

The collective in Maltese

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In this paper the Maltese Collective category is introduced under two perspectives: the descriptive and the historical perspectives. Maltese being basically an offshoot of Arabic, the Maltese Collective is traced back to its Arabic antecedent, and historical changes affecting it in gender and number are noted. The continued productivity of this native feature with foreign material is amply illustrated through examples of loan nouns taken from both Romance and English. At the synchronic level, the paper discusses the "qualitative" nature of the Collective (for which the term *Type Noun* is proposed) and the parallelism between the Collective (as an Object-Type Noun) and the Verbal Noun (as an Action-Type Noun) in both their morphological and semantic development. In both cases, this development yields formations which are of a quantitative nature, namely the *Unit Noun*, the *Determinate Plural* and the *Type / Collective Plural*.

1. Introduction

This paper is intended to trace the main characteristics of the Collective in Maltese, putting together into an organic structure the different analyses proposed so far. It will also treat diachronic changes which this category has gone through. Since this is the first full treatment of the theme, it does not claim to be exhaustive. One only hopes that the proposed classification, as well as the examples with which it will be illustrated, will prove useful to whoever wants to form an idea of this feature in Maltese.

The term 'Collective' has received various definitions, some of which differ considerably in their extent of application. This is due not only to the different theoretical outlooks or methodology of their proposers, but also, and perhaps to a higher degree, to the different typology of this feature in the various languages under study. Thus, a definition which would be sufficient for the feature 'Collective' in one language may prove insufficient or even basically unsound when applied to another language. The same is often true of other so-called language 'universals'. In the effort to analyse particular features across the spectrum of European languages by way of establishing typological congruence and diversity, the data offered by Maltese, a language with a basically Semitic – and therefore non-European – framework, should be a profitable contribution which will serve both to complete the European picture and to check the universality (if that is the appropriate term at all in a European

context) of the results which have emerged from the languages observed so far.

While in some languages the Collective is hardly more than a semantic category with syntactic implications, in Semitic languages it is a morphological category which lends itself to the grammatical developments which I shall briefly outline.

2. The Arabic background

The basic morphological structures of Maltese undoubtedly have a direct Semitic (more specifically North African Arabic) genealogy. However, the severance of practically all cultural and linguistic ties with the Arabic-speaking world and with Muslim culture for the last 700 years, as well as the long and intensive contact with different European languages, have left their effect on these structures, some of which have been discontinued as productive features and are represented only by a closed, and often rapidly decreasing, lexical repertoire. This is the case, for example, of the Nouns of Place and Instrument (Mimmed Nouns) and the Dual. Other structures have fared better and have not only survived but have remained productive over the centuries with early or late Romance, as well as with English, borrowings. Among these productive features one finds, for example, some Internal Plural patterns,¹ the inflexion of the Weak Verb,² as well as the Collective, which, as we shall see, basically preserves the morphology, the syntax and semantics of Arabic even in its treatment of borrowings from non-Semitic sources. The vitality of the Maltese Collective can hardly be appreciated through the perusal of some of our traditional grammars, in which this important nominal category is often discussed in a couple of short paragraphs, which is probably the space afforded to it in grammars of Italian or English where it is much less important as a category.³

2.1. The collective category in Arabic

Grammarians of Classical Arabic (cf. e.g. Fleisch 1961:301-310) distinguish between two main types of Collective, which are treated in the following sections.

2.1.1. The noun of species /'ism al-ğins/

This class of nouns comprises "nouns that express the genus or whole" (Wright 1967, II:147). They have no particular structure, though a large number of them fall under the pattern *lʊ2(c)3*.⁴ Such nouns, however, serve as the stem to which morphemes are bound in the form of suffixes.

By the addition of /-a/ (i.e. vowel /-a/ + *tā' marbūta*), a *Unit Noun*, called /'ism al-wahda/, is formed which designates "one individual out of a genus, or one part of a whole that consists of several similar parts" (Wright 1967).

e.g.	<i>Collective</i>		<i>Unit Noun</i>
	/ħa mām/	'pigeons'	/ħa 'māma/
	/tuf fāh/	'apples'	/tuf 'fāha/
	/tībn/	'straw'	/tībna/
	/ḡahab/	'gold'	/ḡahaba/

Grammatically, these Collective nouns may be used as either masculine or feminine, since in the view of most Arabic grammarians they are "masculine by form (ending with a consonant) and feminine by signification", being /'al-ğamā'a/, 'the totality' (cf. Wright 1967, II:180). Some grammarians (e.g. Fleisch 1961), however, consider the masculine as the dominant gender of the Noun of Species.

2.1.2. The Collective /'ism al-ğam/

This class comprises nouns indicating a collectivity of beings or objects. These do not develop a *Unit Noun* by the addition of a suffix (as in the Noun of Species). Their singular is formed either (a) from a totally different root-base (e.g. /'ganam/ 'ewes': /šā/ 'ewe' (Fleisch 1961:302) or (b) from the same root, but using a different word-pattern (e.g. /rakb/ 'company of wayfarers': /rākib/ 'a (mounted) traveller'). They may refer to rational beings, in which case they are masculine or feminine, or to irrational beings (e.g. /'ib/ 'camels'), and then they are grammatically feminine (cf. Wright 1967, II:179-180).

2.1.3. Other Arabic collective types

Other less numerous nominal types which are sometimes considered as Collectives are:

(a) Nouns indicating a people or clan, from which the individual belonging to the group is identified by suffixing /-īy/.

e.g.	<i>Collective</i>		<i>Unit Noun</i>
	/'arab/	'the Arabs'	/'arabī/
	/tul yān/	'the Italians'	/tul yānī/
	/'inki'līz/	'the English'	/'inki'līzī/

(b) Nouns formed by the plural suffix /-a/ on Nouns of Profession having pattern *lʊ2'2ā3* and which indicate groups of people with the same profession.

e.g. *Singular* /qaw wās/ 'archer' : *Plural (Collective)* /qaw wāsa/ 'archers'

2.2. *The modern dialects of Arabic*

The modern vernaculars of Arabic have generally retained the basic morphological features of the Collective. The changes which have occurred, such as shifts from the Collective to the Plural, usually involve single lexemes. The Noun of Species, however, has generally lost its ambivalent gender and synchronically is considered grammatically masculine.

The comparison between the morpho-semantic features of the Collective in the Arabic dialects and in Maltese would doubtlessly be an interesting subject of research. Such an exercise, however, lies outside the descriptive scope of the present paper.

3. *The Maltese collective category*

As already observed, the Collective category has not been given its due importance in most descriptions of Maltese, even of a comparative nature (cf. e.g. Aquilina 1979:17-18). In others (e.g. Sutcliffe 1936:29-31, 36-37) it receives more attention, but diachronic changes as well as accretions from non-Semitic sources are ignored completely. A fuller treatment is found in Aquilina (1965:71-73) and in Borg (1979:188-202) and Borg (1988:100-113), where the grammarian makes a syntactic-semantic analysis of the Collective and its morphological derivatives.

3.1. *The Type Noun*

A close look at the class of Maltese Collectives will show that rather than with a category of number we are here concerned with a category of *quality*. In this sense the term 'Collective' is hardly applicable, and the Arabic terminology /ism al-ğins/ 'noun of genus or species' seems to be more exact. This is the name given to the genus, species, 'quality of being' of the object observed and so it cannot be quantified (uncountable). In Albert Borg's terminology (e.g. Borg 1988:109), it is an "imperfect" noun. It contrasts /ħa did/ 'iron' (as a *type* of material) to /in yām/ 'wood', /ħgiġ/ 'glass', etc. (and as such is equivalent to Otto Jespersen's *mass-word*), but it similarly contrasts "Collectives" like /nemel/ 'ant(s)' (as a *type* of creature) to /naħal/ 'bee(s)', /ħût/ 'fish', etc. For this reason I shall use the term *Type Noun* which transcends the difference between *mass-word* and *Collective* and can be used to describe both with respect to their

quality. It will also prove useful later on in our comparative comments on Verbal Nouns. Thus:

/silġ/	'snow'	is perceived as a type of material,
/ħobz/	'bread'	as a type of material, spec. food-stuff,
/nemel/	'ants'	as a type of animal,
/ħût/	'fish'	as a type of animal,
/tonn/	'tunny'	as a type of animal, spec. fish,
/°eneb/	'grapes'	as a type of fruit, etc.

The "qualitative" nature of the Type Noun is also illustrated and supported by the following two usages:

(a) In *partitive* expressions, where it regularly follows a noun indicating a definite quantity, a receptacle, etc. (e.g. /ki'lo fül/ 'a kilo of beans'; /ferħ naħal/ 'a swarm of bees'; /fliš kün zeyt/ 'a bottle of oil'; /kobbha ħayt/ 'a ball of thread'). In such expressions, the second noun is clearly indicating the *type* (of material, substance, genus, etc.) and the first noun defines the *quantity*.

(b) In *generic* expressions, in which reference is made to a type (of material, etc.) without necessarily involving number or quantity. Observe the following sentences:

- (1) *Question:* /rayt dub'bin?/ you-saw flies (Coll.)
'Did you see any flies?'
- (2) *Answer A:* /le, ma raytš dub'bin/ no I-saw-not flies
'No, I didn't see any flies.'
- (3) *Answer B:* /rayt dub'bin, rayt 'wahda/ I-saw flies, I-saw one
'Yes, I saw one fly.'

In (1) the Type Noun /dub'bin/ is used without referring to any number; in fact a negative answer like (2) is possible. In (3), on the other hand, the Type Noun is used with reference to just one member of the group; which means that it cannot be considered as a "Collective", which would logically involve a group. In all three sentences, in fact, /dub'bin/ is used in an abstract "qualitative" sense, indicating the type or nature of the creature, irrespective of the number of partakers of this nature.

The Type Noun is generally masculine (ending with a consonant) and, as the name of a type, it is invariably treated as singular. It is logically connected primarily with certain semantic categories of which the most important are represented in Table 1:

Table 1 Semantic Categories of Maltese Type Nouns (with illustrative examples)

GENUS:	
(a) Fauna	SM /hūt/ 'fish'; /tayr/ 'fowls'; /dub'bin/ 'flies'; /nemel/ 'ants'; /naħal/ 'bees' RM /sar'dm/ 'sardines'; /tonn/ 'tunny-fish'; /al'wett/ 'larks'; /bram/ 'medusa'
(b) Flora	SM /'amħ/ 'corn'; /'basal/ 'onions'; /'eneb/ 'grapes'; /'tewm/ 'garlic'; /'tīm/ 'figs'; /'amħir rīm/ 'maize' RM /frott/ 'fruit'; /'lūmi/ 'lemon'; /'čip'ress/ 'cypress'; /'palm/ 'palm'; /'astan/ 'chestnuts'
MATERIAL:	SM /ħa'did/ 'iron'; /'ramel/ 'sand'; /ħgġ/ 'glass'; /träb/ 'dust'; /'°adam/ 'bones' RM /'čomb/ 'lead'; /in yām/ 'wood'; /'lastiku/ 'rubber'; /firdi'ferru/ 'wire'; /'späġ/ 'string' EM /'siment/ 'cement'; /briks/ 'brick'
(Foodstuffs)	SM /ħobz/ 'bread'; /'ġobon/ 'cheese' RM /'cokkor/ 'sugar'; /'cal'cett/ 'sausages' EM /'tofi/ 'toffee'; /'okxow/ 'OXO (trade-name)'
SET:	SM /zar'bùn/ '(pair of) shoes'; /kar'kūr/ 'slippers'; /'taragħ/ 'stairs'; /ħibb/ 'door' RM /'pa počč/ 'slippers'; /'sandli/ 'sandals' EM /büc/ 'boots'; /'flipflop/ or /'flip'flop/ 'flipflops'; /šörc/ '(pair of) shorts'; /'skeyc/ 'skates'

3.2. The Unit Noun

By the addition of suffix /-a/ (or its allomorphs /-ya/ after vowel /i/, /-wa/ after /o/ or /u/) to the Type Noun, we move into the sphere of countable nouns. The individuality of the unit here emerges from the 'qualitative' background in which it has been so far merged with other units of the same nature.

With reference to the semantic categories of the Type Noun described above, the Unit Noun may express:

- (a) an individual/exemplar having the natural *genus*, or
 - (b) an object made of the *material*, or
 - (c) one item of a *set* indicated by the Type Noun.
- Borg Albert (1988:109) uses the term "perfect" noun to bring out the countable nature of the Unit Noun and contrasts it with the "imperfect" (i.e. Type) noun.

The Unit Noun is grammatically feminine and singular, but the term *Unit Noun* is here preferred to *singular* since it brings out better the morphosyntactic relation *Type: Unit*, setting it apart from the *Singular: Plural* relation of normal countable nouns like /ktib/ 'book': pl. /koba/, /skōla/ 'school': pl. /skeyyel/.

The Unit Noun may eventually receive a diminutive form.

e.g. *Type Noun* : *Unit Noun* : *Dimin. Unit Noun*
 /ħobz/ 'bread' : /'ħobza/ 'a loaf' : /'ħbeyza/ 'a small loaf'
 /'ġobon/ 'cheese' : /'ġobna/ 'a cheese' : /'ġbeyna/ 'a cheeselet'

3.3. The determinate plural and the collective

Like any countable noun, the Unit Noun can be quantified; but its quantification follows a different pattern. Normal countable nouns have one plural form (e.g. /skōla/ 'school', pl. /skeyyel/) which is used both after numbers and for undefined quantities (like /fitt/ 'a few', /ħafna/ 'many'). Unit Nouns make use of two different plural forms: (a) one form with suffix /-it/ is used after numbers 2-10,⁵ henceforth termed *Determinate Plural* (e.g. /hūt/ 'fish': /'hūta/ 'a fish': /'ħames hūt/ 'five fishes'), and (b) the form of the *Type Noun* is used for undefined quantities, this time however to indicate a *countable* (though *undefined*) quantity of units even though used in the singular (e.g. /ħafna hūt/ 'many fishes') – hence the term *Collective* seems suitable and will be used here.

Table 2.

<i>Type Noun</i> /hūt/ 'fish' /nemel/ 'ants'	<i>Unit Noun</i> /hūta/ '(one) fish' /nemla/ '(one) ant'	<i>From 2-10</i>	<i>Undefined quantities</i>
		<i>Plural</i> /erba° skeyyel/ 'four schools' /ħamest ir'ġil/ 'five men'	<i>Plural</i> /ħafna skeyyel/ 'many schools' /fitt ir'ġil/ 'few men'
		<i>From 2-10</i>	<i>Undefined quantities</i>
		<i>Determinate Plural</i> /seba° hūt/ 'seven fishes' /zewġ nem'lit/ 'two ants'	<i>Collective Noun</i> /ħafna hūt/ 'many fishes' /fitt nemel/ 'few ants'

3.4. The Type Noun and the collective

From what has been said above, it follows that one morphological form which we have so far identified as the *Type Noun* is actually performing two separate syntactic and semantic functions: (a) as a *Type Noun* identifying the 'type' or 'genus' (therefore, a *qualitative* function), and (b) as the *Collective* of the *Unit Noun* (and therefore, a *quantitative* function). Although this distinction has never received due attention, it has been noted intuitively by the Maltese grammarian Cremona (1938 II:112), who distinguished clearly between the two functions of /'gebel/ 'stone/stones', using the following examples:

- (1) Id-djar ta' Malta huma tal-gebel
the-houses of Malta they-are of-the-stone
'The houses of Malta are made of stone (Type Noun)'
- (2) Il-gebel ingarr fuq karettun
the-stone(s) it-was-carried on cart
'The stone-slabs (Collective) were carried on a cart'.

Albert Borg, presumably independently, comes practically to the same conclusion when he holds that "the syntactic distribution of a noun like *rgiel* is equivalent to the distribution of a noun like *nemel* (i.e. our *Collective*) together with the distribution of a noun like *nemliet* (i.e. our *Determinate Plural*)" (Borg 1988:111) (N.B. The translation and bracketed insertions are mine).

With *Type Nouns* indicating sets, the number of units indicated by the *Collective* is often, though not necessarily, evident (i.e. logically definable).

- Type Noun : /zar'bùn/ 'shoes (as a type of wear)'
- Collective : /zar'bùn/ '(a pair [= logically defined number] of shoes)'
- Type Noun : /'tarag/ 'stairs (as a type of construction)'
- Collective : /'tarag/ '(a flight [= undefined number] of) stairs'

In the first type of set, the *Collective* (/zar'bùn/) is equivalent to the complete set, while the *Determinate Plural* (/zarbu'nit/) indicates a number (2-10) of loose shoes, i.e. not necessarily belonging in pairs (hence, /tlit zarbu'nit/ 'three (odd) shoes').

It is interesting to note that several *Type/Collective Nouns* have a plural (here called *Type/Collective Plural*) which, as would be logically expected, may indicate:

- (a) '(different) types of ...' (as plural of the *Type Noun*), or
- (b) '(large) quantities of ...' (as plural of the *Collective*), or
- (c) both (a) and (b).

E.g.

- (a) Type Noun /°a'gin/ 'pasta' > pl. /°a'ggyen/ '(different) types of pasta'
- (b) Type/Coll.Noun /dúd/ 'worm(s)' > pl. /dwid/ '(large) quantities of worms'

In the case of sets, the plural of the *Collective* (/zrabén/) indicates an indeterminate number of sets, i.e. 'pairs of shoes', possibly different. Going back to where we started, i.e. the *Type Noun* which both semantically and morphologically is the point of departure for derivation, we can have a look at Table 3 in which the morphological, syntactic and semantic features of this category are set together.

Table 3. Classification of Type Nouns and their Derivatives

	Uncountable			Countable		
	Type Noun	Collective Noun	Unit Noun	Determinate Plural	Plural of Type Noun	
Marker	Ø	Ø	-a	-it	(internal pl.)	
Gram. number	sg.	sg.	sg.	pl.	pl.	
Numerical value	1	unspecified	1	2-10	unspecified	
Gender	masculine	unspecified	feminine	common	common	
Sex	unspec.	unspec.	unspec.	unspec.	unspec.	
Examples						
<i>Fauna</i>						
'fly'	dub'bin	dub'bin	dub'bina	dubbi'nit	'dbiben	
'lark'	al'wett	al'wett	al'wetta	alwet'tit	—	
<i>Flora</i>						
'corn'	'amh	'amh	'amha	'am'hit	'mùh	
'orange'	la ringg	la ringg	la ringa	larin'gít	—	
<i>Material</i>						
'skin'	gild	gild	'gilda	gìl'dit	glùd	
'soap/soap-bar'	sa pùn	sa pùn	sa pùna	sapu'nit	'späpen	
'wax/candle'	'šema°	'šema°	'šema°	še'm°at	—	
<i>Set</i>						
'shoes'	zar'bùn	zar'bùn	zar'bùna	zarbu'nit	'zrabén	
'door'	bib	bib	'biba	bi'bit	bi'bin	
'stairs'	'tarag	'tarag	'tarğa	tar'gít	tur'gin	

Note that in the case of many fruit-trees, the Type Noun and the Collective convey the concepts both of the tree and of its fruit.

e.g.	Type Noun	Collective	Unit Noun
	/lewz/	/lewz/	/lewza/
(a)	almond (tree)	: almond trees	: an almond tree
(b)	almond (fruit)	: almond fruits	: an almond (fruit)

Other examples are: /la'riŋ/ 'oranges' ~ 'orange trees'; /tuffih/ 'apples' ~ 'apple trees'; /lan'gäs/ 'pears' ~ 'pear-trees'.

3.5. Other collective types

Besides the type of Collective nouns discussed so far for Maltese, there are other less numerous groups which may somehow qualify as Collectives or at least have been so considered in the past. I shall list them briefly for the sake of completeness. The first two have already been mentioned in § 2.1.3 with reference to Arabic, though they are not normally considered as Collectives in Maltese grammars.

- (a) Collective + Ø : Unit Noun + /-i/ m., /iya/ f., /im/ pl.
e.g. Coll. /^oarab/ 'Arabs': Unit-n. /^oarbi/ 'an Arab' m.

This type of formation is very rare in Maltese.

- (b) Noun of Profession 1v22ä3 / 1v22i3 or 1v22vY:
Coll. Plur. + /-a/.

- e.g. N.Prof. /had'dim/ 'worker' : Coll.Pl. /had'dima/;
/bah'här/ 'sailor' : /bah'hära/.

This is a very common SM plural for nouns of profession, indicating members of the same professional group or guild. In Maltese it has incidentally found an important *appui* in a similar S.Italian plural morpheme (cf. Mifsud 1995:73-74).

- (c) Collective Nouns whose Unit Nouns are formed from the same root-base but on a different morphological pattern.

e.g.	Type Noun	Collective	Unit Noun	Determ. Pl.
	/klim/	/klim/	/kelma/	/kel'mit/
	'speech'	'words'	'a word'	'(2-10) words'
	/lbi/	/lbi/	/libsa/	—
	'dress, apparel'	'dresses'	'a dress'	

It is probable that in these word-groups developed from the same root-base the relation *Collective Noun* : *Unit Noun* is only incidental and results from the semantic link between the different forms.

- (d) Cremona (1988, II:131) treats one of the semantic subdivisions of the "mimata" (i.e. m-released) noun as a Collective. The form is *mu12v3* with its fem. variants *mu123a* or *mv123a*:

e.g.	/ma'bar/ 'cemetery'	(cf. / ^o abar/ 'tomb');
	/ma'sab/ 'cane-brake'	(cf. / ^o asab/ 'canes');
	/masgar/ 'forest, grove'	(cf. / ^o sigar/ 'trees');
	/miġfna/ 'fleet'	(cf. / ^o gifen/ 'galleon');
	/mißtla/ 'nursery-bed'	(cf. / ^o site/ 'plants').

In my opinion, it is not exact to consider these nouns as Collectives since they belong to a nominal pattern, traditionally known in Arabic grammar as /^oas'mā' al-'akra/ 'nouns of abundance', designating the *place* where an object is found in large quantities and not the quantities themselves.

- (e) Other Collectives indicating groups of individuals with similar characteristics do not share the same morphological mechanism, and their corresponding individuating noun is lexically unrelated to them. In this sense they may be compared to the Collectives of English or Italian (e.g. *E a herd of cattle*). A long list of such "idiomatic" Collectives is found in Borg P. 1945.

e.g.	/e'zerçtu (sul'däti)/	'an army (of soldiers);'
	/flotta (va'pürri)/	'a fleet (of ships);'
	/folla (nis)/	'a crowd (of people);'
	/merħla (n ^o äg)/	'a flock (of sheep);'
	/at'a (tayr)/	'a flight (of birds).'

4. Diachronic changes and developments

While the general scheme presented so far holds good for most Maltese Type Nouns, there are several subclasses which do not fit perfectly into its morphological or syntactic patterns. The discrepancies are generally the result either of diachronic changes affecting these subclasses in Semitic Maltese or of new non-Semitic material which has conformed to the Semitic pattern but not completely and which still betrays some incongruity. These discrepancies are discussed below under different headings.

4.1. Discrepancies in gender

4.1.1. Semitic Maltese pseudo-feminine Collectives

In Semitic Maltese the Arabic phoneme /ʕ/ (represented by /^o/ for Maltese) as well as /y/ are normally not pronounced in final position. Thus, in cases when the Type Noun pattern /*v2v3* (e.g. /gebel/ 'stone/s'), morphologically masculine, has a final /^o/ or /y/, it is rendered phonetically as [-a] (e.g. /^oana(y)/ ['āna] 'songs'; /ħara(y)/ [ħara] 'excrement'; /šema(°)/ [šema] 'wax'; /wisa(°)/ [wisa] 'space'). For this reason, such Type Nouns in Maltese tend to be interpreted and treated as feminine, since /-a/ is the basic marker of the feminine for nouns and adjectives.

e.g. /l-^oana(y) mal'tiya/ 'Maltese (f.) songs'
 alongside /l-^oana(y) māl'ti/ 'Maltese (m.) songs'
 /iš-šema(°) tħammeg l-i'deyn/ 'wax soils (f.) the hands'.

This tendency has been noted also by Fenech 1978:46 in newspaper language (e.g. /^oata ġdida/ 'a new (f.) cover') and he traces it back to the colloquial register as opposed to the literary tradition.

In the Unit Noun derived from such Collectives, the silent consonant reappears phonetically in the case of /y/ (e.g. /^oanya, ħarya/) but not in the case of /^o/ (e.g. /šema, wis^oa/).

4.1.2. Romance Maltese feminine collectives

Several Romance loan words ending in /-a/ have been integrated as Type Nouns and have yielded the relative derivatives. Some loans have developed a backformed collective by dropping the final vowel to conform to the traditional pattern with final consonant, e.g. /sar'din/ 'sardines', /palm/ 'palms', /gawwi/ 'swallows' (< SM /ar^oa/ 'pumpkin' + Sic *boccia* 'marble, the hybrid/ arabočč/ millet' (< SM /ar^oa/ 'pumpkin' + Sic *boccia* 'marble, sphere'). Others tend to keep their final vowel /-a/ and are considered feminine, and the same form is used for the Type/Collective Noun and the Unit Noun (e.g. /pa tāta/ 1. (Type/Coll.) 'potatoes', 2. (Unit Noun) 'a potato', /pata 'it/ (Determinate Pl.); other examples: /ba nāna, čī rāsa, čikku lāta, fa zōla/ 'banana(s), cherry/ies, chocolate (bars), bean/s'). However, even in such cases, I have personally heard children extemporizing standardized forms and referring to the genus as /ba nān, pa tāt/, etc. (e.g. /ma nħob būs il-ba nān/ 'I don't like bananas').

4.1.3. Unit noun suffix /-u/

The gender of the Unit Noun (ending in /-a/) is normally feminine, but for a small group of Type Nouns Maltese has developed what seems to be a totally innovative kind of Unit Noun with suffix /-u/ and of

masculine gender. In view of the fact that the ending /-u/ in mixed Maltese is usually associated with the Romance element where it normally occurs as a marker of the masculine singular (cf. /nānu/ 'male dwarf' as opposed to /nāna/ 'female dwarf' and /nāni/ 'dwarfs'; similarly: /vāvu, -a, -i/ 'baby', /tīmidu, -a, -i/ 'timid'), it is interesting to note that in this case it occurs only with a small number of nouns of Arabic origin which have another Unit Noun with /-a/, normally with a different meaning.

I have never come across any similar suffix in dialectal Arabic.

Table 4.

Collective	Unit Noun
/fūl/	/fūla/ 'a bean' 'a bean-pod'
/bzār/	/bzāra/ 'a pepper-corn' 'a pepper pod'
/dūd/	/dūda/ 'a louse, bug; a tapeworm' 'a caterpillar, a worm'
/beb būs/	/beb būsā/ 'shell of a snail' 'a snail'
/ħar rūb/	/ħar rūba/ 'a carob tree' 'a carob-pod'
/nemel/	/nemla/ 'an ant' (same meaning)

In such cases, the wide semantic scope of the Type Noun is divided between the two Unit Nouns which now convey more specialized meanings.

In a couple of other cases (namely /ħa mim/ 'pigeons' and /wizz/ 'geese'), the opposition /-u/ : /-a/ helps to bring out the sex-distinction. These cases are quite unique, considering that in the Collective category the sex of the individual, if at all necessary, is usually brought out by the words /rāgel/ or /mara/ ('male' and 'female', *lit.* 'man' and 'woman') placed after the Unit Noun.

e.g. /naħal/ 'bees' > /naħla/ 'a bee (sex unspecified)',
 /naħla rāgel/ 'a male bee',⁶ /naħla mara/ 'a female bee'

but:

/ħa 'mim/ 'pigeons'	>	/ħa 'mima/ 'a female pigeon'
/wizz/ 'geese'	>	/ħa 'mimu/ 'a male pigeon'
		/wizza/ 'a goose'
		/wizzu/ 'a gander'

In these two cases, sex is specified on the Unit Noun.

4.2. Discrepancies in number

4.2.1. From Type Noun to plural

While, as has already been observed, many non-Semitic nouns have joined the Type/Collective category, a number of Arabic Collective (and therefore grammatically singular) nouns have given up their "uncountable" status and synchronically feature as countables in Maltese, where they are actually used as plurals. These are:

M	/ba'ar/ 'cows' (pl.)	<	Ar	/baqar/ 'cattle' (Type/Coll.)
	/ti ġiġ/ 'hens'			/da ġaġ/ 'fowl/s'
	/mo'oz/ 'goats'			/ma'az/ 'goat/s'
	/siġar/ 'trees'			/šaġar/ 'trees'

While this tendency may seem strange when we consider the general vitality and productivity of the Arabic Collective category in Maltese, the following three points seem to me worthy of note since they may well account for these changes:

(a) In the first three cases, which involve animals, both the Collective and the Unit Noun indicate the female of the species, while the male is identified by a different lexeme with a different plural (M./barri/ 'bull': pl. /bar'rîn/: /ser'dù/ 'cock': pl. /srida/; /bodbod/ 'billy-goat': pl. /bdābad/). This fact confirms their unique status and puts them at variance with the other Unit Nouns, in which sex is unspecified.

(b) In all the above cases, the Collective was made up of individuals which are easily identifiable as distinct since they are creatures of considerable size, compared e.g. to insects like /ne mûs/ 'mosquitoes', /naħal/ 'bees', /nemel/ 'ants' etc., which have not left the Collective category.

(c) This development seems to point out to a process of standardization of more extensive proportions based on the criterion of size, which seems to be confirmed by a couple of shifts in the opposite

direction. In fact, a couple of names of insects (therefore, small animals) which belonged to the singular/plural category of Arabic have become proper Collectives in Maltese:

Ar /ġu'bāb/ 'fly', pl. /ġub'bān/ > M Type/Coll. /dub'bin/ 'flies', /-a/, /-it/, /dbiben/ (also in N.African Ar. dialects, cf. e.g. Stumme 1896:§§ 65, 107)
Ar /ʃu'āba/ 'nit' pl. /ʃi'bān/ > M Type/Coll. /su'bin/ 'nits', /-a/, /-it/

It should be noted that nouns which have shifted from one morphological structure to another still preserve a part of their former morphology, since they have a Determinate Plural (e.g. /ba'rit/ 'cows', etc.) for numbers 2-10 and an Indeterminate Plural (better not termed Collective, since it is not grammatically singular any more).

Thus, sg. /ba'ra/: Determ. pl. (2-10) /ba'rit/, Indeterm. pl. /ba'ar/

e.g. /ba'ra 'waħda/ 'one cow'
/ħames ba'rit/ 'five cows'
/ħafna 'ba'ar/ 'many cows'
/il-'ba'ar 'ħaġġu/ 'the cows went out' (pl. verb)

4.2.2. Type nouns treated as plurals

In modern Maltese, especially but not exclusively in the colloquial language, Type/Coll. nouns often tend to be treated as plurals.

e.g. /klīm ħfif/ 'easy (pl.adj.) words' for /klīm ħa'ħfif/;
/il-'wera 'ya'°u/ 'the leaves fall (pl.vb.)' for /il-'wera 'ya'a'°/;
/id-dub'bin ('°ūma) 'fitti/ 'flies are mischievous (pl. pron./adj.)'
for /id-dub'bin ('°ūwa) fitt/

Two possible reasons for this tendency are:

- (a) the ambiguous status of the Collective use of the Type noun (grammatically singular, notionally plural);
- (b) the influence of the morphology of Italo-Romance and English, where the equivalents for most of these Collectives are simple plurals.

e.g. M	/iz-zar'būn sa'biħ/	M	/il-'wera 'aħdar/
	the-shoes nice (sg. m.)		the-leaves green (sg. m.)
E	The shoes are nice	E	The leaves are green
It	Le scarpe sono belle	It	Le foglie sono verdi

Fenech (1978:47) notes the same trend to treat Collective nouns as plurals in the journalistic language in contrast to what happens in the literary language.

Alexander Borg (1978:289) notes that some Collectives "tend to display singular number in adjectival concord but plural number in verbal concord".

- e.g. /il-bayd ir'his il'lùm/ 'Eggs are cheap (sg.adj.) today.'
/kemm "ämu l-bayd/ 'How much did the eggs cost?' (pl.vb.)

He further notes that Collectives "denoting countables... are almost indistinguishable from plurals" – a statement which definitely needs to be qualified further.

4.2.3. From plural to type noun

Very intriguing from the point of view of language contact are the cases in which non-Semitic loan words have been borrowed in their plural form which has served as the base-form for their integration into the Maltese Collective category. As observed above for Romance words ending in /-a/, also here the pl. suffix /-i/ has sometimes been dropped to bring the form in line with the native Type Nouns which regularly end with a consonant.

- e.g. RM Type Noun Unit Noun
/rav'yùl/ (cf. It *ravioli*) /rav'yùla/
/cal'cett/ (cf. It *salsicce*) /cal'cetta/
/m'ar'rùn/ (cf. It *maccheroni*) /m'ar'rùna/

In other cases, however, the ending is retained and the complete plural form is transferred to the Semitic Maltese morphology where it is treated as a (singular) Type Noun and receives the derivational suffixes. This happens more easily with loan words from English, where the plural suffix itself is a consonant and as such more easily considered as part of the stem. This phenomenon occurs also with some loan words in English, such as *spaghetti* which is used in the singular (e.g. *Spaghetti is good for you.*); the use of words like *criteria* and *media* as singulars is quite common though considered unacceptable in careful writing or speech.

- e.g. It sg. *sandalo* 'a sandal', pl. *sandali* 'sandals' >
M Type/Coll.(sg.) /sandli/ '(a pair of) sandals',
Unit Noun /sandla, san'dliya/ 'one sandal',
Determin.pl. /san'dlitt/ 'sandals (loose)',
Type/Coll.pl. /sandli'yit/ 'pairs of sandals'.
E sg. *boot*, pl. *boots* >
M Type/Coll.(sg.) /bùc/ '(a pair of) boots',
Unit Noun /bùca/ 'one boot',

- Determ.pl. /bu'cìt/ 'boots (loose)'
Type/Coll.pl. /buc'iyit/ or /bwic/ 'pairs of boots'.
E sg. *brick*, pl. *bricks* >
M Type/Coll.(sg.) /briks/ 'brick/s',
Unit Noun /brikksa/ 'one brick',
Determin.pl. /brik'sit/ '(2-10) bricks'.

In a few such cases, the Type/Coll. noun is feminine in Maltese, often for no apparent reason.

- e.g. M /'çawsi/ 'mulberry' (cf. Sic. pl. *ceusti*);
/çìcìri/ 'green or chick-peas' (cf. Sic. *ciciri*);
/çìps/ 'potato-chips, French fries' (< E *chips*; here the fem. word /pa'tàta/ 'potato/es' is probably understood)

It is worth noting that children who speak Maltese at home seem to acquire the concept of the Collective noun very early. I have personally heard children⁷ coin Unit Nouns on Maltese plural forms or mass nouns which they treat as Collectives.

- e.g. /'hweyyeg/ 'clothes, wear' (pl. of /'hàga/ 'a thing') > /'hweyga/ 'one item of clothing';
/flùs/ 'money' (pl. of obsolete /fils/ 'coin') > /'flùsa/ 'one coin';
/keyk/ 'cake' > /'keyka/ 'a piece of cake'

Other loan words indicating types have often joined the Collective category without being completely involved in its derivational mechanism. Such loan words (which are predominantly feminine) are regularly used also in the sense of Unit Nouns, but their pluralization usually follows the normal singular/plural scheme, e.g.

- | | Type Noun | Unit Noun | Plural |
|---------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| /çar'rùta/ | 'cloth' | 'a tatter' | /'çràret/ |
| /esper'yenca/ | 'experience' | 'an experience' | /esper'yenci/ |
| /'karta/ | 'paper' | 'a sheet of paper' | /'kartil/ |
| /'landa/ | 'tin (metal)' | 'a tin' | /'landi/ |
| /'poe'ziya/ | 'poetry' | 'a poem' | /'poe'ziyi/ |
| /'puli'ciya/ | 'police' | 'a policeman' | /'puli'ciya/ |
| /tē/ | 'tea' | 'a cup of tea' | /te'yit/ |

An interesting example in which no less than three different modes of integration are displayed with the same loan word is:

- RM Type/Coll.(sg.) /ka'fē/ 'coffee (genus)',

	Unit Noun	/ka fēna/ 'a coffee bean',
	Determ.pl.	/kafe nīt/ '(2-10) coffee beans',
	Type/Coll.pl.	/kafe yīt/ 'types or brands of coffee'.
RM	Type/Coll.(sg.)	/ka fe/ 'coffee (drink)',
	Unit Noun	/ka fe/ 'a cup of coffee',
	Plural	/kafe yīt/ 'cups of coffee'.
RM	Singular	/ka fe/ 'a café, coffee-house',
	Plural	/kafe yīt/ 'cafés, coffee-houses'.

5. The collective and the verbal noun

One can hardly discuss the Maltese Collective category without being involved in a comparison between its derivational mechanism and that of the Verbal Noun, which runs parallel to it both in morphology and in its syntactic-semantic implications. Strangely enough, though, only few works on Maltese have pointed out this parallelism. It was noted by our pioneer grammarian M.A. Vassalli as far back as 1791 (p. 130), but had to wait almost two centuries to receive the due attention in Borg Albert (1988:101-3, 113).

The system of categorisation of both nouns is practically the same. Just as the genus or nature of an object is identified by the Type Noun (indicating its "type of being"), so the nature of an act is identified by the Verbal Noun (indicating the "type of doing") contrasting the basic verbal lexeme to other verbal lexemes (e.g. /gbîr/ 'collecting' is a "type of doing, i.e. of action" different from /misi/ 'walking', /^oawm/ 'swimming', etc.). Just like the Type Noun, the Verbal Noun can function as a countable noun (a *Verbal Collective*) indicating an undefined number of single actions of that type (e.g. /il-gbîr 'kollu fil-'ud dis tal-'lûm/ 'all the collections, i.e. single acts of collecting, in today's masses'). As with the Collective, a *Unit Verbal Noun* is derived from the Verbal Noun by the addition of suffix /-a/, which may be pluralized in two ways: by the Determinate Plural (ending in /t/) from 2 to 10, and by the Verbal Collective Noun (which is grammatically singular) in all the remaining cases. The following examples illustrate these parallel forms and their syntactic-semantic correspondence:

'BEING':		
Type N.	/il-gebel 'ibes/ 'stone is hard';	
Coll.N.	/il-gebel in 'garr fû' karet'tûn/ 'the stone-slabs were carried (sing. vb.) on a cart'	
Unit N.	/din il-gebla t'fla/ 'this slab of stone is heavy'	
Det.Pl.	/'wa ^o u 'hames geb lit/ 'five stone-slabs fell down'	

'DOING':

Verb.(Type) N.	/il-bini y'jhu z-zmîm/ 'building takes time';
Verb.(Coll.) N.	/il-bini kollu tal-'belt/ 'all the buildings in the city';
Unit Verb. N.	/din il-binja/ 'this structure (building)';
Determ. Pl.	/'erba ^o bin yit diffe renti/ 'four different structures'.
Verb.(Type) N.	/it-tib dîl 'yitlob sagri fiççu/ 'changing entails sacrifice';
Verb.(Coll.) N.	/it-tib dîl 'kollu tal-kostitut'cyōni/ 'all the changes in the Constitution';
Unit Verb. N.	/it-tib dîla li 'saret dan l-'aħħar/ 'the recent change';
Determ. Pl.	/'zewġ tibdi lit 'gōdda/ 'two fresh changes'.
Verb.(Type) N.	/il-gbîr šo'ol 'ibes/ 'collecting is a hard job';
Verb.(Coll.) N.	/il-gbîr kollu tal-'lûm/ 'all today's collections';
Unit Verb. N.	/il-gabra tal-'birah/ 'yesterday's collection';
Determ. Pl.	/'hames gab rit 'ohra/ 'five other collections'.

In modern Maltese, especially in the colloquial language and in journalistic, there seems to be a tendency to use the Verbal Noun in contexts where the Unit Verbal Noun would seem to be more appropriate. Thus, e.g. vn. /bini/ 'a building' (for vn.u. /binja/); vn. /fte'îm/ 'an agreement' (for u.vn. /fte'îma/). A recent news bulletin spoke of /zewġ fte'îm/ (in the sense of 'two agreements') which were signed between the local state and church authorities. This spurious use of /fte'îm/ probably represents the vain effort to pluralize the vn. /fte'îm/ which is being used in place of the u.vn. /fte'îma/. The Determinate Plural /fte'îmit/ would have been the grammatical solution for '(two) agreements' suggested by morphology.

While many Type/Coll. Nouns are pluralized, the plural of a Verbal Noun is quite rare and seems to occur either (a) to pluralize a vn. which is being used in place of a u.vn. as just described (e.g. vn. /^oe mîl/, used in the sense of 'one act, action' instead of u.vn. /^oamla/, takes the plural /^oe meyyel/ 'acts'), or (b) when the vn. has acquired a material meaning as it often tends to do (e.g. /^oa ġin/ meaning 'pasta', from the literal meaning 'kneading', takes the plural /^oa ġeyyen/ 'different types or large quantities of pasta').

A basic difference between the Collective and the Verbal Noun is that while the Collective has no definite morphological pattern, the Verbal Noun is set to a series of patterns according to the Semitic root-based morphology. This means that while any foreign noun can be immediately integrated as a Collective Noun, most foreign verbal stems (consisting of a continuous morpheme) are barred from joining the

traditional verbal noun patterns. Suffixes of Romance origin take over here to cover the whole gamma of necessary concepts. These suffixes are productive also with English stems, which obviously face the same difficulty in integrating, and even with a few stems of Semitic origin.

e.g. *Verbal Noun*: /-ār/, /-ac'cyōni/

RM	/spa'r-ār/	'shooting'
EM	/stensil'y-ār/	'stencilling'
SM	/sten'n-ār/	'waiting'
RM	/eduk-ac'cyōni/	'educating, education'

Unit Verbal Noun: /-a'tūra/, /-āta/

RM	/spar-a'tūra/	'a shot'
EM	/čekky-a'tūra/	'a check-up'
SM	/fa'°-a'tūra/	'a bang'
RM	/ša'l-āta/	'an outing'
EM	/čip s-āta/	'a meal of potato-chips'
SM	/gen n-āta/	'an act of folly, mad action'

Table 5 illustrates the parallelism between the morphology of the Collective Noun (as described in 3.4, Table 3) and that of the Verbal Noun with the aim of bringing out the common line of development underlying both systems.

Table 5. Comparison between the morphology of a Collective Noun and that of a Verbal Noun

	Countable				
	<i>Type Noun</i>	<i>Collective Noun</i>	<i>Unit Noun</i>	<i>Determinate Plural</i>	<i>Plural of Type Noun</i>
<i>Marker</i>	∅	∅	-a	-it	(internal pl.)
<i>Collective Noun</i>	/kar'tùn/ 'cardboard'	/kar'tùn/ 'pieces of cardboard'	/kar'tùna/ 'a piece of cardboard'	/kartu'nit/ '(2-10) pieces of cardboard'	/kräten/ 'types or quantities of cardboard'
<i>Verbal Noun</i>	/tib'díl/ 'changing'	/tib'díl/ 'changes'	/tib'díla/ 'a change'	/tibdi'lit/ '(2-10) changes'	-

6. Conclusions

The discussion in this paper may be summarised in the following general conclusions.

6.1. The terminology

In the case of Maltese, the term *Collective* is misleading because it suggests a *quantitative* category. The Maltese Collective is primarily an *uncountable, qualitative* category (hence the term *Type Noun* has been suggested), which however functions also as a *countable, indeterminate plural* (the *Collective* proper). These dynamics involve not only the sphere of objects (the *Type/Collective Noun*) but also that of actions (the *Verbal Noun*).

6.2. Productivity

The Maltese Collective, of Semitic origin, is an important morphological category lending itself to further morpho-semantic developments (the *Unit Noun*, the *Determinate Plural*, the *Plural of the Type/Collective Noun*). It is not only very active within the Semitic component of Maltese, but it has proved to be productive with numerous words of Sicilian, Italian or English origin which have been forged to its derivative morphology.

6.3. Opposing forces

As in other areas of morphology, in modern Maltese one can note two opposing forces which affect the Collective category: (a) a *centripetal force* which works towards the standardization and strengthening of the native system and through which several borrowed nouns which are semantically categorizable as *Type Nouns* join the morphology of the Semitic Maltese Collective and yield derivatives; (b) a *centrifugal force* which has a disruptive effect on the system and which is mainly the result of the influence of the English and Italian systems where this category is not morphologically marked as in Semitic Maltese. Its effect is evident in the way the Semitic Collective category often gives way to the morphologically simpler *singular/plural* system, as well as in the hesitation of native speakers of Maltese in assigning a singular or plural number to the referents of Collective Nouns.

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Notes

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1 Cf. Mifsud (1994).

2 Cf. Mifsud (1995).

3 Cf. e.g. Cremona (1973:27-28).

4 The reader is reminded that in Semitic languages, such as Arabic and Maltese, the morphology is based on a *root-base* made up of a sequence of 3 or 4 consonants (here indicated by numbers) which forms the skeleton of the word and conveys the basic meaning. Both derivation and inflexion operate through *patterns* made up of syllabic sequences in which vocalic and consonantal material is interdigitated into the root-base, and through which the basic meaning is further defined.

5 In Maltese, as in Arabic, nouns following any number bigger than 10 are put in the singular (e.g. /ħdaš-il dār/ 'eleven houses'; /elf dār/ 'a thousand houses').

6 Note how clearly the discrepancy between sex and gender categorization is brought out in such phrases as /naħla rāġel/ 'a male bee', where grammatically speaking a feminine noun (but indicating a male) is followed by, and agrees with a masculine noun used adjectivally.

7 The first two examples are from Stefan Debono of Birkirkara, 3 years of age in 1992; the last one from his sister Maria, 2 years 6 months in 1994.

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