founded in the 1960s by local lawyer and MP Tony Dimech, the original Juventus Malta fan club went under the name of Club Amici della Juventus, and met on premises owned by a band club. By 1975 the Juventus club rented premises in Valletta, and in the same year was accepted by the mother club as 'Juventus Club Malta'. The club badge depicts a heart with the black and white stripes of Juventus, inlaid in which is the island of Malta and the Maltese Cross. Underneath are the words of Juventus Club Vero Amore, Malta 1975. The club claims to have had, at one time, the largest membership of any foreign fan club in Malta, but the entity in existence in 1998 was rather different from the original idea of Juventus enthusiasts. The original idea as far back as the 1960s was to operate a Malta club attached to the Turin-based Gruppo Amici della Juve and, to this end, two of the three founders, who were sports journalists, liaised

with the Italian entity and called a meeting at the Piazza Regina in central Valletta. It was not until 1975 that the three established a formal (and separate) entity, which they named Juventus Club Malta. The adverts in the local newspapers they worked for called upon other enthusiasts to meet and, having no premises of their own, rented out the La Vallette Band Club and later the Osbourne Hotel. Realising that Juventus fans were now numbering hundreds, in 1979 the club rented premises on Zacchary Street in Valletta, and continued as a fan club there for approximately 18 years.

The Juventus team had only twice played a Maltese team in a competitive tournament. In 1971 the visit to Malta produced a 6–1 victory over Marsa in the first round of the UEFA Cup. In 1987, in a similar fixture, Juventus beat Valletta 4–0. In later years, Juventus arrived courtesy of Maltese funding. In 2000 Roberto Bettiga, then Vice-President of Juventus, was appointed Honorary President of the Malta supporters' club, which paid some Lm10,000 for him and 11 others to visit the islands. On the 25th anniversary of the founding of the club, the Juventus and Italian International, Marco del Piero came to Malta to visit the club.

A wide palazzo-style staircase takes visitors up two flights of stairs to the bar, with its adjacent committee room, souvenir shop and large TV area; the Juventus (Malta) fan club is spacious and well lit. Upon opening in September 1998, the club had 2,400 members; however, less than half of these were fully paid up. That said, anyone can enter the premises on weekdays and enjoy a drink, as the club does not operate a 'restricted access' policy. This changes on match days when those visiting have to show evidence of membership, and donate an entrance fee. A points reward system operates, based on the gradation of membership rewarding those regularly attending the club's activities. Points give preferences when selling match tickets for Juventus. Being the largest Juventus fan club in the world means that tickets to games are in demand. The club can usually obtain 200 tickets for any home game, but when these are sold out they have sources that seek out more in Juventus' home city of Turin.

The club's statute and regulations specify that its principal aim is to enhance the name of Juventus. A further aim is to foster a spirit of friendship, collaboration and solidarity among all sports enthusiasts, be they Maltese or foreign. Personal gain is prohibited for anybody who is part of the Executive Committee, and members are told they must not carry out activities which go against the spirit of the club. The statute explains explicitly: 'The club must never be associated with any religious or political group.' All club business is conducted in Maltese, except where correspondence from foreign countries demands a second (usually Italian) language. Membership is open to all aged 16 or over; those younger need the signature and approval of one parent. Prospective members must be known to have genuine sporting enthusiasm and manifest good conduct. Membership may be terminated by the Executive Committee at any time. This latter group is chosen by annual election, and meets monthly to discuss an agenda produced by the Secretary in agreement with the President. Voting is usually by show of hands, but can be secret balloted if requested.

The Juventus victory in the 1996 Champions League produced dozens of new recruits to the club, but also a split in the ranks of Maltese Juventus fans. Between 1996 and 1998 a separate entity took the name Vera Amore, the name derived from the Turin-based Juventus fan club of Prima Vera Amore. The Separatist Club lasted for less than two years, but met in separate premises and caused bad feeling. Trying to explain the schism was not easy for anyone involved. For some the issue was over premises; the Valletta meeting place was too small and antiquated; furthermore, Valletta was no longer the central meeting place for the Maltese. Others, when questioned on this subject, claimed the dispute was generational and that the committee of the original entity were too set in their ways and, furthermore, were unwilling to give way to youth. The Separatist entity were successful in gaining recognition from the Juventus Football Club, and sent a delegation to state their case. Between 1996 and 1998 the Separatist entity could claim 1,500 members, whereas the established club had less than 1,000. It was not until the realisation that the Juventus Club was celebrating their centenary in 1997 that some of those involved in the schism realised that a *rapprochement* was needed. A pivotal figure in this was Richard Muscat, an elected member of the Maltese Parliament and Juventus fanatic. Suggesting a Juventus exhibition in honour of the centenary, he was instrumental in the hiring of a villa in central Malta, and advertising for all Juventus enthusiasts to contribute their various souvenirs and memorabilia to the cause. The exhibition attracted no less than 4,000 visitors, and the two separate fan clubs which contributed provided three persons each to the Exhibition Standing Committee. Following the success of the display, those concerned realised that one club was preferable to two, and new premises in Birkikara were found and rented by the Vera Amore Club. However, soon after, the two clubs formally merged and both joined in a compromise entity, which to this day is called Vera Amore Malta (1975).

The Vice President of the combined club in 2005 was Vost, who had, at one time, been instrumental in the Vera Amore schism. His story informs the reader of the level of commitment required of a man to hold such a position, and also offers insights into the possible controversies that such positions afford those active in foreign supporters' clubs. Vost's passion for Juve has nothing to do with domestic politics; indeed, his father was a fanatical fan of Manchester United. Brian's fixation with Juve began in 1978 when he had first watched Juventus on TV. What particularly swung his loyalty towards Juve was that their team kit was similar to that worn by the team of his village, Rabat, which was established in 1930 and took the nickname of Magpies in honour of the kit worn by Newcastle. Vost tells me the village, even today, is also a stronghold of fans of Newcastle United. Sitting on the Juventus Committee since 1997, Vost was instrumental in the merger of the two entities, and also understood that such a merger needed someone with his skills. Employed as an Operations Manager for an oil terminal, Vost had 15 years' experience as a Union negotiator. He had leadership qualities, and was articulate, tall and thickset in physique. When he spoke, people listened.

On a Sunday morning in a Rabat bar, Vost's loyalties are evidenced by a Juventus medallion, key-ring and cigarette lighter. The previous evening Juventus had won their game and Vost had taken up his usual position in the club bar and held court with the 60 core members found there every weekend and most nights of the week. The club was his main social life and had been since he was elected on to the Committee in 1998. The 12-member Board included what he considered to be the crucial figures of President, Secretary and Treasurer, who were elected on an annual basis by secret ballot. Another 12 members were elected by secret ballot at the AGM and included his position, as well as an International Secretary and a Public Relations Officer. In the 2004 election, some 250 members attended the AGM and voted. Originally Assistant Secretary, Vost then became Activities Officer and was then elected Vice-President in 2003. At times his tasks included standing in for the President when he was absent. The President was a well-known lawyer in Malta and, hence, Vost's standing-in time was quite extensive. On merger the club had over 2,000 members; by mid-2005 they had a paid-up membership of 890. The club operated under a statute, which was borrowed from the original club begun in 1975, and membership came via a variety of gradations. Thus a gold card cost Lm20 annually, a family card cost Lm15, a normal membership Lm10, women paid Lm5 and the under-16s and over-60s Lm2.50.

There were regularly 300 members watching live matches in the 2005/2006 season; for vital games this could rise to 500. The club also provided social activities, which ranged from dinner clubs to fan forums, wherein twice a year representatives from other Italian fan clubs in Malta would attend and debate the status of their clubs and Italian football, generally in a procedure hosted by a well-known TV sports personality. For those who required it, the Juve club was alone of all similar entities in Malta in having a Spiritual Director, who was actually a monk and a Juve enthusiast. The 15-man Committee, headed by the President, has similar titles to that evident at other large clubs, albeit the 'International Secretary' and his assistant hint at global involvement. This is available to those browsing the website begun in late 2001, while locals are content to read the supporters' club magazine *Bianconeri Ole*, published in Maltese and containing no fewer than 16 editorials in its 12-page February 2002 edition.

Aside from providing local entertainment, the Juve club organised travel to watch Juventus in Italy. In 2004 for a Serie A game the club chartered a plane and flew 144 fans to Palermo, Sicily. For a game against Manchester United the Club organised travel for 160 to Turin; a smaller group had travelled to the Netherlands to watch Juve play Feyenoord. Such planning required the International Secretary's dedication as well as the skills of the Public Relations Officer. It also required incredible levels of diplomacy because demand for tickets always outstripped supply. As Vost explained, obtaining tickets for home games at Juventus was usually a problem-free procedure. The huge stadium permitted the Maltese entity to take as many fans as were willing to pay; problems occurred when fans sought tickets for games elsewhere. In such scenarios, the club organises a raffle wherein the winners receive a ticket; otherwise the tickets

are allocated at the whim of the Committee. Vost admits this is problematic when family and politics are involved.

The club Committee is politically divided in terms of Malta's polarised loyalties. Vost argues that, while this was not planned, it is an ideal scenario in that it works in a kind of checks and balances situation. That said, the issue of presidency is, in Vost's opinion, not political; however, cliques are formed and at the last election a candidate, who stood against the President, had a voting bloc of over 60, but this was not enough to overthrow the sitting President. The issue of tickets provoked the admission that the Maltese have been successful in sourcing the informal economy, which deals in the distribution of tickets for Juventus. Hence they have been able to provide fans with more tickets than supplied by Juventus. Vost, to this end, recently visited the club and joined the 'Juventus Doc Scheme' wherein as long as members gave 15 days' notice and a name, a ticket was usually allocated. Crucial to the friendship with the mother club was the former reserve goalkeeper of Juventus, Mikaelanglo Rampalla, who, on retiring from football, became the coordinator for Juventus supporters groups. Vost and his President met twice with Rampalla, and established a good working relationship.

The subject of the 1998 visit by Juventus to Malta produces a dismissive snort. The visit was not organised by the supporters' club, but instead by a Standing Committee to which the supporters' club President at the time contributed. For Vost the visit was frankly an embarrassment, particularly when the Juventus players refused to visit the new club's premises as arranged, in protest at the behaviour of Juventus fans upon their arrival at the airport. Indeed, the premises were opened one year later – after being unofficially opened – when the Juventus President, Roberto Bettega, visited on a trip paid for by the Maltese. The debacle that surrounded the Juventus visit, in Vost's opinion, saw membership drop by around 40 per cent. The club was still trying to claw back former members.

The club Committee contains one woman, who sits as Secretary; this is nothing new, since a female has occupied this role as far back as the 1980s. For the 60 core male members, the club is a daily drop-in; for another 150, which Vost calls the silent core, the club is primarily a place to watch TV, courtesy of a huge 52" screen in a 300-seater, non-smoking area. Alternatively, they can watch a plasma TV screen in the smoking bar area which comfortably holds 50. For three individuals the club is a place where they will be honoured for life and, indeed, death. The three, given the title of Honorary President, include two of the founding members of the Valletta-based club and the man considered instrumental in establishing the Vera Amore Club. In this latter instance the spirit of compromise was not only reflected in the nomenclature of the 1998 club, but also in their appointing the President of the Valletta entity to the position of Vice-President of the merger.

The largest financial outlays, on a routine basis, the club face are the Lm5,000 annual rent for the premises and the Lm500 fee for satellite TV. The bar is rented and the owner pays a flat fee and is free to introduce innovations

for his own profit. The largest financial outlay on an extraordinary basis is the Lm15,000 required for chartering planes to away games. In Vost's words, the club exists on an annual turnover of Lm40,000 and is forever seeking to both retain and attract new members. To this end, it produces a glossy newsletter as well as a fortnightly electronic newsletter, daily e-mail missives and a publication of forthcoming events.

While hosting representatives from other supporters' clubs in the aforementioned forums, the Juve entity welcomed their counterparts of Milan in 2004 on the last day of the Italian football season. That said, Vost admits the club receives abusive phone calls and has the occasional cavalcade of rival Italian fan club supporters driving past the club premises shouting abuse. However, the Juve do not particularly feel antagonistic towards any particular entity in Malta and indeed, as an illustration of cooperation, in 2005, representatives of the top six foreign fan clubs in Malta cooperated to conceal the income they made from charging supporters to enter their premises on match days in the face of a tax enquiry that had been leaked to one of their members days before the 'surprise' tax inspection visit was due to happen.

In Vost's opinion the Juve club did not exist to the detriment of the local game. Since the 1970s the Juve club have annually presented a trophy at the MFA Annual Presentation Night in honour of Malta's most promising young player. The trophy was presented by either the club President or the Honorary President, and was welcomed by the MFA.

The Germans have landed: Bayern Munich Malta (April 2005)

A fan club for German football was first begun in Malta in the late 1980s by a local journalist, Silvio Vella. Meeting weekly in the German-Maltese Circle building in Valletta the enthusiasts, numbering some two dozen, would discuss the Bundesliga and when the occasion arose watch the German national team play games on TV. Free to join, the gathering lasted for a few years before a misunderstanding between the founder and other members. Inevitably the issue was money-related and centred on funds sent to German clubs seeking souvenirs. This impromptu gathering did not seek to gain German accreditation. This was convenient because the German football federation would not accept a foreign-based supporter club of their national team. Any affiliations had to be at club level. This caused many to focus their emotions on the most famous of German clubs – Bayern Munich. Curiously, by 2003 the German national team had established a worldwide supporters' club with an official home page sponsored by Cola-Cola.

A Maltese shopkeeper by the name of Paul Zammit attended the 2001 Champion's League final between Bayern and Juventus in Valencia, Spain. On his return he began a Bayern Munich (Malta) supporters' club having placed adverts in both English-language and Maltese newspapers. A number of people responded to this, one of whom was Brian. As one of 57 Maltese men who

arrived at the inaugural meeting held in the bar of the St Lucia football clubhouse in July 2001, Brian became part of the four volunteers for the then temporary Bayern (Malta) committee.

In tribute to the founder of the 1980s Deutsch football supporters' club, Silvio Vella was invited to the next meeting to assist in establishing statutes and regulations. The idea was to borrow from the original German supporter entity. While willing to provide documentation, Vella was too busy to become an active member of the new club. The first General Meeting held in 2001 in the Despott Hall, Floriana (a government building free to hire) attracted 45 people who chose an 11-man committee by virtue of nomination and absence of opposition. No elections were required.

The first President was Paul Zammit with ten others holding titles ranging from Secretary to Public Relations Officer. However, the good men were to discover that a Bayern Munich supporters' club was already in existence in Malta and was affiliated to the Munich Club. Comprised mainly of German ex-pats and organised by a German national, the club was 40-strong but did not meet as an entity except to collectively watch the national team in World Cup games in a bar. Contacting the organisers an amalgamation was agreed upon by both factions by November 2001 and the club was recognised by Bayern Munich in Germany a couple of months later. The change from a national football club to a specifically Bayern one did not cost the club a single member.

The next meeting took place in Eddy's bar in Hamrun by virtue of the building being owned by the family of one of the members. Opening for Bayern games on Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons, admission was free. The profits generated from bar takings enabled the owner to install a new toilet and two additional TVs, thereby making the establishment more attractive to the 12 regulars and up to 50 occasionals who attended on match days.

In September 2004 the committee decided to 'take over' a bar and have a de facto-dedicated Bayern establishment. Premises in Hamrun were found and the club agreed to pay the rent of Lm8,000 per annum. Two members guaranteed Lm2,000 each, and another six put forward Lm1,000 to realise the dream. The bar rent was Lm8 a day and in return was open daily from 6 p.m. and every Sunday lunchtime. Open to all, including those living nearby, the club is nominally a Bayern bar but is run by an owner to whom Bayern rent the bar while permitting anyone to enter and play the slot-machines so as to assist in profit-making.

The club exists by virtue of TV screens and satellite TV transmission. Local cable TV has no German channel. Thus to watch a live Bundesliga game requires access to broadcasts from a variety of nations: Polish, Spanish, Norwegian, Arabic (via Dubai) and Sky Italia. This was not always the case – in previous years up to six games were available via satellite; however, the demise of the Kirch media group meant that transmission was available only as far south as Rome. The Malta situation was doubly frustrating. As Brian explained: 'We get the channel – but no signal.'

Fearful that the German theme might cause the bar's local regulars to drink

elsewhere, the committee agreed to fund the purchase of four new TVs and satellite connections. This provided new programmes nightly for regulars and permitted two Bundesliga games to be broadcast simultaneously. The regulars remained – a few joined the club and the proprietor played his part by providing food for the annual dinner and the seasonal *Fenkata* (rabbit stew) evening; he too became a member. The bar now has a pool team (called Bayern Malta) and subsidises the pool table for one hour a day to allow them to train.

Outside, the sign above the door proclaims this to be The Trendy Bar (no one could explain the nomenclature), but since 2005 another sign has been erected, renaming it 'Wunderbar'. Sponsorship is provided by the local Farsons brewery. Far from offering a threat to local beers Farsons were importing German beer and saw the establishment of the bar as a potentially lucrative market. Aside from the actual club the entity exists in the virtual, via an internet home page (www.bayermunich.com); like all official clubs the Bayern has a committee room adjacent to the bar and a postal address.

Annual membership of Lm5 produces a membership card, which requires of applicants two passport-sized photographs. A 'kids club' offers Lm2 junior membership (only three had joined by 2005). A newsletter is circulated every two months to the 180 members (of which 100 are up to date with their subscriptions). Of these, all bar six are male – the six females are German expats who attend with their German male partners. Ten male members are German born. The oldest member is aged 72, the youngest 16. The average age of members is around 40. A mix of occupations and social class is evident and while Brian works for the cargo-handling side of Air Malta his predecessor was a bank manager. The German national who is the club's Public Relations Officer was the liaison with the mother country. The Malta home page is in Maltese, English and German.

It is an issue of great pride to the Maltese that the Secretary of Bayern Munich is well aware of the Malta club. Further recognition from Germany comes from a 10 per cent discount offered on official Bayern merchandise. In 2004, when visiting Munich, Brian was burdened with no less than Lm800 and two dozen requests from Maltese members for a variety of Bayern apparel. Invitations are sent to Munich annually in the hope that somebody from the club will visit Malta.

In their absence, the Maltese visit Munich. A dozen travelled to the Munich–Juventus game in Spain on a trip organised by Brian and his Vice-President who obtained tickets via the internet. Visits to Munich have yet to produce the kind of welcome that has been anticipated. While 30 travelled on one recent excursion to see a game, visit the club shop and drink in fan bars, it was with some regret and indeed hurt that Brian admitted that the club itself was not hospitable to them. They would have liked a guided tour and a chance to walk with other fan groups around the running track before a game to announce their existence to the Bayern world.

Some pressing of German flesh had occurred in a few venues. The visit of Bayern to Malta in 2001, while only 12 hours in duration, satisfied at least a few Bayern-Malta fans who were able to meet their heroes before the game, courtesy

of a friendship between the MFA Treasurer and a Bayern (Malta) member. Horst Heese also brokered a visit to the club by Mikael Skibbe, assistant to Rudi Voller as the German national coach. He signed photos and answered questions for some 40 fans in the club bar, and the legacy of his visit remains on the wall in the shape of a number of photographs, alongside Bayern scarves, pendants, stickers, beer mats and beer glasses.

For some, the game between Bayern and a Malta XI produced a dilemma: where do Maltese loyalties lie in such circumstances? Brian tried to explain:

I didn't support anyone that evening ... I would say that all our members are Malta fans in other contexts. In 1982 before the World Cup in Spain, Germany showed up in Malta for a qualifier, I went to watch and saw Malta take a 1-0 lead before losing 3-2 ... I sided with Malta.

An invitation to the President of the MFA to visit the club bar was accepted in December 2002 in an attempt to maintain good relations with local football figures. As part of a wider public profile Bayern (Malta) were involved in the motorcades when Germany won an important World Cup fixture. Their cortège, though, numbered ten and not the 100+ manifest by the Maltese-Italian and Maltese-English fans on similar occasions. Accepting invitations to join similar foreign fan clubs in Malta had seen Bayern celebrate the club anniversaries of Liverpool (Malta), and send representatives to Maltese foreign fan club TV chat shows.

For Brian the Bayern club is his hobby and a relief from both his full-time occupation and the 24-hour care that his disabled daughter requires: 'Without this club I would go nuts ... and what else would get me on TV in Malta!' Never having sat on a committee in his life, he has progressed from member to Secretary and is an integral figure on the Executive Committee elected for a three-year duration by an AGM which attracts 35 members who vote by secret ballot. Enjoying his position he is aware of the nature and indeed inevitability of local fall-outs. Recent controversies have centred on a senior committee man who appeared on a TV football show without running the invitation past the Executive Committee for approval: 'You cannot have a one-man show, or people who decide things on their own.' Similarly, the former President in his role of bank manger annoyed many members by calling meetings at premises he worked in for his convenience, and dictating the duration of such meetings.

The Bayern (Malta) club is a modest and unpretentious entity which exists with a minimum of structure and status gradation. Fun and welcoming, the club does not take itself too seriously. The stereo system plays Bayern songs, which assist the beer-fuelled and raucous moments of Bayern fandom. A German national donated 100 bottles of German beer for his new-found friends. The small plaque on the wall outside the bar is the only clue to the existence of such enthusiasts. With a small financial turnover the club is largely ignored by the Bayern Munich authorities, and has met with refusals when seeking funding from Lufthansa in Malta and the Mercedes (Malta) importer. As for the polit-

ical ramification of the Maltese extending affection for all things German, Brian has a well-rehearsed answer: 'The only reason the Maltese got bombed was because of the presence of the British military. Those doing the bombing were Italian.'

As is evident, the clubs manifest different levels of physical engagement and consumption. Some participants chant, some enjoy the recordings of club songs, some permit smoking, some drink to excess; others censure behaviour of this type. The bodily discipline varies with the habitus of the club and the ethos of the Presidents and committees. The local motorcades and celebrations are structured by events that occur elsewhere in the world. For some clubs the primary experience is visual; others encourage or permit a more engaged presence. In many instances the Maltese continue the hostilities of the host country. Thus Lazio claims a friendship with fans of Inter, but disparages Roma, and the Liverpool supporters' club receives phone calls of abuse from the Malta Manchester United fan clubs. Curiously, the fan club football tournaments, which were discontinued due to disorderly behaviour, contained within them the very Maltese traits of accusations of bias, of cheating by bringing in players who did not belong to local foreign fan clubs and, in the throes of anger, accusations about the morality of family members.

Much of what has been described could fit the category of hyper-real. However, singing songs about absent rivals, shouting instructions to Fergie and exasperated comments directed at referees suggest that the hyper-real is real. One might even see a religion without metaphysics. In such processes the post-modern celebration of diversity and variety is evident, particularly in the annual pilgrimages. What is evident is an articulation of identity in the face of the processes of globalisation, modernity and, indeed, postmodernity. Much of the fandom is mediated, and the fans exist in the two worlds of TV and *in situ* experiences. The fandom is thus evidence of the interconnectiveness and interdependency of sporting issues (Giulianotti 2005, Giulianotti and Robertson 2007) and, indeed, the compression and intensification of consciousness. The satellite-induced passion alienates the individual if they remain in the domestic sphere in an armchair. The TV image implodes the possibilities of socialisation (Baudrillard 1983: 100). The Maltese challenge this with their love of associationalism. Football in this instance is the vehicle. Be it the home or the bar, the Maltese were always post-fan fans; they preceded by decades what has happened elsewhere in the past 15 years.

Epilogue

The just man in Malta

The man

On Friday 26 January 2007, Michel Platini was elected President of UEFA. On 29 January 2007, Malta's MFA President Joe Mifsud was re-elected to the UEFA Executive Committee. The following day the *Times of Malta* stated that 'Dr Mifsud was less forthcoming when asked if he intends to stand for re-election as MFA President in July. "There's six months to go", he said. "We have other commitments to attend to before July, not least the on-going works to relocate the MFA offices to the Millennium Stand."'

When the election was called, Mifsud decided he would stand – against his former friend and colleague, now chief opponent Norman Darmanin-Demajo. Mifsud was interviewed for this book just two days before the July election, and his given reasons for standing combined a general commitment to public service with an unwillingness to allow Darmanin-Demajo – known popularly as *Dede* – to succeed him. Sitting in the comfortable new MFA HQ office suite at the Millennium Stand, Mifsud chainsmoked throughout the interview; he was casually dressed with his top three shirt buttons open to reveal a gold neck chain. His style contrasted with that of *Dede*, who was always clean-cut and suited, signifying a European cosmopolitanism in contrast to Mifsud's more populist Maltese style. After fifteen years in the MFA hot seat, why did Mifsud seek another term of office? 'It's my duty as a UEFA Executive Council Member. I have to help develop football in Malta, even though I'm 57.'

He saw himself as something of a crusading reformer, reeling off the various structural changes he had introduced to the islands – generally enhancing the national stadium by making it all-seater and installing a PA system, adding to the training camp facilities, building the centenary stadium, building the Millennium Stand, and assisting in the construction of new grass and astroturf surfaces. These of course were enabled by his prowess in securing external funds – 2.5 million Swiss francs for the Millennium Stand, 400,000 Swiss francs for the GOAL Project 2 from FIFA, and a similar fee towards the astroturf pitch at the centenary stadium. As he explained:

From 1990 to 2000, UEFA's contributions to Malta were non-existent. Now thanks to agitation from small nations like Malta, monies from the European Championships have begun to flow and the profits are given to local clubs. In recent times the MFA have given Lm70,000 a year of UEFA monies to youth development.

It was funding, of course, that led him into direct conflict with Darmanin-Demajo. As the name of his adversary was raised, Mifsud withdrew to his adjacent office to produce a file of documents and cuttings related to *Dede*. In the *Times of Malta* of 26 May 2007, Mifsud had referred to how 'a former official had tried to divide the [Malta Football] Association ... certain people made inappropriate use of official MFA documents ... football is not like politics ... our association thrives on unity, not discord.' In our interview, Mifsud was rather more dismissive:

I have known him since I was 18, having met him at university. I brought him to Qrendi to play for us. In 1992, when I became President, I asked him to become treasurer. We worked well. I put him on the UEFA Youth Committee – then in 2000, just before finishing the centenary stadium, and the Millennium project, he started making monkey business with me and I had to speak to him. By Euro 2000, he was not speaking to me and when we got back to Malta he went public with allegations. He would rally local clubs. This was affecting the reputation of the MFA and affecting sponsorships. I called an EGM and got 80 or 90% victory having stated if he wins I go. However, when I won, he would not go. He stayed doing nothing in the general assembly of 2001, but he didn't present the allegations and eventually he finished.

Mifsud's defence of the Millennium Stadium project was based on his perception of what was right for the future of Maltese football, but also in defence of the nation's reputation:

The old stand, built in the early eighties had to be demolished, but we couldn't afford to rebuild. Meanwhile we partitioned off sections of the ground. When we played Italy here I watched and realised millions on RAI [Italian state TV] must have looked and considered the state of football in Malta. We had to replace it. Everyone elsewhere was thinking about new stadia – look at England. So any critic is blaming me for looking to the future.

But were the costs worthy of the end product?

You can say the man in the street or village hasn't got goalnets or footballs and we have this, but then you can look around Malta and ask why every village needs a magnificent church which is way beyond what the villagers can afford.

Unlike his challenger, who had begun in February, Mifsud did not start his election campaign until some six weeks beforehand, claiming he had ‘too many projects to finish’. He was critical of the slick campaign Darmanin-Demajo had put together, suggesting that he had only prepared a written statement of policy in response to *Dede’s* elaborate manifesto. Significantly, Mifsud’s was published in Maltese, whereas *Dede’s* was in English. Mifsud questioned both the provenance and the logic of the document:

They had a manifesto – eventually we put something in writing, but look at what he did. He had a meeting with all the clubs last Saturday, and the minutes of the meeting, that is, his manifesto, supposedly a result of consultation, were published before the debate began. How can that be? You propose to collect Lm9.25 million in three years by a public bond issue to bring in Lm350,000 and other proposed monies of Lm1.2 million from other projects ... how?

Darmanin-Demajo’s two-page document contained four issues, three of which were based around club finances. Throughout his manifesto was an undercurrent demanding transparency and integrity around the MFA proceedings. The crux of his election platform was that gate receipt incomes were to be changed to benefit the clubs, not the MFA; and that fees for the use of the national stadium were to be reduced and clarified. Furthermore, all monies due to clubs, from whatever source, were to be paid by the MFA to the clubs within a specified time limit. Financial assistance in the shape of interest-free loans were to be made available to all clubs to develop their infrastructure, subject to free use of said facilities being offered at youth and nursery level. All funding would be created by the issue of a public bond. Furthermore, improvements to the MFA audits were promised as well as auditing scrutiny around monies from FIFA and UEFA, both on future and existing agreements that the MFA had entered into, particularly with TV broadcasting rights. A third promised initiatives in the way of information hotlines, club ombudsmen, turf maintenance assistants and the reimbursement to clubs of the MFA charges asked of them when using the centenary stadium astroturf, as the money for this had subsequently been funded by UEFA. The final item of the manifesto promised a change in both League and FA Trophy format if it were the will of the majority of clubs.

The manifesto contained a number of implicit but direct criticisms of Mifsud’s MFA management – the costs to teams of playing at the national stadium; lack of transparency and mismanagement of UEFA and FIFA income. Mifsud defended the stadium charges, arguing that as it is the only stadium in Malta that meets UEFA standards, it should be adequately funded to maintain those standards. As a whole, though, Mifsud’s campaign was based upon his ability to bring better funding to Malta – and ultimately to the clubs. To this end, three days before the election, the MFA Executive (chaired by Mifsud) announced that it would refund Maltese clubs’ money that had come from UEFA to cover the clubs’ expenses when playing in UEFA tournaments.

Although coming into MFA coffers since 1998, none of this money had found its way to the clubs, due to what Mifsud described as an ‘accounting error’.

The revelation was the third public scandal of the year for Mifsud. In May 2007 Mifsud confronted the Children’s Commissioner on live television when he refused to sack a convicted paedophile who was working as a groundsman at the MFA-managed Pace Grasso ground. The ground was frequently used by local youth teams. In June 2007, John Farrugia, one of the three MFA vice-presidents, resigned after being arrested in connection with a scandal at the Maltese Maritime Authority, where he worked. He was accused of issuing false documentation, and taking bribes, for over 400 vessels.

Although not an ideal lead-up to the election, Mifsud was still confident of victory. With less than 48 hours until the 101 delegates would vote by simple majority in a secret ballot, he predicted: ‘I don’t think I will be leaving this coming Saturday. I think I have a majority of 10.’

The moment

Shortly before the election all eligible voters were anonymously sent a picture of Mifsud depicted as Hitler – a tactic publicly condemned by Darmanin-Demajo, whose supporters suggested it could even have been the work of Mifsud’s own supporters to show them in a bad light. Mifsud was vehement that although he involved himself directly in much of the MFA’s work – himself chairing many of its subcommittees – he was no dictator. Indeed, the election itself was a staged demonstration of his democratic principles.

In 90-degree heat on 28 July 2007, 150 people assembled at the centenary hall of the Centenary Stadium for the election, which began at 11:55 a.m. All were men, the ten women present were there as either delegates from the press or as assistants to the proceedings. There were four camera crews and around 20 journalists. Joe Mifsud chaired the six-man panel which faced the delegates. Behind them on the wall were the badges of the MFA, UEFA, FIFA and a crucifix. In the general meeting that preceded the election, Mifsud emphasised the MFA’s strength. He reiterated the plan to reimburse the clubs’ missing UEFA funds. Total attendances in all four divisions in season 2006 to 2007 were 126,433, a drop of just over 30,000 on the previous year. Some 74,322 paid to watch Premier league games. The MFA balance sheet showed a Lm404,330 surplus; a rise of Lm70,000 on the previous year. The MFA had fixed assets of Lm4.325 million and total assets of Lm5.1 million.

At midday delegates were shown a powerpoint presentation on how to vote – a single ‘x’ against one of the two names on the polling card. In a jovial atmosphere, the 101 eligible voters were called out by name and walked to receive their polling card, put their cross in one of two boxes in two booths and then returned to place their card in a box located in front of the six-man board. At 12:30 p.m., silence descended as the box was emptied and counting began. Ten minutes later, on the announcement of the 100th ballot, a cheer went around some of the room; as Mifsud had got the 51 votes required and had therefore

won the election. The end result was 52–49 in favour of Mifsud. The President had left the room for the duration of the vote and was thus to re-enter it triumphantly whereupon he made a one-minute speech thanking delegates and requesting the help of God and Our Lady in his duties. Minutes later he told the press scrimmaged around him that the election was proof that the MFA was a democracy and the depiction of him as Hitler was done by those who did not know him or how he worked.

The fall-out

In many ways the election was typically Maltese – fiercely fought, very close and in the end decided by a small number of floating voters who influenced the result. The revelations and assurances about unpaid UEFA funds turned out to be a bit of a red herring, as they would have failed to appease the enduringly antagonised Premiership teams, and seen as an irrelevance to delegates from the lower divisions (which comprised the majority of the electorate), to which payments were not due in the first place. As a contest between candidates of differing personal styles and differing images, the ‘man of the people’ won over against the slick, smart-dressing ‘man of business’ – to this extent, the election was a victory for the local over the global. It confirmed the influence of the smaller local teams from the lower divisions, over the Premiership sides with European ambitions.

Darmanin-Demajo had refused to attend the election, to avoid an inevitable public confrontation with Mifsud. Some of his disappointed supporters regarded this as a tactical mistake; and in the personalised environment of Maltese political life, they saw other individuals’ actions as contributing to their loss. The blame went as follows: Father Hilary had been forced to travel to Sicily to be with his dying sister. His vote, which he had publicly promised to *Dede*, had been passed to another delegate of the Youth FA who could not be relied upon to have voted in the same way. The second to blame was Victor Schiriha, who had become President of Valletta weeks before Marsaxlokk, the club he had been President of for the previous seven years, won the League for the first time. Known to favour *Dede*, his dislike of Robert Arrigo, who was firmly in the *Dede* camp, meant he could have voted for Mifsud to spite him. The third character who took the blame was George Hedley of Qrendi (Mifsud’s home village, and the club he was former President of). Holding a part-time position in the MFA Treasury, Hedley had fallen out with Mifsud earlier in the week, who had threatened to sack him. When called to cast his vote Hedley had followed procedure and then once at the ballot-box ostentatiously tore up his card. Called by the electing officer to return and cast a vote or announce an abstention, Hedley cast a vote and showed it to those sitting at the committee table before placing it in the ballot-box. Many believed he had voted for Mifsud, but staged the drama in order to remind the President of his reliance on people such as him.

These stories gained strength throughout the day as Darmanin-Demajo’s dis-

appointed supporters attempted to rationalise their loss. Some five miles away from the site of the election, at the Luxol St Andrews clubhouse, they sat with their deflated candidate, who received non-stop calls and texts of sympathy on two phone lines. *Dede* was disbelieving yet philosophical. Certain that his campaign would win by a majority of 20, he could only guess which clubs, and therefore votes, had let him down. Dejected, he mourned how his plans for local football could never be realised. The excitement he had generated among his supporters was palpable. He was the new dawn offering a new finance and infrastructure. His office presented an image of modernity; in place of a crucifix was a high-quality photograph of eight children – boys and girls of various skin colours – arm in arm and wearing the kit of the host team Luxol. He did not invoke the Bible or God or the saints, but rather his belief in lateral thinking inspired by the Maltese guru Edward de Bono: ‘Tomorrow the sun will rise again, and in the scheme of things this event is a pinprick on the world and humanity.’

Many of his supporters were less able to be so philosophical. If football globally is a win–lose cultural phenomenon, locally in Malta the stakes are higher than elsewhere. A change of MFA President would, like a change of national government, mean a root-and-branch reform of not only structure but also personnel. Men who had invested not only their hopes for football’s future but also their own personal futures were crushed by the recognition that they had backed the wrong candidate and were now effectively cast into the wilderness. Such was the investment that defeated supporters wept openly at the post-election wake.

The future

In October 2006 Malta finally won an international game, beating Hungary 2–1 in a European Championship qualifier in Malta. The MFA produced a commemorative DVD. By mid-2007, Malta had obtained four points from the qualifiers and were two ahead of Moldova and two behind Hungary. This record points haul brought with it the unprecedented ambition of avoiding finishing at the bottom of their group. The national team now stood 119th in the FIFA world rankings, and five Maltese players were to be found playing abroad.

In this new mood of optimism, and in a rhetorical move that signals an ending to Malta’s post-colonial dependency, Mifsud emphasised not only what Maltese football could receive from the institutions of the global game, but also what it could contribute. He had worked hard, he assured us, on the various UEFA and FIFA committees he had sat on, successfully improving the standard of refereeing from Euro 1996 to Euro 2000. Institutionally, he was working to extend local initiatives to the global game:

We are the first FA in Europe to put a wage cap on what players can earn. The clubs wanted it to curb player demands. I accept money can pass under the table but any disputes over non-payment mean the player can only

claim for that agreed on the contract. Rules also exist for transfer fees based on games played and international status. But players know how to negotiate, and can get their own deal. I remember when I became VP – once the player signed they were tied to a club for life. I changed it and made a maximum five-year contract between player and club.

Licensing of clubs existed here before UEFA brought in their criteria. Our aim was to stop clubs going into debt which means underperformance by players. We've never had to refuse a licence or relegate a team. All are required to give us a set of accounts annually for some 30 years now. We have a board for players' complaints and one for when clubs complain against each other. Next Sunday [the day after the election] we will amalgamate the two and all issues relating to players, coaches, clubs and agents will ultimately be heard by the independent arbitration tribunal which will not be nominated by the MFA Council, but will see the parties choose a candidate each and I choose a chair.

The issue of foreign players and the EU also sees Mifsud consider himself a pioneer:

We allow three foreign players for two reasons. One is money, foreign players are too costly and they end up not being paid and cause us problems. Secondly many are not very good but many Maltese believe the foreigner is always better. In June 2004 shortly after Malta joined the EU we made a proposal that at any one time eight players in a team on the field of play had to have had an association with the club for at least three years. The nationality of the player is immaterial – the issue is long association. The EU agree that football is different from making cars – it's a specialist form of labour, and UEFA are seriously considering the eight-player proposal. The Maltese government supported the proposal – after all it's a long-term plan to save local football, and in the next few months, new rules will be agreed upon in UEFA which will build on what I proposed for Malta.

For all the work Mifsud does, which he is quick to emphasise, 'six days a week, fourteen hours a day', he does not take a salary, merely an allowance and a little money 'to make up some of the funds for losing work in my legal office'. This is a pittance compared to what he could earn in the law, but he has no aim to get rich from either football or the law – he even sometimes represents people without payment, to protect their rights. Does he have any regrets?

People throw mud, but they cannot find any truth in all the details. Everything I did, I did in the best interests of the MFA. The most important thing is that I can walk down Republic street in Valletta any day of the week with my head held high. I'm content with what I have – maybe at times I was impetuous, I can get nasty in arguments but when it's over

that's it, it's finished. The disagreement is not in my heart. That's me, a bit insensitive to other people. I make mistakes, why not? If you work hard you are bound to. Those who don't work, don't make mistakes, and what does the Bible say ... the just man sins seven times a day – imagine the number of sins committed by those of us who are not just.

(6 August 2007)

Notes

Introduction: Europeanisation and football

- 1 The second taboo, as discussed in Chapter 4, is that although everybody knows Maltese football is corrupt, this should not be acknowledged in public.
- 2 'Malta' consists of an archipelago of five islands, three of which – Malta, Gozo and Comino – are inhabited. This book concerns only the island of Malta, the largest of the three.
- 3 Taken from the Treaty itself, a Latin inscription with this text still stands in a prominent position in Valletta.
- 4 The 1992 Participation in Sport Survey (commissioned by the Ministry for Youth and the Arts) found that, of those who expressed an 'interest' in sport, nearly 50 per cent put down football, twice the number who chose swimming (22.3 per cent). Other choices were billiards/snooker (18.8 per cent), basketball (12 per cent) and horse-racing (9.8 per cent). Those who took part competitively in such sports numbered 5.5 per cent for football, 3 per cent for billiards and snooker, 1.3 per cent for basketball, and 0.8 per cent for swimming. Those actively involved in horse-racing numbered only 0.5 per cent. Under the category of 'total participation', football came top with 14.8 per cent, closely followed by swimming at 13.8 per cent; third was billiards/snooker at 11 per cent, followed by basketball at 6 per cent and horse-racing at 1 per cent.
- 5 Some water polo clubs remained inactive after the war. These were replaced by new clubs, such as Seagulls, Msida, Pietá and Balluta, who made their debuts in the 1946 Second Division League. Valletta United (nicknamed the Pioneers) reappeared after a lapse of 20 years to become a major force. The big teams with big support in the 1950s were Sliema ASC, St Julians ASC, Neptunes WPC, Sirens (St Paul's Bay) and Balluta. New teams, such as Marsaxlokk, Birzebbugia, Marsaskala, Gzira United, Ta' Xbiex ASC and Exiles, were formed in the mid-1960s and became regular participants in the Second Division League.
- 6 The ASA (Malta) continued the work initiated by the MASA. To this end it has increased the swimming programmes, introduced diving and with the help of government funding built an international-size swimming pool in 1983. However, since its foundation, the ASA (Malta) encountered various difficulties; problems over finances and controversies over the construction of pools were the most notable.
- 7 A degree of success in the water was provided by Maltese medals achieved at the FISEC games held in Nantes in 2000. Maltese swimmers have competed in the Olympic games, but only personal bests have been attained. Historically many of the island's strongest swimmers had channelled their energies towards water polo, the popularity of which has peaked; both attendances and participation seem to be in terminal decline. Prior to the formation of an Association for the game water polo teams representing Valletta, Sliema and Vittoriosa played friendly matches in the open sea

against colonial company teams. To offset the rough conditions of the sea, it was a common practise to lay the pitch along the berth of a British warship.

- 8 The British presence in Malta hindered access to beaches and the facilities to train. During The Second World War the beaches of Malta, which previously served as bathing promenades, were covered with barbed wire to hinder any landings by the Axis forces. The swimming club premises, integral to such bathing and location, were turned into look-outs.
- 9 Other pastimes and their nomenclatures reveal the legacies of British colonisation. A yacht club has existed in Malta since 1835 and racing on water in a variety of forms has no doubt taken place for centuries. Today six clubs constitute the Malta Sailing Federation, which was begun in 1975. The prestigious club retains the title of the Royal Malta Yacht Club. Judo developed in Malta as a consequence of the British Military. Emulating the practice as displayed by the elite military units of the Armed Forces, the Malta Judo Association was formed in 1972 and first competed in the Mediterranean Games of 1979 (the year the British military departed from Malta), finishing a credible fourth. In 1983, a Maltese national, Laurie Pace, came seventh in the World Championships. In 1995 in the games of the Small States of Europe, Malta won six medals of its total of 12 from the Judo event, one of which was a gold. In later years in the same tournament held in Iceland, Malta won three gold medals. While such achievements are commendable, the sport attracts dedicated *aficionados* but it is not widely practised, nor does it add any debate to perceptions around national identity.

Tennis was similarly introduced by the British at the end of the nineteenth century. Tennis courts were later constructed at the Marsa Sports Club and the Malta Union Club. Due to problems of space in Malta, namely flat surfaces and grass courts, the game had difficulty developing. None the less, tennis grew after the Second World War and, eventually, in 1966, an association of tennis clubs was formed, consisting of 11 clubs, only two of which, the Marsa Sports Club and the Country Club, were still in existence by 2002. The rest had been replaced by the early twenty-first century by 20 new tennis clubs, which hosted close to 6,000 registered players. The pursuit of international recognition has seen Malta as part of the International Tennis Federation since 1985 and participate in the Davis Cup since 1966. Malta's participation in tournaments usually produces heavy defeats for their entrants. Tennis, therefore, cannot be said to have contributed in any way to the formation of any sporting identity.

1 Team selection: producing the nation

- 1 The role of the Catholic Church is the unheard voice in the development of the game of football. As all Maltese schools are nominally Catholic and all youth clubs (oratories) are operated by the Church, it is inevitable that the game grew alongside Catholic proselytising from a variety of religious orders. That said, none of the bigger football clubs claim any religious backing and the Church does not overtly interfere with the game. There has never been any formal Catholic doctrine on sport in Malta. The Roman Catholic Church holds considerable power over Maltese life, even though this power has been greatly reduced when compared to Malta at the turn of the century, or even Malta 20 years ago. Today 70 per cent of Maltese attend Mass regularly. A third of Maltese children go to Church-run fee-paying schools. Malta is the only country in the EU where divorce has not been legalised. In recent referendum and electoral campaigns, the only contribution the Church officially made was to encourage voters to gather all the knowledge they could on the issue at hand and asking them to vote with a 'fully formed conscience'.
- 2 See C. Baldacchino, 'In Search of the True Pioneers of Maltese Football', *Times of Malta*, 19 June 1993.
- 3 In fact, the MLP won the election, by 67,607 to 20,177, but, with 2,559 invalid votes

and only 59.1 per cent of the electorate participating, the British declared the results to be inconclusive. They reflected a successful campaign of boycott by the combined forces of the PN and the Church.

- 4 The next time Malta hosted the English national side, a similarly dismissive attitude was still evident in the British media. Before an international friendly in June 2000, the nationwide tabloid the *Mirror* ran a two-frame cartoon entitled 'Can't kick, won't kick'. The first of the two frames depicted a crowd on their way to a signposted stadium, led by five males, all sporting a skinhead haircut with caricatured pointed heads, large lips, staring eyes and disfigured noses. Four wore football colours. One asks, 'What do you know about this Maltese team?' to which another responds, 'Nothing'. The second frame then reveals that two of the five wear T-shirts proclaiming their support for Malta. Another is captioned answering the question with 'Surprising, really, considering we're Maltese'. The man who raised the initial question adds further, 'I didn't know we even played football ... thought we were just a holiday resort.'
- 5 The Maltese currency is the Maltese Lira (Lm – pl. Liri). There are 100 cents to the Lira, and roughly £2 per Lm1.
- 6 Other sporting stadiums are equally the issue of political contests. A swimming pool built in the fishing resort of Marsascula, while a reward for the electorate, was a white elephant because it was so remote that no athletes travelled to train there. Likewise, a swimming pool, built at the Marsa Sports Complex by the Labour government for Malta's hosting of the Small Nations games was kidney-shaped. In 1993, an Olympic-size swimming pool was inaugurated by the Nationalists, who also built Malta's first synthetic athletic track and shooting range.
- 7 Sport has, in the past three decades, become formally part of the Maltese political agenda. In the year 2000 government monies towards sports activities and organisations amounted to Lm381,000; a further Lm10,000 went towards the Malta Sports Council to administer and govern sporting practices. Maltese governments have thus contributed towards the building of sports complexes and funded athletes for both the Olympic games and the Games of the Small Nations of Europe. At the local level, sports clubs and facilities receive funding from local councils, which assist in the repairing and maintenance of facilities.
- 8 MAFA has existed since 1953. MAFA has only ever had two Presidents, one of whom fell out with Joe Mifsud and so ceded from the FA. In later years MAFA re-integrated into MFA, which declared it illegal for any player registered with it to turn out in the MAFA League. In this scenario, any breach would have to be reported by an MFA registered team. Surprisingly, information as to breach of regulations is extremely rare. In 2000 the MAFA League consisted of 30 teams who played very competitive games on a Sunday morning. Local patrons pay their players and pay professionals from the MFA for special appearances. The IASC was a very well run league of 20 teams which included many veterans of MFA.

2 New tactics: producing difference

- 1 The Cottonera is so named after Grand Master Nicolas Cottoner of the Knights of St John, who was responsible for the fortification of the area in the late seventeenth century.
- 2 Birgu comes from the Italian 'Borgo', meaning small town or village.
- 3 A reference to the monied Sliema people.

3 Football and politics: traditions and modernities

- 1 Nationalist governments continued to 'give' land to sports clubs. Eventually, due to the campaigning of Fr Hilary, Chair of the Sports Council, they were given preferential leasing agreements. Given the precariousness of their tenancy, clubs had been

reluctant to invest in facilities and infrastructure at their grounds. In 1998, though, an Act of Parliament gave clubs 49-year leases on their facilities. As a result, their rents were raised considerably, but they were now free to develop facilities secure in the knowledge that they would not be arbitrarily removed from their control. This saw unprecedented development of sports facilities throughout the country, be it through the installation of astroturf, shower facilities, grandstands or other infrastructural improvements.

- 2 The Sons of Malta Cup was a trophy donated by Maltese migrants in Canada. The fixture saw the Championship and FA Trophy winners play for the trophy between 1967 and 1980.

4 Playing to the big-men: patronage and party

- 1 The Dutch were resentful for years following the Seville game. In December 1990 the Netherlands beat Malta 8–0 at Ta'Qali and were 4–0 victors five years later. Their most pointed revenge came about with the help of the McDonald's Corporation in April 2004. An advertisement produced by McDonald's (Netherlands), shortly before the 2004 Euro Championships, ridiculed the Malta national football team. While the Dutch have considered the advert humorous, many Maltese felt insulted and, indeed, prominent politicians voiced their disdain. The advert was eventually pulled following the protests to McDonald's on behalf of McDonald's (Malta) and the MFA.
- 2 As well as the nurseries, there is also a goalkeeping school on the island. Young goalkeepers are therefore in a position to gain significant knowledge from the two coaches' experience. However, both goalkeepers have only taken the Maltese goalkeeping coach qualification. This involved only a week-long course with no final exam. Goalkeepers taking the course are not tested on how they deliver a session. It is possible that even though they have a wealth of experience, they cannot get their knowledge across to their students. Unfortunately, these coaches cannot take the UEFA 'B' goalkeeping course until they have obtained the outfield qualification, making it a costly commitment for them.

5 Professions of faith: footballing modernities

- 1 An unsung influence on the Professional Scheme, beginning in 1986, was Anthony Bilocca, who as manager at the Corinthia Group of Companies was instrumental in making one of his employees – Michael DiGiorgio – the first professional in the new scheme.

8 Getting into Europe: global flows of talent

- 1 Following Tabone, Floriana appointed the Englishman George Shaw in what was a very bold step for Maltese football. This former player of West Bromwich became the first paid coach in Malta. He was succeeded by former Ipswich star Ted Phillips as player/coach in the early 1960s; however, his presence brought friction when the Maltese players realised he was paid and they weren't.
- 2 The first Brazilian footballer arrived in Malta in 1968 and was to become a professional at Hibernians for a season. Known by his nickname 'Badu', the player was 'sponsored' by a Canadian millionaire who lived in Paola's finest residence, known as the 'Power House'. His philanthropy towards the local footballing entity saw the Brazilian do his gardening in return. The Canadian's time in Malta coincided with the height of the Church–State dispute between Archbishop Gonzi and Dom Mintoff. Scared of losing Church funds, Gonzi trusted the Canadian to take millions of Church monies and bank them away from the grasp of the Maltese government. The Canadian, however, took the monies (millions of Maltese Liri), left the country and

was never heard of again. The footballing significance of this episode is that due to this arrangement (and the Canadian's generosity to Hibs) the club was effectively – if unknowingly – sponsored at this time (1988–1970) by the Catholic Church.

- 3 The former left his position after just one season, protesting via the media that championships in Malta were won by money, not playing ability. The latter was to win the League with the Hibernians in 1996 and Marsaxlokk in 2007.
- 4 Although the EU does not have the power to set its own sports policy, it does have initiatives that may affect sports, directly or indirectly. These include issues around equal opportunities, anti-doping schemes, public health, broadcasting rights and advertising. In applying its laws, the EU is obliged to take into account country-specific social, educational and cultural functions.
- 5 No specific EU programmes of funds for building sports facilities are currently offered by EU membership. However, some sports projects can be supported, if specifically intended to promote social cohesion, or to integrate minorities and the disabled. Projects that meet these objectives can be funded through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme on training or the Youth Programme. More extensive projects can be supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), particularly if their objective is social integration. Infrastructural projects for educational purposes can also be funded under the European Regional Development Fund.
- 6 Captain Caruana was an agent for Johnny Walker Scotch.
- 7 Following Carmel Busuttill was the former Valletta midfielder Stefan Giglio, who spent two years in Bulgaria with CSKA Sofia from 1999 to 2001. Yugoslav born but Maltese national, Daniel Bogdanovic left Malta to spend time with the Bulgarian side Chetumore. Others chose the Italian route with Gilbert Agius spending a brief season with the Italian Serie B club Pisa.

9 Foreign fan clubs: the global in the local

- 1 Satellite TV produced more by way of innovation not only in provoking mass fandom but by creating a racket in decoders, which overcame the expense demanded of the consumer by the broadcaster.
- 2 A Gozo branch of Inter began in 2000 with 80 members run by a police sergeant; membership was paid to the Maltese sister club. Three other clubs – Milan, Juventus and Manchester United – are also in existence in Gozo, but as separate entities to the Maltese clubs due to a variety of disputes.
- 3 A reference to the 'hard-core' and often violent Italian fan cultures.
- 4 A degree of local controversy was caused by the Gozo branch of the United supporters' club. Numbering up to 150 members, their one-time affiliation to the Malta entity ended when they were found to be not paying the lease on the premises they hired for meetings. By 2001 a new Gozo committee was seeking to build bridges with the sister club.

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