

## BYE, BYE, CACOPARDO! REVISITING FACTIONALISM THROUGH THE HUNTING SCENE IN MALTA

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In June 2014, Malta's hunters petitioned Parliament to protect 'minority' rights against 'vindictive' 'abrogative referendums'. This was the latest episode in their long struggle against Malta's environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), which have taken increasingly strong stands against hunting as a morally distasteful practice. Based on a collaborative project between Conservation Biology and Anthropology, this paper documents the escalation of tensions following the establishment of the 'Coalition for the Abolition of Spring Hunting' (CASH) in July 2013, an alliance of local ENGOS pushing for a referendum to make spring hunting illegal. This paper additionally revisits a body of literature on 'factionalism', which despite being downplayed in narratives of Anthropology's development, is still useful in helping us understand the hostilities dominating Malta's hunting arena and can initiate fruitful collaboration and dialogue between Anthropology and Conservation Biology.

### **Bye, Bye, Cacopardo!**

*Triq ir-Repubblika*, the main street of Malta's capital, usually goes silent late in the afternoon, when the city's offices and shops close and visitors retire to their homes. Not so on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2014. A crowd of mostly middle-aged men, journalists buzzing around them, was slowly making its way towards Republic Square to the magnificent palace housing Malta's Parliament.

A small group of men dressed in ties and suits, led the crowd. These men had received much media attention over the previous months, and were known to all as the leaders of the *Federazzjoni Kaċċaturi Nassaba Konservazzjonisti*<sup>1</sup> (FKNK), Malta's largest hunters' organisation. They laboured to hold up a large heavy banner that displayed a collage of photos of Maltese fireworks, horse-racers, touristy horse-drawn carriages, divers, land rod-fishing, clay pigeon shooting, large jeeps off-roading through the countryside and archers straining at their bows. The banner's caption, in Maltese, read:

Protecting the interests of the minorities. Sign the petition here.  
After the hunter, it will be your turn.

A wave of exclamations rippled through the group of leaders midway through their march, as a young man in a black suit was shoved into their midst. Backs were patted, hands shaken,

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and Cyrus Engerer, a member of the reigning *Partit Laburista*<sup>2</sup> (PL) and an executive member of Malta's *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender* (LGBT) Rights Council, smiled brightly as cameras flashed around him.

Eventually, the crowd made it to Republic Square. The police had duly taken precautions to restrict access to the Palace with heavy iron fences. Standing alone outside the barricades, Michael Falzon, a high-ranking executive member of the PL and a well-known hunter, watched the march pour into the square. FKNK's leaders waited for the journalists to take position, and then, surrendering their banner, unfurled another canvas and raised it up high for everyone to read:

“104,293!”

The crowd's excitement could not be contained any longer. Previously solemn, it now burst into cheering and applause. Fistfuls of white confetti were thrown up into the air as three elderly men pushed three hand-barrows forwards, containing the petition signatures advertised by the banner.

FKNK's leadership followed the carts to where Falzon greeted them. Journalists closed around them as FKNK's President made his address:

“We're here to defend the privileges and interests of the minorities. We are asking for the Referendum Act to be discussed, so that no abrogative referendum should vindictively eliminate the rights of a minority.”

It was Falzon's turn. “[Given the number of signatures,] we cannot not push this petition to Parliament”, he told the journalists. Then, turning to FKNK's leadership, he added, “Gentlemen, follow me”, and, before journalist could ask any questions, he walked away from the cameras. The hunters' whistling and screaming doubled as their leaders, escorted by police officers, disappeared into the Palace.

The festive mood lasted for a few minutes, until FKNK's leadership, reemerging from the Palace, thanked the multitude for their support, and urged them to disperse quietly. With nothing left to film, the journalists turned their cameras onto the crowd. Spurred by the sudden attention, the hunters waved and cheered defiantly at the journalists' lenses, and laughed in support when one hunter squeezed his way to the front to chant in a mocking tone:

“Bye, Bye, Cacopardo! Cheerio!”

### **Introduction**

The submission of the hunters' petition was the latest episode in a long battle that has been escalating since 2008. This saga saw the gradual consolidation of two opposing parties. On one side the FKNK and its allied organisations are out to defend hunting and trapping rights. Pitted against them is the *Coalition Against Spring Hunting* (CASH)—an alliance between Malta's Green Party and local environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOS)—campaigning to abolish spring hunting.

This paper has three goals. First, we will give an account of the rapidly escalating struggle between hunters and environmentalists, particularly following the establishment of the CASH coalition in July 2013. We base our narrative on a series of formal interviews conducted in October 2013 with the leaders and spokespersons of 25 ENGOS, hunting

organisations and state institutions active in the hunting scene. This information is supplemented by analysis of newspaper articles and press releases, as well as informal interviews held with our informants following our departure from Malta.

Second, we revisit a body of anthropological theory that flourished in the 1960s and excelled at interpreting factional struggle and social conflict. Despite being instrumental in driving the final nails into structural-functionalism's coffin, the corpus of literature on 'factionalism' has been neglected in anthropology.

Thirdly, we suggest that because 'factionalism' is so efficient at explaining the baffling developments occurring in Malta, it also addresses a pressing issue in the discipline of Conservation Biology.<sup>3</sup> Conservationists widely argue that conflicts involving the management of wildlife ('conservation conflicts') present this discipline with one of its toughest challenges (Dickman 2010; Redpath *et al.* 2013). Up until recently, however, 'conservation conflict' only referred to situations where wildlife competes with humans over common resources. This ignores the fact that, in many instances, conflict also occurs between human stakeholders over the control of natural resources (Marshall *et al.* 2007). Stakeholder-conflicts are often expensive and destructive affairs that undermine conservation efforts and disrupt social order (Goldman *et al.* 2013; Treves & Karanth 2003), and become especially acute when they involve practices that directly exploit biodiversity,<sup>4</sup> and where NGOs are very active and participate in—or even initiate—such conflicts (e.g. Douglas & Verissimo 2013; Redpath *et al.* 2013; Thirgood & Redpath 2008).

While Conservation has grown aware that the dynamics between stakeholders must be understood if conservation policies are to succeed, the discipline still lacks the tools to effectively understand human struggle. Consequently, most conservation conflicts are still solely approached from an ecological perspective (Dickman 2010; White *et al.* 2009). On the other hand, the social sciences have a long tradition of engaging with what conservationists call 'stakeholder-conflicts'. Efforts have been made to ethnographically understand the motivations of antagonistic social actors (e.g. Falzon 2008), the politics of environmental activism (e.g. Van der Heijden 1997; Carter 2007; Rootes 1999), as well as competing concepts of the environment, biodiversity and animal welfare that often guide such struggles (e.g. Theodossopoulos 2003; Van der Heijden 2005; Burnham 2000). This paper argues that factionalism can help us explain recent developments in what has been dubbed by bird conservationists as the 'the black spot of the Mediterranean' (Raine 2007), supplying Conservation with the ethnographically-informed tools it requires.

### **The Eyes of the Law**

Malta joined the European Union in 2004. Malta's four hunting associations, claiming that their 14,000 members could swing elections, pressured the Maltese government into negotiating an entry package that allowed for a spring hunting season. This was granted in the form of a derogation authorizing the local government to open a limited spring hunting season, allowing the shooting of only two species, the trapping of one, and a reduced bag-count.

In 2008, however, the European Court of Justice (ECJ), after receiving reports that Maltese hunters were copiously breaking the terms of the derogation, ordered the Maltese government to suspend the spring hunting season. Frustrated by the State's consistent failure to take a stand against hunting and emboldened by the ECJ's ruling, BirdLife Malta<sup>5</sup> adopted a strong, active stance on the issue. Its yearly 'Spring Watch Camps', originally conceived in the 1980s

as bird-watching events shifted towards more complex military-like field-operations to patrol the countryside, seek out illegalities and aid the police in arresting poachers (Campbell & Veríssimo 2015) (Times of Malta 2014g). In this, they were joined by foreign animal-welfare groups, particularly the ‘Committee Against Bird Slaughter’ (CABS).

Despite finding Malta guilty, the ECJ allowed Malta to reopen its spring hunting season in 2010. Angered, the NGOs intensified their field-activities. Clashes between hunters and conservationists became commonplace. In 2010, an FKNK council member was found guilty of assaulting a CABS volunteer (CABS 2010). Protected birds, occasionally shot for sport or out of frustration, were also being killed as a form of protest (Lia 2011). In 2012, ENGOs responded by increasing their presence in the field and deploying a drone to monitor the landscape. The drone was shot down a few days later (CABS 2012), and by Spring 2013, the Army had to intervene to keep order in the countryside (Times of Malta 2014f).

### The CASH

In Summer 2013, Carmel Cacopardo, a high-ranking member of Alternattiva Demokratika (AD), Malta’s Green Party, approached BirdLife Malta with plans for a different strategy. He proposed an alliance that would use a recently enacted law allowing citizens to push for a referendum if they gathered the support of at least 10% of the population. The mainstream middle-class Maltese, AD insisted, have no sympathy for hunters, and so an AD-BirdLife campaign could easily muster the required 35,000 petitioners, win the referendum and abolish spring hunting without having to resort to further fruitless political negotiation.

BirdLife Malta initially refused. AD, however, proceeded to convince Malta’s other ENGOs—most of which do not have bird conservation as their focus—to join the cause. BirdLife Malta, perhaps afraid of being left out from what promised to be a successful campaign on its core issue, joined the movement on the condition that AD would not feature amongst the alliance’s spokespersons.

In July 2013, the NGOs formally announced the creation of the *‘The Coalition for the Abolition of Spring Hunting’* (CASH) (Malta Today 2013a). Spring hunting, they declared, threatens the survival of migratory bird populations, and is a savage sport that should not exist in a European country with modern values. Moreover, if hunters keep breaching derogation terms, Malta risks getting fines that must be shouldered by *all* Maltese taxpayers, including those with no taste for hunting. Hunters also prevent the Maltese public from enjoying the outdoors, as (to avoid trespassing by ENGO members) hunters have started to bar access to parts of the countryside. Lastly, CASH argues, hunting annoys tourists and damages Malta’s image as a quiet, safe and hospitable country. In short, the Coalition maintains it is supporting the interests of the general Maltese population against a small group of selfish, morally-dubious citizens and their hijacking of Government policy (Malta Today 2014h, Malta Today 2014q).

The CASH includes one political party and 12 ENGOs of varying sizes (from less than 10 to about 2,700 members) and agendas (from animal welfare, to marine conservation, to the protection of historical heritage). All members of CASH invested some effort to collect signatures for the referendum at public events.<sup>6</sup> They do not, however, have the same weight when it comes to determining the Coalition’s policies. CASH is led by a committee of four organisations: Ramblers, BirdLife Malta, the GAIA Foundation<sup>7</sup> and, of course, *Alternattiva Demokratika*. The Coalition has other less frequent general gatherings attended by CASH’s direct member-

organisations.<sup>8</sup> CASH also lists the ‘Coalition for Animal Rights’ (CAR), another coalition of 12–14 animal<sup>9</sup> welfare NGOs, as one of its members. CAR members do not directly participate in the CASH’s meetings, but are represented by a delegate who, confusingly enough, is a high-ranking member of an institution that is a member of both the CASH and CAR.

It is important to note that this was not the first time Malta’s ENGOs had banded together. In 2004, for example, a large number of Maltese ENGOs launched a campaign that, with the support of the *Partit Laburista*<sup>10</sup> and the Church, stopped plans to turn the fields around Malta’s old medieval capital into a golf course (Malta Independent 2010). Similarly, Malta’s ENGOs, working alone or in small groups, have been increasingly successful in halting irregular construction projects in both urban and rural areas (Boissevain and Gatt 2010).<sup>11</sup> Scholars have attributed ENGO effectiveness to their symbolic value as signifiers of resistance to the wide-scale commercialisation of Malta’s landscape to accommodate the rapidly expanding tourist industry (Boissevain 2010). ENGOs have been additionally empowered by Malta’s accession to the EU, which prioritised environmental sustainability, limited the power of national governments and thus enhanced ENGOs lobbying power (Brigulio 2010, 2012, 2014).

### **Money for nothing?**

The hunting lobby was initially undaunted by this attack on Spring Hunting. FKNK leaders seemed sceptical of CASH’s ability to collect the votes. They also claimed they were ready to challenge the legality of CASH’s campaign<sup>12</sup> and were confident that the Labour Party Government would not readily entertain holding a referendum that could set a precedent for anyone seeking to impose policy.

Their position would soon change. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, a CASH spokesperson announced that the cause had collected 10,000 signatures in just two months (Malta Today 2013b, 2013c). At a heated public debate about spring hunting held at the University of Malta on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, Cacopardo proudly declared that the petition had reached 25,000 signatures. He also confirmed the hunters’ greatest fear. ‘Bird rights,’ he was reported to have said, ‘are for the whole year,’ and that CASH’s ‘referendum [was] just the start of more referenda to make hunting completely illegal in Malta’ (Malta Today 2013d). In mid-December, when CASH reported reaching 30,000 signatures, FKNK finally hit back (Malta Today 2013f) and announce that the hunting lobby would also start collecting signatures for a petition to amend law to prohibit referenda that infringe the rights and privileges of Maltese ‘minorities’ (Malta Today 2013e).

This was a surprising twist. Hunters had previously used ecological arguments to defend their rights.<sup>13</sup> Through their numerous publications and ‘cultural activities’ they sometimes subtly suggested that hunting has deep roots in ‘Maltese culture’: traditional cuisine, folk rhymes and even religious festivals such as the ‘*Mnarja*’ all have links to hunting (Fenech 2010, FKNK 2012, Malta Independent 2014g). FKNK’s press-conference, however, recast hunters not as guardians of Maltese identity, but as an inherently distinct section of the Maltese population, vulnerable and misunderstood, particularly in their claim to ‘*namra*’, the strong emotional force that drives hunters to the fields and could lead to depression, insanity and even death if denied (Falzon 2008). Moreover, FKNK argued that their petition was against the immoral abuse of democratic rights by ambitious political elites, and concluded by suggesting that they would not need six months to muster 40,000 signatures.

January 2014 was a quiet month. By February, however, both the FKNK and CASH were escalating the conflict, drawing upon various resources to outmanoeuvre their opponents.

### Drunkards and Wife-beaters

‘We must voice our Federation’s concern’, lamented FKNK’s President in a letter to the Minister of Education,<sup>14</sup>

regarding such ... [an] unchecked social-hatred campaign of ‘brainwashing’ school children ... who are being ‘taught’ to disrespect and disapprove of their parents simply because they are hunters (Malta Independent 2014a).

FKNK’s letter was in response to a social studies test-paper that asked female secondary school students to identify species of flora put at risk through unsustainable hunting and trapping. The letter moved on to accuse the headmistress of failing in her public duty to raise a generation of open-minded citizens that respect their society’s minorities.

A week later FKNK issued a second complaint, this time referencing a social studies textbook given to primary school students. The letter pointed out how the textbook depicted hunters as backward individuals who need to be educated out of their traditions now that hunting is no longer needed to procure food, and as alcoholics who enjoy getting drunk in social clubs (*kazini*) before going home to pick quarrels with their wives and children (Malta Independent 2014a).

The attempt to rupture the bond between parent and child, essential to the inculcation of *namra*, was not the only thing at play. The FKNK was also worried that ENGOs had won free reign to colonise Malta’s schools. In an open letter to the Minister of Education published in the press, FKNK argued:

“FKNK has ... many a competent lecturer on a vast range of social subjects connected to hunting ... We had also presented your predecessor with a “teachers’ educational pack” with regards the traditional socio-cultural passions of hunting and trapping ... our requests have been shelved and the anti-hunting crusade continues in our educational institutions. We therefore appeal to ... your better judgment ... to evaluate our concerns, not only as hunters ... but also as parents ... [and] ask you to consider our request to be integrated in the education system... (Malta Independent 2014b).”

### British Jam Doughnuts

In April 2014, in order to commemorate a series of historical anniversaries, the Maltese Government invited the legendary ex-Queen guitarist Brian May to give a concert (Malta Independent 2014c). Mid-way through his performance, however, he stunned his large audience with the following declaration:

I am so happy that in this country ... you can have a petition, and if you have enough names on the petition, then you can have a referendum [to] change the law... When the time comes, please put your vote to end the cruelty of spring hunting (Malta Independent 2014d, Times of Malta 2014e).

The following day discontent started appearing in many newspaper forums. May, many suggested, had no business meddling in Maltese affairs. Most suspected a foul connection between CASH and the British rock star.

The next day, Government officials sought to declare their innocence and downplay the issue. However, when May, confirmed that he stood by what he had said, the FKNK launched its attack:

In typical colonial fashion, May deemed it fit to remind that the British always know better ... The irony of this statement is that it materialised on ... Malta's Freedom Day ... [But then] he opted for the massacre of these innocent creatures [deer] ... because they happened to live on [his] land. The FKNK has little else to say to hypocrites... (Malta Independent 2014f).

*Kaċċaturi San Umbertu* (KSU), a small hunting organisation strongly allied to the FKNK, was even more assertive: '[KSU] Deplore[s] the hijacking of a public event paid for by the Maltese taxpayer for the promotion of BirdLife Malta's abolitionist agenda' (Malta Independent 2014f).

For, they added, there was no doubt BirdLife Malta was involved:

The new cover photo of the BirdLife Malta executive director's Facebook page ... together with Mr May should clear any doubts... Clearly Brian May was exercising his support for animal rights by being the perfect BirdLife Malta parrot ... a relic of the legendary band Queen who has [as] much knowledge of Malta's democratic process or Maltese hunting as a British Jam Doughnut (Malta Independent 2014f).

### ***"Kemetra, Feathers on the Inside"***

A few days later, the spring hunting season opened. The following 19 days would prove to be especially tense, with BirdLife Malta expanding its presence in the countryside. Chris Packham, a British TV presenter famous for his shows about spring-time bird migration, joined BirdLife Malta's field-teams in order to gather material for a documentary about the '*avian apocalypse*' that is Malta (Times of Malta 2014h). Using this footage, Packham led a funding campaign through which 1,800 UK donors added €50,000 to CASH's resources (Malta Today 2014k). A few days into the season, however, Packham was asked to report to the police headquarters for questioning, on the grounds that he had illegally filmed army operations and was publishing material that could be used by the police as criminal evidence (Malta Today 2014j).

Packham's case attracted plenty of attention both in Malta and the UK. FKNK congratulated the police for bringing in what was obviously a destabilising force in Malta's tense countryside. They insisted that Packham would be ready to alienate any party, bend any fact and break any law to depict Malta as a 'bird hell' (The Guardian 2014). CASH, by contrast, interpreted the event as obvious proof that the Police was in it with the hunters and, therefore, against Malta's civil voice. British papers also had much to say, most reading the event as the brutal suppression of an animal rights hero (The Guardian 2014). Even the Daily Mash, a British satirical newspaper, pitched in. It described how Packham was rescued by a flock of wild birds, who attacked Maltese policemen while their bird-brother Packham—known to them as '*Kemetra*', or 'feathers on the inside'—escaped on the back of a giant eagle (The Daily Mash 2014).

### **The Hunters and their Allies**

In March 2014, Cyrus Engerer, an energetic PL candidate for the European Parliament personally presented FKNK's leadership with 1,600 signatures for their campaign (Times of Malta 2014a). When asked about his move, Engerer replied that the LGBT community, which had recently acquired important civil rights, could only stand to benefit FKNK's plans to change the referendum law to safeguard 'minority' rights (Malta Today 2014d). Moreover, he added that he could never stand idly by while the EU 'bullied' tiny Malta:

I am not a hunter and I will never be one. I did what I believed to be the best in the national interest as I did on other occasions<sup>15</sup> ...

Malta has two derogations ... there are countries that have 1,800 derogations ... It's not a question of shooting down birds, it is a question of Malta being considered equal (Times of Malta 2014d, Malta Today 2014c).

CASH's supporters were quick to attack this new alliance. Invoking Engerer's political career, some journalists dismissed him as a petty opportunist who had defected from the Nationalist Party to join the PL, where he rapidly gained prominence as the face of the party's liberal policies (Times of Malta 2014b). Moreover, Saviour Balzan, the newspaper editor who had infuriated the FKNK with his appointment to ORNIS, wrote:

Cyrus knows that the petition organised by CASH has nothing to do with 'minorities'. It is about stopping the massacre of birds by a bunch of morons who know no better.... Cyrus is simply using Labour as a vehicle to get himself installed in Brussels ... to receive a handsome wage and a pension. (Malta Today 2014b).

While some individual politicians would, in the following weeks, declare their support for either CASH or the hunters, both main political parties stayed aloof of such decisions. Similarly, other 'minorities'—namely firework artisans—denied involvement in the issue (Times of Malta 2014c, Times of Malta 2014i).

#### **'Victory for Civil Society'**

CASH submitted its petition on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March. News reports showed AD's Cacopardo standing in front of the doors of the Electoral Commission, with BirdLife Malta's project and executive managers on either side. All were straining under cardboard boxes containing the 44,376 signatures collected over the previous months (Malta Today 2014e). Cacopardo congratulated the NGOs, signalling that the day marked a victory for civil society, so that 'the decisions which Parliament has failed to take in the past years will be acted upon by the electorate' (Malta Today 2014n).

In response, FKNK's leadership insisted that the Government should, at least, carefully check the validity of the signatures submitted.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, FKNK argued, Parliament ought to seriously consider the political repercussions of entertaining such a referendum, for it could set a dangerous precedent for even more contentious activities. They cited the case of Pastor Manché, who, just days earlier had also presented a petition for a referendum to prevent gay couples from adopting children (Malta Today 2014f).

By law, the Electoral Commission had 15 days to confirm the validity of the signatures and give the referendum the green light. This would have allowed CASH to combine its referendum with the elections for the European parliament, guaranteeing a high voter turnout (Malta Today 2014m). A couple of days in, however, the Commission lamented that it was 'humanly impossible' for it to complete its task in just two weeks (Malta Today 2014g). The Government accepted the Commission's appeal, granting it an extension of several months and forcing CASH to miss its goal.

### **Final Engagements**

The following months were surprisingly silent. Hunting played a minor role in May's European Parliament elections, and it was even suggested that the hunters were struggling to find supporters for their petition.

They were wrong, because, as described in our introductory vignette, when the hunters *did* submit their petition in June they trumped CASH's performance with a larger, more pompous ceremony that chose the Parliament, instead of the obscure Electoral Commission, as its theatre (Malta Today 2014l; Malta Today 2014p). Many reacted by condemning the hunters for their anti-democratic spirit (Malta Today 2014s, Malta Independent 2014f). CASH, however, confidently commented that the run up to the referendum would surely spark an 'interesting and lively debate' (Times of Malta 2014j).

It would be a mistake to think that the tensions between CASH and FKNK subsided while they awaited for governmental institutions to process their petitions. By July 2014, both sides were pushing for a referendum date that would further their chances of victory. CASH insisted that the referendum ought to be combined with another larger election in order to minimise both financial costs to the state and inconvenience to the voting public. They eyed the local council elections of April 2015 as a possible date (Malta Today 2014g). FKNK, by contrast, maintained that the referendum should be held as a standalone event. Hunters predicted that the abolition of spring hunting is not of sufficient importance to CASH's sympathisers, who, unlike the hunters, would only cast their vote if drawn to the booths by the passions bi-party politics consistently mobilise (Times of Malta 2014k; Malta Today 2014i). Early in 2015, the PL Government fixed the referendum date for the 11<sup>th</sup> of April to coincide with the Local Council Elections. At the same time, however, the leaders of both PL and PN would declare their personal support for the hunters and their privileges, which they held to be achievements in Malta's negotiations with the EU. This is where our narrative ends. While the following months would see CASH passing on the anti-hunting banner to Spring Hunting Out (SHOUT), a vociferous organisation that would mount an energetic and fierce campaign, and while, to SHOUT's disbelief, the referendum would be eventually narrowly won by the hunting lobby, the events leading to the fixing of the referendum date provide us with sufficient material to illustrate how conservation needs to take into account anthropological models of conflict if its projects are to be successful. It is time, therefore, to move to a different story.

### **Revisiting Factionalism**

'Factionalism' traces its origin to a particular line of critique of structural-functionalism, delivered by a group of anthropologists—particularly those within the British tradition working in Europe—who felt that structural-functionalism could not deal with the conflict and social change they were observing in the field. Structural-functionalism, they argued, is mainly concerned with how 'social institutions' work to reproduce the 'solidarity' (cohesion) of a 'society' (a bounded system of relationships and institutions), populated by individuals who share similar 'values'. Within this framework, conflict can refer to one of two things. First, it could be the product of the wide dissemination of different 'values', leading to sections of 'society' breaking apart to form a different social system. Alternatively, it reflects a superficial rupture between individuals, easily mended by the 'sanction' of higher social institutions. In both versions, conflict is a symptom of social disequilibrium, and politics is the process of restoring balance and order (Firth 1954; Easton 1959; Banton 1966; Gluckman & Eggan 1966; Beattie 1964).

But what about a society that features groups engaged in long-drawn-out conflicts over different values, but which nonetheless do not desire to break it into two? And what about those struggles where ‘higher institutions’, instead of restoring balance, end up being drawn into the conflict, becoming spoils over which different groups compete? (Boissevain 1964, Bailey and Nicholas 1968)

Not all anthropologists sought to replace structural-functionalism upon encountering its limitations. Many sought ways to write ‘conflict’ into the paradigm. The late 60s, therefore, saw a surge of literature dealing with groups anthropologists called ‘factions’: social groups engaged in conflict with other ‘factions’. It was argued that ‘factions’ are present in every society, but were missed or ignored by structural-functionalists, whose interest in social *order* led them to focus solely on institutional or ritual behaviour (Boissevain 1968).

Yet, despite the volume of literature produced (or rather because of it), these scholars could not agree what defined a ‘faction’ as an observable group. Many indicated that ‘factions’ are inherently non-corporate groups: they own neither property, nor have any definite organizational structure (e.g. Chambers 1963; Mayer 1966; Bujra 1973; Yablonsky 1959; Beller & Belloni 1978). Others insisted that factions often need to adopt corporate features to achieve their aims (Boissevain 1978; Salisbury & Silverman 1977). Some scholars spent considerable effort to show that factions are characterised by ambitious leaders whose greatest challenge is the conversion of their charismatic authority into something more lasting (Lewis 1954; Maybury-Lewis 1967). Others, by contrast, indicated that factions can form around more abstract ideologies and ideals. Debate also raged over whether factions deal with specific issues (Spiro 1991) or whether they could cover multiple issues. Disagreement existed over whether factions dissolve upon victory/defeat or whether they can re-invent themselves to target new issues (Lasswell 1931; Morris 1957). Factions, others insisted, also had a particular ‘mode’ of operation, working publicly in the open (Siegel and Beals 1960). Yet covert factional struggles, where membership is secret and individuals could keep a foot in different groups were also reported (Dickson-Gilmore 1999). Factions were generally seen as petty, simply occupied with controlling resources (Mayer 1966; Burja 1973). Yet, they could also be revolutionary, seeking to transform society (Reader 1964; Boissevain 1965).

Anthropologists soon grew disillusioned with this quest to define the ‘faction’. The term came to acquire so much intellectual baggage that it became a blunt instrument raising more questions than it answered. The obsession over classification, moreover, ended up reproducing some of the things that had put them off structural-functionalism in the first place: descriptions of static institutions insensitive to social change and transformation (Siegel and Beals 1966; Salisbury and Silverman 1977).

As a consequence, anthropologists adjusted their attention away from ‘factions’ towards ‘factionalism’, the process through which factions emerge, react with each other, seek to overcome their rivals, and, upon victory or defeat, consolidate themselves into stable organisations, move on to different issues, or fade away and dissolve. The emphasis on process rendered the task of defining the faction null, for the central aspect of ‘factionalism’ is change, in the sense that in the course of their struggles, factions are likely to expand or contract, adopt or shed corporate features, develop ideological frameworks and readjust their tactics, goals, ‘domains’ and ‘modes’ of operation (Arnold 1972; Sanjek 1974; Boissevain and Mitchell 1975). In order to sidestep the complications associated with the definition of ‘factions’, this paper will henceforth refer to these dynamic opposing parties as ‘conflict groups’.

At the risk of simplification, it could be said that ‘factionalism’ developed two theoretical branches. The first focused on the ebbs and flows of conflict within a society over long periods. Even at this stage, factionalism was not at odds with the goals of structural-functionalism, for through their long-term analysis anthropologists tended to see how ‘conflict groups’ paradoxically strengthen ‘society’s’ resilience, as they tend to emerge when new resources become available, or when a ‘society’ requires urgent change to survive (Bailey 1957; Stacy 1960; Gouldner 1960; Nicholas 1965). The second branch marks an irreconcilable departure from structural-functionalism. With its preference for looking at shorter breadths of time in much greater detail, this approach developed an interest in how groups mobilise support and creatively strategize to overcome their opponents. The focus shifts, therefore, to agency (van Velzen 1964; Mayer 1966; Boissevain 1974a).

### **Factionalism in the Maltese Hunting Scenario**

Factionalism teaches that groups locked in conflict are, by virtue of their rivalry, likely to behave in predictable ways. Their antagonistic relationship is often so strong that it might generate baffling strategies participants would consider impossible under other circumstances. The predictable dynamics of conflict described by the exponents of ‘factionalism’ can be best understood if examined in the light of the feud between hunters and ENGOs.

First, conflict-groups are often fiercely entrenched in their positions, and often end up defining themselves in opposition to the antagonistic ‘other’. Moreover, since conflict groups are constantly anticipating attack and are generally well versed in techniques to ward off their adversaries, factionalism is dominated by a sense of deadlock and frustration (Khattab 2001).

In Malta, the hunting scenario is marked by constant engagement. The rush to referendum gave both sides many new supporters, who have armed themselves with an arsenal of arguments to use against their opponents, especially in local media debates. Moreover, the factional struggle between the FKNK and CASH has led both groups to polarise themselves into a tense zero-sum game. Constantly on guard, they assign sides to everything: Brian May’s message immediately put him in CASH’s camp while Engerer was discredited as a petty opportunist. Similarly, the Government is a threat to both ‘civil society’ (e.g. arresting ‘Packham’ and extending the Electoral Commission’s deadline) *and* the ‘minorities’ (e.g. allowing ‘extremists’ into the ORNIS and the education system). Actors attempting reconciliation must be aware that the strong currents of factionalism can unmoor the most neutral of institutions and recast the most ‘scientific’ of ecological arguments as biased propaganda.

### **Establishment, Opposition and Mimetic Escalation**

Theorists of factionalism agree that ‘conflict groups’ are not mirror images of each other. Rather, one group is out to control of a particular resource/social institution or change specific rules/laws governing a social system. This defines them as the ‘Opposition’. Pitted against them is the ‘Establishment’, which aims to prevent the ‘Opposition’ from conducting such changes. Because Oppositions’ goals imply a degree of social change,<sup>17</sup> they are often inclined to—but not bound to—adopt discourses of liberalism, progress and refreshing revolution. In response, Establishments can be expected to occupy ideologies of continuity, order, privilege and identity rooted in tradition (Boissevain 1974b, Nicholas 1965).

This resonates with the Maltese case. On the one hand, we find an alliance of ENGOs seeking to abolish spring hunting. Following theories of factionalism, this goal identifies

CASH and their supporters as the ‘Opposition.’ Accordingly, they generally see themselves as the champions of an educated liberal middle-class that (in theory) intensely dislikes partisan politics and patronage, values the environment as a fragile, collective resource and is eager to cleanse Malta of negative stereotypes. The FKNK, on the other hand, can be seen as the ‘Establishment’, utilising their superior political connections and manpower to defend their hunting privileges. They have developed two conservative stances: the first depicts them as guardians of Maltese traditions, the second as defenders of Malta’s ‘minorities’. Both value social stability and legal protection against uncontrollable change.

It is important to note that what defines the ‘Establishment’ from the ‘Opposition’ is their respective goals, and nothing more. Therefore, while one might be tempted to view CASH as the ‘Establishment’, given its support amongst the professional middle-classes, control of the media and the aid of numerous foreign institutions (including the EU), factionalism encourages us to see these connections as resources it can employ—as the ‘Opposition’—in its quest to get rid of spring hunting. Similarly, while Establishment and Opposition are likely to gravitate towards antagonistic discourses of tradition and progress respectively, Factionalism suggests that they are by no means exclusively bound to them. On the contrary, both conflict groups can be expected to break the deadlock by developing creative strategies to overwhelm or outmanoeuvre the enemy and/or spread the conflict into new arenas where believe they have a distinct advantage (Nicholas 1965). To the observer, conflicts between opposition and establishment seem to escalate rapidly, with both conflict groups imitating each others’ tactics, including the strategy of creatively expanding conflict in new directions and forming unexpected alliances (e.g. such as that between the hunting lobby and members of the LGBT community) (Wallman 1974; Boissevain 1984). In Malta, this escalation was exemplified in a series of episodes:

### **Internal Organisation**

Factionalism suggests that the Opposition will try to make itself as organisationally efficient as possible (Segel and Beals 1960; Boissevain 1974b). First, in the Maltese case, where the Opposition is composed of many small NGOs, the organisational structure of the CASH maximised resource and communication efficiency. Secondly, CASH also provided the NGOs with the leadership needed to mould their various agendas into one, focused ideology, ideal to achieve their goal. In a recent article, Boissevain and Gatt describe a Maltese landscape populated by a rich range of NGOs sporting different agendas and modus operandi (Boissevain and Gatt 2010). While doing our research, by contrast, we were surprised by how Maltese NGOs showed great similarities in their ideologies and tactics, favouring animal welfare discourses and direct confrontation. This homogenisation also sucked in formerly moderate ENGOs such as BirdLife Malta, which, initially sceptical about abolishing spring hunting now refuses to engage in basic negotiations (e.g. Times of Malta 2013b).

Establishments, on the other hand, being larger and more confident, are less fussy about organisation (van Velzen 1973). This seems to be the case with the hunting lobby, and is also a source of tension. Firstly, of the four organisations active in 2004, only the FKNK and KSU are officially allied. The remaining associations seem politically inactive, but still represent a reasonable fraction of hunters who may not consider the FKNK as their leader. Secondly, while it would be unrealistic to demand that a conflict-group’s ‘core’ (executive leadership) be able to control the behaviour of all its ‘support’ (members and sympathisers), a few rogue

hunters can wipe out entire flocks of protected birds. The FKNK often comes down hard on such dissidents by revoking FKNK membership, needed for gun-licences and hunting-permits. This, however, does nothing to quell tensions with CASH, who still suspect the tacit involvement of FKNK's 'core'.

### **New Battlefields**

The Opposition will often try to outmanoeuvre its rivals by spreading the conflict into new arenas where it has the upper hand (Nicholas 1965; Caplow 1968). Thus, CASH was interpreted as having colonised concerts, public events and even the education system in order to spread its anti-hunting message and collect signatures. When interviewed, CASH members also said that they went for a referendum because they were confident this was a battle they could win, counting on the general support CASH claims it has to decide the issue.

In Malta, the Establishment has reacted by attempting to delegitimise such expansions (e.g. Brian May), and by trying to pursue its rivals into new fields before they are permanently lost (e.g. education system). The FKNK has sought to contain the 'domain' of the struggle, maintaining that hunting is not important enough for a referendum (where its supporters, though numerous, might not be enough to secure victory). Eventually, however, the Establishment had no option but to open its own fronts (e.g. minorities petition).

### **Networks**

Factionalism, especially in democratic contests, is a numbers game. Conflict groups constantly seek ways to extend, display and celebrate their 'support' (e.g. petition submission by both CASH and FKNK) (Turner 1957). 'Support' is primarily recruited and mobilised through personal networks: the FKNK often suggested that if its 14,000 members were each to recruit three friends or relatives to the cause, they would overcome any opposition.

Conflict-groups are also likely to wield their networks to secure the support of individuals with access to important resources such as manpower, funds and influential positions of power (Swartz 1968). CASH's NGOs were quick to mobilise their international connections, raising money and attracting foreign media coverage. BirdLife Malta has installed into its 'core' politically-experienced supporters in influential positions in local media. CASH used its existing connections to recruit the 'Coalition of Animal Rights', whose members, no matter how small, add weight and legitimacy to its cause.

### **Invasion**

Conflict-groups are generally studied in pairs of Establishment-Opposition (Murphy 1971). But often there are multiple 'factional dialectics' in society (Maybury-Lewis 1967; Boissevain 1964). In Malta, the conflict between CASH and FKNK has developed alongside the overwhelming struggle between the Labour<sup>18</sup> and Nationalist<sup>19</sup> Parties. How do 'factional dialectics' interact? The Maltese case suggests three distinct ways.

First, one cannot ignore the possibility that emerging factional dialectics are offshoots of existing conflicts. Hunters often accused CASH of being a poorly disguised attempt by the tiny Green Party to place itself at the helm of a conflict that would depict it as a viable alternative to the main parties—a champion of civil society against passive, soulless parties. In interviews, hunters often lamented *they* were the real victims, picked upon by an AD trying

to win its spurs. Second, participants of the younger, more energetic factional struggles will try to make other conflict groups pick a side. Over the past year, the FKNK has sought ways to be patronised by Labour Party candidates who had hunter backgrounds and could be sympathetic to their cause. CASH's supporters, by contrast, have repeatedly urged the Nationalist Party to come out strongly against hunting, and take their place as the champions of Malta's educated, liberal middle classes (Malta Independent 2014f). Third, Malta's parties understand that their supporters' hearts beat in different directions when it comes to hunting. Both parties, in effect, have failed to take a stand either in favour or against hunters, mainly because they refuse to bind their fate to conflict groups whose exact support is unclear, but also since they fear a backlash from those party members who might not share their leaders' views.<sup>20</sup> Parties' high-ranking officials, therefore, often dodge attempts forcing them to pick sides by mumbling obscure wisdom about democracy or fleeing dangerous situations entirely (e.g. introductory vignette). Likewise, those candidates for the European Parliament who openly backed CASH or FKNK got no official support from their Party.

### **Ideology beyond Networks**

Theories of factionalism insist that conflict-groups mainly recruit support through personal networks, relegating ideology to a by-product of struggle (Boissevain 1978). Yet, as the Maltese case suggests, the fast escalation of tensions means that conflict groups need to rapidly mobilise large numbers of supporters. No group can rely solely on personal networks to achieve this. Rather, ideology can be in itself a way to facilitate new alliances. Thus, FKNK's shift to a discourse on 'minorities' allowed it to pair up with an influential member of the LGBT council, who, in turn, drew on fears that the gay minority might lose important rights if minority rights remain unguarded. Factional rivalries, in simple words, can supply social actors (including 'Establishments' favouring traditionalist discourses) with the will, energy and opportunity to create progressive unions if it aids their struggles. Social change and inertia go hand-in-hand and can coexist.

Additionally, the ideologies that both 'Establishment' and 'Opposition' adopt are banners behind which the Maltese public can rally. Despite their extensive networks, both conflict groups were forced to rely on this strategy. CASH thus came to fight for a society where civil society could win against lobby groups' vested interests, while FKNK, stands for a society with a different notion of liberty, where minorities are protected and their traditions safeguarded. In other words, while both sides accuse their enemies of using ideology to mask their petty aspirations (e.g. AD, Cyrus Engerer),<sup>21</sup> the Maltese case shows no inevitable boundary between self-interest and ideology. It is clear that it is the ambitions, antagonisms, hopes and fears of conflict groups' leaders that provide the energy animating conflict. Yet in order to succeed, these rivalries need the support of individuals beyond their networks, and thus must tap into wider questions of general interest. The struggle between CASH and FKNK escalated to being one over the meaning of democracy, and what kind of place Malta ought to aspire to be.

### **Conclusion**

By 1970s, the study of factionalism was eclipsed by a new generation of politically-driven anthropologists. Despite some valiant attempts (Boissevain 1978), students of factionalism could not defend themselves against accusations that 'factions' dealt with petty struggles between ambitious leaders, and ignored the conflicts, ideologies and social identities that

would radically transform society: class and gender (Dahrendorf 1959; Davis *et al.* 1965; Alavi 1973; Bujra 1973; Schryer 1975). Factionalism was depicted as an unfavourable return to classic functionalism, with its simplistic model of the individual as rationally trying to maximise power and resources, and was gradually forgotten (Salisbury and Silverman 1977).

This paper argues that letting go of factionalism is detrimental because it has supplied anthropology with a sophisticated model of conflict able to explaining complex struggles between individuals and organisations in contemporary society. Factionalism suggests that conflict binds participants into a strong spiral of mimetic rivalry that develops in predictable ways, transforms groups and individuals, generates powerful ideologies and discourses and is a central motor in both social change and immobility.

Moreover, analysis of the Maltese hunting scenario indicates that factionalism can offer several lessons to conservationists interested managing biodiversity. First, biologists need to wade into fields they previously considered beyond their expertise. Successful conservation must recognise the importance of stakeholder conflicts, and this in turn requires them to understand such feuds ethnographically by paying attention to the dynamic nature of rivalry. This includes elements such as the changing fears and hopes of antagonists, and how rivalry can mobilise powerful social movements. Second, conservationists must learn that their rigorous ecological approaches to conservation fail because they do not address the suspicions of antagonistic factions in contexts where trust is preciously rare. Thirdly, failure to understand the human dimension of conservation can lead conservationists into becoming part of feuds they should be instead mediating. Conservationists who are subjects to, rather than masters of, factionalism see their scientific authority eaten away, further corrode trust between factions, fuel the flames of conflict, banish the possibility of reconciliation and make conservation possible only through expensive and forceful suppression and the criminalisation of their rivals.

## Notes

1. Literally: federation for conservationist hunters and trappers, although the FKNK website translates their title as 'Federation for Hunting and Conservation Malta'.
2. The Malta Labour Party, which under new leadership, had won a crushing victory in March's 2012 general elections, following over 20 years in opposition.
3. This paper is based on a collaborative project between Conservation Biology and Social Anthropology. The authors thank the School of Anthropology and Conservation of the University of Kent for financially supporting this research.
4. Such as hunting and fishing.
5. Malta's largest environmental NGO in terms of funding and members. It is, organisationally, linked to BirdLife International, yet it has considerable liberty in managing its issues, funding, recruitment, policies and strategies.
6. Such as *Notte Bianca*, *Birgu by Candlelight*, *village festas* or the other traditional food festivals that have come to dominate the Maltese calendar.
7. Particularly for the legal expertise of one of its leaders.
8. These are: Nature Trust, Moviment Graffiti, International Animal Rescue Malta, Greenhouse Malta, Friends of the Earth Malta, Flimkien ghal Ambjent Ahjar, Din l-Art Helwa and the Coalition for Animal Rights.
9. Numbers are based on lists of member organisations produced by different CAR members. These vary, mainly because CAR includes very small organisations with very limited resources and often very limited lifespans. The numbers given represent the number of active organizations at the time of research.
10. Then still in opposition.

11. Boissevain hints that part of this resistance also comes from the fact that the financial yields of tourism are not equally distributed.
12. Spring hunting was part of the EU entry package which the Maltese population had thus already approved via referendum.
13. Mainly, that their presence actually maintained rural ecosystems and that Malta only received a minor fraction of the birds travelling northward, and thus had no real impact on population viability.
14. The letter was also published by several newspapers.
15. Engerer is referring to the divorce referendum, and Malta's accession to the EU. He was also an active player in safeguarding civil union rights for gay couples.
16. FKNK routinely stresses that many of BirdLife Malta's members are not adult, and, therefore, are not entitled to vote. FKNK also insisted that the ENGOs were pressuring people into signing, some of whom responded by giving inaccurate details, invalidating their signatures. In addition, it was suggested that people could have signed more than once, or were foreigners and thus ineligible.
17. From simple change over who controls or is denied control over a particular resource, to full-blown social revolutions transforming the way power and resources are distributed.
18. The Establishment, currently in government after virtually 25 years in opposition.
19. Currently in opposition and recovering from two crushing defeats, one in 2012, which saw it lose its governing position after 25 years in power, and the second in 2013, decisively losing the European Parliament elections.
20. This particular scenario occurred during the run up for the divorce referendum, where the Nationalist Party declared its support for the anti-divorce movement, and earned open and sharp critique from many of its supporters and candidates. The Labour Party allowed its members a free vote.
21. The AD to obtain seats in the Maltese Parliament and the FKNK and supporting politicians to obtain seats in the European Parliament.

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