

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: The spin doctor of Malta

By  Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

29 Jun 2018

Abroad, when politicians sponsor the football teams in their districts or dish out hampers and bottles of wine during electoral campaigns, they call it vote-buying. In Malta, these politicians are described as 'benefactors'. Abroad, when a national team footballer becomes a fisherman, people start smelling something fishy. In Malta, we say, "Oh come on, he likes the sea." Abroad, when a fisherman opens up a diesel import company, the police become really suspicious. In Malta, the comment is: "How he's progressed, God bless him."



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After three decades of PR practice in South Africa, I thought I could write a book about spin. But after having lived on the Maltese islands for a year, I realise I still have a lot to learn...

Binary politics

Malta's binary political landscape (labour in power and nationalist in opposition) extends to the media landscape, since both own party newspapers, radio and television stations which frame the news according to their ideological agenda.



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It's thus fascinating to see how all the malfeasances of government are whitewashed through language choices. (For the best examples below, I am indebted to Arnold Cassola, former Alternattiva Demokratika chairman and former secretary

general of the European Green Party.)

Abroad, when the government of the day dishes out one contract after another by direct order to a greedy, money guzzling politician-lawyer, they call it clientelism. Here in Malta we call it 'person of trust'.

Party apparatchiks

Abroad, when a Prime Minister gives four promotions in three months to his best friend who thus becomes army chief, they call it abuse of power. In Malta, it is called 'exigencies of the service'.

Abroad, when they appoint as chairmen of rehabilitation projects, of cultural capital and what not party apparatchiks, they call it abuse of power. In Malta, they justify it saying, "He cannot because he's labour?"

Abroad, when a lawyer coming from the legal office of a member of Parliament defends one of Daphne's alleged killers, this is deemed to be a national political scandal.



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Or when an opposition politician is a sub-agent for a government-sponsored scheme selling citizenship and passports, abroad they call it opportunism. In Malta we call it: "Not everyone needs to earn a living?"

Abroad, when the government dishes out public land or public hospitals very cheaply to foreign shady persons, the local judiciary immediately initiates a public enquiry. In Malta, instead, we boast that we are creating jobs.

Personal capacity

Abroad, when the Prime Minister and chief of staff are caught participating at the wedding of a suspected crook, the politicians concerned immediately resign or are subjected to a public investigation. In Malta, instead, this is justified by saying, "I paid for the plane ticket to get to Florence."

Abroad, when a director of the foremost newspaper in the country was present at the aforementioned wedding of the aforementioned alleged crook, he is immediately kicked out of his position. In Malta, instead, his presence is justified with the words, "I was there in my personal capacity."

Abroad, when a politician appoints as his PRO paid with public money a journalist coming from the TV station of his/her political stable, they call it nepotism. In Malta, they call it: "Because he is capable."

On an island where English is a second language, these wordsmiths are so much more than merely capable. For their corruption of the language they deserve nothing less than a backhander compliment.

ABOUT MARCUS 'THE MALTESE FALCON' BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger Level 1 BBBEE marketing/comm agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact marcus@marcusbrewster.com or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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