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Football, Fascism and Fandom in Modern Italy

This paper will examine the relationship between Fascism and football in Italy from the regime's origins in the mid-1920s through to the present day and will seek to explain the far right's continued presence in the game. Contextualising Italian football's development within the nation's postwar history, it will argue that while the Fascist regime laid the foundations of the contemporary game, its influence was not profound enough to explain the far-right's existence in Italian stadiums since the 1980s. By situating the politicisation of Italian football within theories of post-Fascist memory and via the examination of specific incidents of pro-regime and anti-Semitic activity within the stadiums, this paper will argue that the failure to combat the far-right's presence has been a direct consequence of the weakness/absence of the Italian state.

Keywords: football; Italy; memory; neo-fascism; supporters.

Remember those mobile phone advertisements where they asked people who they most would like to have a one-to-one with? Ian Wright picked Dr Martin Luther King, my choice would have been Mussolini.

Di Canio (2001: 310)

This paper will examine the relationship between Fascism and football (*calcio*) in Italy, from the mid-1920s and the rise of Italy's Fascist regime up to the present day, focusing on how the stadium has become a key venue for both reviving the memory of the regime and Mussolini and for expressing and propagating extremist ideology. Its objective is to establish how the far right's contemporary association with the game has developed and the extent to which it can be traced back to Italian Fascism of the 1930s. The chronology of this analysis will establish the fundamentals of Fascism's takeover of the game before contextualising its development in post-Fascist Italian history. Drawing upon existing knowledge regarding Fascist memory, it will make an original contribution to the understanding of football and politics in Italy by contextualising the game's enduring connection with the far right within the framework of contemporary Italian history. While there has been a growing interest in the

politicisation of Italian football and its fan groups, there has been no academic consideration of the long-term connection between Italian Fascism and football, as if the strong link between the two had been broken by the political rupture occurring in 1945. Following the collapse of Fascism in 1943 and the Nazi-Fascist puppet-state the Italian Social Republic¹ in 1945, the reconstitution of the Fascist party was made illegal by the 1947 Italian Constitution, and the apology of Fascism banned by the 1952 Scelba Law.² Extreme right-wing ideologies nonetheless persisted in postwar Republican Italy, and football has since provided a visible outlet for the expression of their beliefs. Not simply a sporting/political issue, however, this is indicative of a number of unresolved problems within the postwar state that have permitted the far right to maintain its presence and visibility. Through analysis of the secondary literature regarding Fascist memory and contemporary news reports that have highlighted the far right's exploitation of stadiums as highly visible political venues, this paper will offer an explanation as to why the relationship between football and Fascism in Italy has been so enduring. Beginning with the 2017 case of stickers at the Stadio Olimpico (Rome) that portrayed Anne Frank wearing an AS Roma shirt, the article will establish Fascism's roots in the game and how its memory and continuing popularity have been created and explained. Italy's failure to definitively break with Fascism and even begin to come to terms with its past will be seen to have contributed to the extreme politicisation of Italian society in the 1970s, which was transferred into the stadiums and their fan groups. One of the groups most associated with neo-Fascism is SS Lazio's 'Irriducibili' *ultras*, who have established a close relationship with former players Paolo Di Canio and Sinisha Mihajlović. Their political identities will be examined before finally addressing the recent establishment of interdependencies between the football clubs, television, business interests and politics that have shaped the game's production and consumption and have turned it into a 'Wild West' of entertainment where almost anything is permitted with little or no sanction, including the unfettered propagation of Fascist ideology.

Anne Frank

In October 2017, some SS Lazio fans attended the Serie A match against Cagliari from the unfamiliar *curva sud* of the Stadio Olimpico, the 'home'

¹ The Italian Social Republic (Republic of Salò) was the Nazi-Fascist puppet state formed in central-northern Italy following the public announcement of the Italian Armistice with the Allies on 8 September 1943 until the surrender of German troops in April 1945.

² See Legge 20 giugno 1952, no. 645, accessed on 04.12.2017, at http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1952-06-23&atto.codiceRedazionale=052U0645&elenco30giorni=false.

end for their archrivals of AS Roma. The identities of each club and their fan groups are distinctive and rooted in their origins, as Francesco Ricatti points out in his analysis of Roman football. Roma, which had adopted the symbol of the she-wolf and the colours of the city (dark red/yellow) developed a strong connection with the urban center and its working class whereas Lazio – the team’s name being the same as the province in which Rome is located – came to represent the surrounding region. While Roma fans took pleasure in derogatively referring to their Lazio rivals as *burini*, those who came in from the countryside to sell butter, Lazio supporters equally refer to Roma as a team of butchers and Jews, based upon their original core areas of support in Rome, which included the slaughterhouse and the ghetto (Ricatti, 2010: 222-223).

Banned from their own customary end (*curva nord*) of the Olimpico following racist chants the previous week, the Lazio club exploited a loophole to allow fans to attend the match by annulling their season tickets for one game and buying a ticket for the *curva sud*, at a token price of €1. This sleight of hand deliberately undermined the punishment imposed by Italy’s sporting justice system and brought the *Irriducibili ultras* into the ‘enemy territory’, where they conducted what the football federation (FIGC) President Carlo Tavecchio described as an “unspeakable act” (Pinci, 2017b: 51). A man not known for using politically correct speech,³ in 2014 when discussing the issue of foreign players in Serie A, Tavecchio referred to “‘Opti Poba’ who used to eat bananas before coming here and now he plays for Lazio”.⁴

Roma’s apparent Jewish links, combined with the ticketing scam, explains how and why some members of the *Irriducibili* (Immovables) *ultras* chose to leave stickers in the *curva sud* stating ‘romanista ebreo’ (the Roma fan is a Jew) plus another with the image of Anne Frank, one of the most well-known victims of the Holocaust, wearing a Roma shirt (Pinci, 2017a). The ‘logic’ – it is offensive to be called a Jew – is not exclusive to Lazio fans either; Roma supporters have also painted ‘Anne Frank supports Lazio’ on walls in the city (Pinci, 2017b; Merlo, 2017). As one Jewish woman stated: “Roma and Lazio ultras who are usually divided by the stupidity of football are, however, united in their use of blind anti-Semitism” (Merlo, 2017).

³ Associated Press, “Italian FA’s Carlo Tavecchio criticised over discriminatory remarks”, *The Guardian*, 1st of November 2015. Last accessed on 06.01.2018, at <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/nov/01/italian-football-association-carlo-tavecchio>.

⁴ “Figc, scivolone razzista di Tavecchio: ‘Mangiava banane ora gioca nella Lazio’”, *il Fatto Quotidiano*, 26 July 2014. Last accessed on 04.12.2017, at <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/07/26/figc-scivolone-razzista-di-tavecchio-mangiava-banane-ora-gioca-nella-lazio/290374/>.

SS Lazio President Claudio Lotito made an apparently penitent visit to the Rome Synagogue to lay a wreath in Lazio colours, for which he was criticised by Rome's Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni. His statement that "the Jewish community is not a washing machine" (Bisbiglia, 2017) appeared to be a direct reference to how Italy's far right sought to cleanse itself of its extremist and anti-Semitic past via openly apologetic gestures, a topic which this paper will return to. Lotito's visit had little effect. As passages from Anne Frank's diary were read aloud in Serie A stadiums prior to the next round of Serie A matches and players wore T-shirts opposing anti-Semitism, a small minority of Lazio fans sang the Fascist hymn 'Me ne frego' (Marrese, 2017).

Calcio's contemporary relationship with neo-Fascism was evidenced again within weeks, with Eugenio Maria Lupi's post-goal celebratory gesture for his Seconda Categoria⁵ team, Futa 65. Taking off his team jersey to reveal a T-shirt bearing the flag of the Italian Social Republic, the player also gave a straight-armed Roman salute. Officially part of the Fascist regime since 1925, this salute was adopted as a substitute for what was considered the bourgeois handshake in 1932. According to Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, it became "the *sine qua non* of the real Fascist, the element without which one could not be considered a Fascist" (Falasca-Zamponi, 2000: 113). Controversial enough as it stands, Lupi's gesture was even more scandalous given the team's opponents, Marzabotto. In 1944, the area surrounding this village south of Bologna, was witness to a mass murder of at least 770 citizens carried out by Nazi Waffen SS forces. The "reasons for the massacre have never been fully explained" but historians "now agree that the massacre was not a 'reprisal, but an act of preventative terrorism aimed at the civilian population'" (Foot, 2009: 133). Although this match took place at a relatively low level of Italian football, attention was drawn to the incident by the President of the Regional Committee for the Honour of the Fallen at Marzabotto, Valter Cardi, who protested at the area being "forced to accept the umpteenth unacceptable insult during a football match" (Camilletti, 2017). In an attempt to distance itself from the incident, the club and its players, without Lupi, visited the Marzabotto Memorial chapel one week after the event.⁶

There is much in these episodes to explain how and why Italy has had such difficulty in separating football from Fascism, including ignorance, a

⁵ Seconda Categoria is effectively the seventh level of Italian football: Serie A, Serie B, Serie C, Eccellenza, Promozione, Prima Categoria, Seconda Categoria, Terza Categoria.

⁶ "Marzabotto, il calciatore fascista non andrà al Sacrario con la squadra", *la Repubblica.it*, 17 November 2017. Last accessed on 04.12.2017, at http://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/11/17/news/marzabotto_il_calciatore_fascista_non_andra_al_sacrario_con_la_squadra-181339282/.

fundamental disrespect for authority, the ineffectual nature of Italian justice, a lack of leadership, and the important relationship between football clubs and *ultrà* groups of supporters. Before turning to these, however, the origins of the relationship should be established.

Football and Fascism

Football and Fascism have been linked since Mussolini's regime restructured the game in 1926 with the Carta di Viareggio. Fascism took interest when *calcio* quickly became arguably the most significant mass popular cultural practice in Italy. In response to the game's rapid expansion across the country and its consequent disorderliness, Fascism set about restructuring the sport and moulding it to respond to the regime's needs as a tool of propaganda and national identity. Principally done via the imposition of a new Fascist hierarchy of officers, a new constitution that imposed disciplinary measures and rules regarding foreign players, and the creation of Italy's first national competition, this stimulated the formation of new clubs such as AS Roma and AC Fiorentina. Although there was no single overriding motive for the intervention, seizing control of an increasingly chaotic game was crucial for a regime that had forced its way into power while promising to restore order to Italian society. At the same time, the Carta di Viareggio was underpinned by the concept of nation: Serie A would offer a national competition with which all Italians could identify, while improving standards and thereby the competitiveness of the national team in the international arena.⁷ Fascism's intervention changed football in Italy forever and stamped an enduring mark upon the game via its organisation, stadiums and successes. Italy hosted and won the 1934 World Cup, holding on to the trophy in France in 1938; in the interim a team of Italian university students won the 1936 Olympic football tournament. Thus, Fascism's intervention and investment certainly reinforced the game's pre-existing solid foundations for the game while Italy's mythical heroes, matches, and victories were filtered to the general public via a highly censored mass media and later retold, thus developing an inevitably long-standing association with the regime. However, "the clear identification between aspects of the regime and footballing success also led to an embarrassed silence on behalf of many about those victories [...] Italy's relationship with the football of the 1930s, as in so many areas, was a difficult one" (Foot, 2006: 442-443).

⁷ On the restructuring of *calcio* see Martin (2004: 51-66).

Fascist Memory

The fall of Fascism on 25 July 1943 began the de-Fascistisation of Italian sport, as the Italian Olympic Committee (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano – CONI) was divided in two parts between liberated Italy and the Republic of Salò. The former international tennis player, ice skater, journalist and sports administrator Count Alberto Bonacossa was made head of CONI. A strong monarchist, he was the perfect candidate to briefly head CONI during the challenging period between the fall of Fascism on 25 July 1943 and the Armistice declaration on 8 September of the same year. He also represented much about change, or the lack of it, in post-regime Italy. While he had never held a position of responsibility under Fascism, he was most likely sympathetic to its rule, and his appointment by Marshall Badoglio's government indicated how 'post-Fascist' Italy would be one of continuity and discontinuity rather than a country that had definitively broken from its past.⁸ Rather than substantially altering the old order and posing difficult questions as to ordinary Italians' responsibility for what had happened under Fascism, the focus for change was one that sought to sweep away the trappings of the old regime and those considered responsible for leading it. Although Bonacossa abandoned his position after little more than a month, he was reconfirmed as an International Olympic Committee (IOC) Executive Committee member in 1946. Conducting much of Italy's immediate postwar sporting diplomacy, he protected its IOC membership and avoided its exclusion from international competition, unlike what had occurred with Germany and Japan (Forcellese, 2013: 169-172).

First appointed as CONI regent on 28 June 1944, and then Extraordinary Commissioner in October 1944, Giulio Onesti re-launched Italian sport. Criticised for appointing individuals tainted by their relationship with Fascism, he was accused of making CONI more oligarchic than it had been under the regime.⁹ The issue reflected the broader problem of what to do with former regime activists who remained within the government administration and state apparatus. In a state where Fascist Party membership had been mandatory, the complete eradication of those who had been employed in the civil service under the regime was impractical. The 'cleansing' that did take place, however, was that of partisans or anti-Fascists that entered the public administration immediately after the liberation.¹⁰ This situation was exacerbated by the lack of any formal justice proceedings for prominent

⁸ On the continuity-discontinuity of CONI in the immediate post-Fascist period, see Bonini (2006: 123-130).

⁹ For Onesti's account of the measures taken, see Onesti (1986: 72-75).

¹⁰ For more details see Ginsborg (1990: 92-93); Lepre (2004: 29-30).

members of the political, military, judicial and economic leadership of Fascist Italy who had planned or carried out war crimes, unlike that for Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg trials.¹¹

This continuity was also the responsibility of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). By the mid-1930s leading PCI figures Palmiro Togliatti and Antonio Gramsci had already begun to theorise Fascist rule by acknowledging its popularity among the Italian middle class. Advocating the construction of long-term alliances with the middle classes rather than a direct attack upon the state, ‘the Italian road to socialism’ was intended to avoid revolution and the possibility of Italian communism once again contributing to the conditions for the collapse of democracy (Foot, 2014: 203). Committed to cooperating with its political rivals, the PCI’s deal with other anti-Fascist parties was confirmed by party leader Togliatti’s ‘about turn’ at Salerno (*svolta di Salerno*) in March 1944, in which the theoretically still revolutionary PCI accepted the immediate leadership of the king and the prospect of shared government with the Catholics and monarchists. Furthermore, as Minister of Justice in the post-liberation anti-Fascist coalition, Togliatti pushed through an amnesty that enabled many Fascists to escape punishment. As there was no wholesale reform of the 1930 Rocco penal code, many judges who were either Fascists or who worked within its system remained in post after 1945, and despite widespread support for their abolition, the Prefects¹² survived although many of them had supported Fascism during its rise and time in power.

Sport further reflected this, with considerable continuity between officers of the regime and the Republic. A notable case was that of the Florentine noble, the Marquis Luigi Ridolfi, who joined the Fascist movement in the spring of 1921. He participated “actively in the activities of the Fascist squads and was vice-commander of the II Florentine legion during the March on Rome”, in 1922, which forced Mussolini into power (Lungonelli, 2016). Secretary of the Provincial Fascist Party, from 1926-1929, Ridolfi was made a Parliamentary Deputy in 1934 and reconfirmed in 1939 and 1943.¹³ He was also the founder (1926) and first president of AC Fiorentina and the driving force behind the construction of the club’s avant-garde stadium, the former ‘Giovanni Berta’ now Artemio Franchi.¹⁴ Unlike national-team

¹¹ See Focardi (2014); Focardi and Klinkhammer (2004).

¹² The Italian state’s key representative at the local level since 1865, Prefects were appointed to each city, with responsibility for controlling public order, overseeing elections, and the administration and execution of laws.

¹³ On Ridolfi, see Cantagalli (1972); Galluzzo (1999); Palla (1978); Martin (2004).

¹⁴ See Galluzzo (2000).

manager Vittorio Pozzo whose “supposed links to the regime [...] led to his isolation in the 1950s and 1960s and to the new stadium in Turin not being named after him in 1990” (Foot, 2006: 442), Ridolfi continued to hold important positions within Italian sport post-Fascism. In 1951 he became head of the FIGC’s *Centro tecnico* (coaching centre) and relaunched the idea of a football ‘university’ for players and coaches that had been mooted in the interwar years. Inaugurated a few months after his death in 1958, the centre at Coverciano, in the periphery of Florence, was dedicated to him.

President of the Italian Athletics Federation (FIDAL) from 1930-1942, Ridolfi was unanimously elected in 1957, holding the post until his death. From 1954, he was also a member of CONI’s board that exerted significant international influence via three Italian members of the IOC Executive Committee – ex-international tennis player Giorgio De Stefani, former Turin Podestà (Fascist Mayor), Prefect and Minister of Finance, Paolo Thaon di Revel, and Alberto Bonacossa.¹⁵ Aristocratic and self-financed, they were kindred spirits amongst the IOC’s oligarchic elite and key to Italy’s successful bid to host the 1960 Olympic Games¹⁶ that came “above all, thanks to the choice of a sporting politics of continuity by CONI” (Forcellese, 2013: 167).

The presence of former Fascists and sympathisers at all levels of government, public service and state administration contributed to the creation of a broad idea of Italians as intrinsically good people – *brava gente* – who were victims rather than accomplices or supporters of Fascism. Pushing the blame for the post-1938 excesses of the Fascist regime principally onto the influence of Nazi Germany thus creates a ‘bad German/ /good Italian’ discourse that shifts or eliminates any sense of guilt for what happened, thereby creating the image of a benign regime and leader. This is, of course, contingent upon whether Fascist Italy’s brutal colonial campaign in Eastern and Northern Africa, racial legislation, and concentration camps, for example, are even recognised let alone critically analysed. The long-term result of this has been

a rehabilitation of Fascism and Mussolini, as if nothing happened in Italian history. While Fascism has not exactly become ‘good’, it is no longer made to appear as something completely ‘bad’. This neutral profile legitimizes many of the values, ideals and references that have been, and often still are, used by some right wing parties. (Mammone, 2006: 213)

¹⁵ On Thaon di Revel, CONI, IOC and previous connections with the Fascist regime, see Forcellese (2013: 175-176).

¹⁶ See Martin (2017).

The postwar Republic's failure to effectively deal with the legacy of the regime was evident in its acceptance of "the creation in 1946 by the defeated Fascists of a political party, which, if not calling itself Fascist, clearly indicated itself as the successor to the RSI by calling itself the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano – MSI)" (Dunnage, 2002: 133). Thus, the repression and distortion of memory was critical to the existence and development of postwar neo-Fascism and the MSI. The party's unrepentant links to the regime lasted until its 1995 party congress at Fiuggi where, in an attempt to create a legitimate political force capable of governing, the MSI was dissolved and replaced by the post-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale (AN). Driven by Gianfranco Fini, he rejected the MSI's previous references to Fascism, condemned anti-Semitism and the 1938 Racial Laws, visited the Fosse Ardeatine monument in Rome¹⁷ to pay homage the Partisans and Italian soldiers executed there, before going to Auschwitz in an act of recognition of those murdered at the concentration camp in addition to the Italian soldiers killed at or deported from the Russian front.¹⁸ Improving the party's electoral and government prospects, it was hugely controversial among its base of support, and a faction of the old MSI remained loyal to its ideals. Refusing to join the Alleanza Nazionale, they formed the Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (MSFT). As Testa and Armstrong note, this "Movimentist brand of fascism is present today in the majority of the Italian neo-fascist youth groups and is certainly recognizable amid the UltraS" (2010: 91).

Ultras

At this point some consideration of the semantic debate regarding the difference between *ultrà* and *ultraS* is required. The first point to underscore is that these committed groups of fans are not necessarily, by nature, violent. In differentiating between the two terms, Ricatti has argued that while *ultrà* is sometimes substituted with *ultras*, both "are usually synonymous, although they are sometimes used with different meanings by supporters of Roma, who indicate with the first the traditional Italian soccer barrackers, and, with the latter, groups closer to the English model of hooligans" (2010: 221). Testa and Armstrong also dispute the frequently presumed assumption that earlier established *ultrà* and the more recent *ultraS* are synonymous with the English term 'hooligan': "In the Italian context, the

¹⁷ In 1944, 335 Italians were executed at the Ardeatine Caves in reprisal for a Partisan attack that killed 33 Nazi troops in Rome.

¹⁸ "Fini: 'Nessuna graduatoria tra Shoa, foibe e gulag'", *la Repubblica.it*, 18 February 1999. Last accessed on 06.01.2018, at <http://www.repubblica.it/online/fatti/fini/fini/fini.html>.

UltraS are perhaps hooligans, but of a very different ilk, because they are now inextricably linked with late 20th-century Italian neo-fascism” (Testa and Armstrong, 2010: 3).

A further bridge connecting Fascist football of the 1930s to the neo-Fascism of the stadiums today was the period of intense and extreme political violence in Italy from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Both a playing-out of the unresolved civil war¹⁹ from 1943-1945 and the dominant postwar Christian Democratic Party’s failure to introduce reforms in response to the dramatic modernisation of Italian society during the ‘economic miracle’, the polarisation of Italian politics, the politicisation of the *piazze* and the accompanying violence was transferred into football stadiums.

The protest movement that began in the universities in 1968 and moved into the factories the following year radicalised large sectors of society and left a tradition of small and highly politicised groups of young Italians from which the *ultrà* emerged. Strongly identifying with their stadium, club and locality, they took the conflict felt in Italian public life into the stadiums, gave *calcio* a political context and significance, and offered supporters a political identity. Divided by their support for communism or neo-Fascism, they united around an objection and resistance to all forms of organisation and control (Triani, 1990: 133-134). Mimicking the style, structures and countercultural features of political groups (Podaliri and Balestri, 1999: 91), the creation of *ultrà* collectives at both ends of the political spectrum was reflected in their names, such as Milan’s leftist ‘Fossa dei Leoni’ (Lion’s Den), arguably the first modern *ultrà* group formed in 1968, and the ‘Brigate Rossonere’ (Red and Black Brigades), and their right-wing city rivals of the Inter Boys SAN (Armed Black-and-Blue Squad) “formed by members of the *Fronte della Gioventù* – the youth movement of the Italian neo-fascist party MSI” (Testa and Armstrong, 2010: 71).

The impact of Italy’s post-1968 radicalisation was reflected in the SS Lazio team that won its first league title in 1974 with a group of eccentric players renowned for their passion for firearms, militarism, parachuting and some who supported the MSI.²⁰ The club’s title success attracted new supporters and recruits to the *curva nord* where groups such as the *Folgore*, who were named after an elite parachute regiment of the Italian military that was much admired by neo-fascist youths, began to appear. Some of these groups combined to form the *Eagles Supporters* in 1976, who organised spectacular matchday displays. Dedicated but relatively pacifist and unpoliticised,

¹⁹ See Pavone (1991); Foot (2009).

²⁰ On SS Lazio and its players in this period, see Chiappaventi (2004).

they contrasted and occasionally clashed with the more extreme *Vikings* who dominated the *curva* until 1987 and the emergence of the *Irriducibili*, who have gone on to become its main force (Testa and Armstrong, 2010: 55-56).

The power struggles within the *curva nord* were indicative of how, during the 1970s and 1980s, many older leaders lost control as groups began to fragment into smaller factions. While some became politically neutral or apolitical, others developed local and national political agendas. Cities with two clubs often had distinctive political identities, as in AC Milan being the traditional team of the railway workers/working class and their rivals Internazionale representing the more conservative bourgeoisie. Club identities also reflected regions with distinctive political allegiances, most notably those in the Northern League (*Lega Nord*) strongholds of Lombardy and Veneto that frequently demonstrated strong anti-southern and racist rhetoric. As local and provincial identities became intensified by the impact of globalisation upon albeit misguided ideas of Italian homogeneity, many fan groups shifted towards the extreme right of politics. With cities increasingly interpreted as *piccole patrie* (small countries/motherlands), there was a corresponding increase in xenophobia and racism.

Such ideas and behaviours became increasingly evident among AS Roma's *Boys*, who rose to ascendancy in the late 1980s as the old guard of the *curva sud* began to dissipate. Taking the double-bladed axe as their symbol, the pillars of their ideology are equally predictable and populist: the glorification of Mussolini as the greatest man in Italian history and the honouring of ancient Rome and the Fascist era, bound together by cultural memory that reinterprets and reinvents the past. In 2005 at Livorno, a hated adversary due to both the city's and team's strong Communist history, they unveiled flags displaying swastikas and Celtic crosses (the symbol of neo-Fascism) and sang choruses of 'Duce, Duce' in reference to Mussolini.²¹ The events were repeated at the Stadio Olimpico the following January when Roma hosted Livorno and included a black and white banner stating: "*Lazio-Livorno: stessa iniziale, stesso forno*" [Lazio-Livorno: same beginnings, same oven].²²

Once again seeking to offend via the connection with Jewishness, the banner worked linguistically in Italian due to the rhyme between the words 'Livorno' and 'forno'. Evidencing how club leaders were careful not offend extreme supporters, AS Roma president Franco Sensi asked simply "that politics

²¹ "Svastiche nella curva romanista", *La RepubblicaSport.it*, 18 September 2005. Last accessed on 07.01.2018, at <http://www.repubblica.it/2005/i/sezioni/sport/calcio/svas/svas/svas.html>.

²² "Olimpico, svastiche in curva sud. 'Lazio-Livorno: stesso forno'", *La RepubblicaSport.it*, 29 June 2006. Last accessed on 07.01.2018, at http://www.repubblica.it/2006/a/sezioni/sport/calcio/serie_a/svastiche/svastiche/svastiche.html.

stay out of the stadium". Taking a similar line regarding sport and politics, Rome Mayor Walter Veltroni nonetheless connected the incident with the city's past: "politics must stay out of the stadium [...] but even more so the apology for the Nazi regime that brought so much horror and death to the world [...] Rome is the city of the deportation of the Jews, Rome is the city of the Fosse Ardeatine. Behaviour like this cannot be tolerated".²³ Spokesperson for Rome's Jewish community Riccardo Pacifici demanded a response from the Interior Minister Beppe Pisanu and Head of Police Marcello Fulvi, as to why the 1993 Mancino Law²⁴ that condemns the diffusion of racially-, ethnically- or nationally-based hatred had not been applied after numerous Jewish and non-Jewish fans in attendance at the stadium protested directly to the police (Caccia, 2006). By no means the first such incident, a similar banner appeared during the 1998 Rome derby: "Auschwitz is your homeland, the ovens your homes" (Caccia, 1998).²⁵ It was unfurled by Lazio's *Irriducibili*, one of the *ultra* groups most associated with neo-Fascism.

Taking the eagle as their symbol, which is shared with that of the club albeit stylistically different, the *Irriducibili* motto – 'Dare, Believe, Be Reckless' – requires little imagination when associating it with the Fascist regime's mantra for Italian youth – 'Believe, Obey, Fight'. Admiring ancient Rome, the imperial past and glorifying Mussolini, they share these sympathies with their neo-Fascist Roma rivals. Such ideas are central to the *ultra*'s highly traditional and symbolic view of the world, and within this context, the importance of Mussolini goes beyond simply the flags in the stadiums. Viewed as *the* great man of Italian history, an individual who represented and enacted the will of the people, this revision of history is offered outside of the context of the regime's inherent violence and involvement in atrocities. It is also often presented as a purer, more honest period and thus contrasted with the corruption of contemporary politics.

Coming soon after the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the 'Tangentopoli' corruption scandal in the early 1990s brought an end to the postwar First Republic and prompted some historians to reconsider the events of 1943-1945 and Italy's liberation. Rather than a moment of collective identification, the re-assessment of the Resistance accused the PCI of "manipulating the historical record for its own base

²³ "Olimpico, svastiche in curva sud. 'Lazio-Livorno: stesso forno', *La RepubblicaSport.it*, 29 June 2006. Last accessed on 07.01.2018, at http://www.repubblica.it/2006/a/sezioni/sport/calcio/serie_a/svastiche/svastiche/svastiche.html.

²⁴ Decreto Legge 26 aprile 1993, no. 122. Accessed on 07.01.2018, at http://presidenza.governo.it/USRI/confessioni/norme/dl_122_1993.pdf.

²⁵ On the development and politics of Roman *Ultra* groups, see Testa and Armstrong (2010: 43-49).

political motives” (Carter, 2010: 168) and reduced the role of Communist partisans in the birth of the democratic republic. At the same time, it also extended to a rehabilitation of the regime and Mussolini.

A clear example of this was Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s insistence, in 2003, that “Mussolini never killed anyone. Mussolini used to send people on vacation in internal exile”.²⁶ Dangerously misleading and completely disingenuous, it is fake history. Presenting an apparently legitimate reading of the past, the distortion creates more respectability/acceptability for what was previously considered morally repugnant, which was important for Berlusconi’s government coalition that included the right-wing Alleanza Nazionale.

Paolo Di Canio

Revising Fascism naturally eases any difficulty that might exist for fans who extol a romanticised version of Italy’s Fascist past. Viewing the present through the past also appealed to Mussolini, who assumed the title of *Il Duce*. The Latin for DUX (leader), former *Irriducibili* member and ex-Lazio player Paolo Di Canio has this tattooed on his bicep along with a Roman eagle and helmeted head of Mussolini on his back. An open supporter of Fascism and its leader, in January 2005 he gave a Roman salute to the *Irriducibili* after Lazio’s victory in the Rome derby, an act that was appreciated by Alessandra Mussolini, *Il Duce*’s granddaughter and a parliamentary deputy at the time: “What a lovely Roman salute, I liked it a lot. It moved me and I’ll send him a thank you card”.²⁷ While Di Canio sought to distance himself from her comments, he repeated the gesture against Siena, Livorno and Juventus on 17 November. Receiving a match ban and a fine of €10,000, Lazio successfully overturned the suspension. Demanding “recognition of the legitimacy and complete absence of illegality in the Roman salute”, the appeal revealed the grey area that covers the apology of Fascism in Italy. As Di Canio’s defense argued, while the Constitution explicitly forbids the reformation of the dissolved Fascist party, it also clearly guarantees the freedom of expression of thought. Thus, the crime of Fascist apology can only exist when there is the aim of re-forming the Fascist party. The Roman salute alone thus would not be a crime.²⁸

²⁶ “New storm over Berlusconi ‘remarks’”, *BBC News*, 11 September 2011. Last accessed on 09.12.2017, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3101198.stm>.

²⁷ “Saluto romano, bufera su Di Canio. La Fige attiva l’ufficio indagini”, *la Repubblica.it*, 7 January 2005. Last accessed 07.01.2018, at http://www.repubblica.it/2005/a/sezioni/sport/calcio/serie_a/salutocanio/salutocanio/salutocanio.html?refresh_ce.

²⁸ “‘Sono fascista ma non un razzista’. Di Canio si difende dalle accuse”, *la Repubblica.it*, 23 December 2005. Last accessed 23.12.2017, at <http://www.repubblica.it/2005/l/sezioni/sport/calcio/dicaniosalut/noraz/noraz.html>.

With no definitive clarification ever reached regarding its illegality or otherwise, it became indicative of Italy's national problem.

Di Canio also explained what the gesture meant to him: "I make the Roman salute as a greeting to comrades, it is dedicated to my people. With that straight arm I don't want to incite violence, nor racial hatred [...] My salute [...] is not political but exclusively sporting".²⁹ Defining himself as a Fascist but not a racist, he has used this defense on two high-profile occasions. In March 2013, a polemic erupted in the United Kingdom (UK) following his appointment as manager of Sunderland AFC, which drew the immediate resignation of former UK Foreign Minister David Milliband from his position as the club's Vice-Chairman (Quinn, 2013). In September 2016, he was removed as a presenter of Italian Sky Sport's English football program the Di Canio Premier Show, after appearing on air in a polo shirt that revealed his DUX tattoo (Vendemia, 2016). More surprising for the fact that Sky had employed him in the first place, given his tattoos and opinions were hardly a well-kept secret, it once again revealed Italian football's turning a blind-eye to Fascism, unless there are economic implications.

Di Canio's comment declaring himself a Fascist but not a racist could apply to some of Fascism's early idealists: Mussolini initially opposed ideas of Nordic racism until his scientists finally discovered that Italians were, in fact, Aryan.³⁰ All the same, it is a complex case to argue and requires the type of selective reading of the past that is evident in his autobiography. Claiming that Mussolini was "a deeply misunderstood individual", Di Canio presents him as a man of principle punished for speaking his mind. Free to express his opinion, as he says, it is nonetheless not a historical fact that "Mussolini managed to rally an entire country around him". Consensus for the regime is, in fact, one of the great historical debates about Italian Fascism. Most alarmingly he states:

While I admire the way he built his power, I am fascinated by the way he wielded it and consolidated it. Mussolini was convinced that he had to save the country from others. To him, the stakes were immense, there was a higher end which justified his means [...]

He deceived people, his actions were often vile or calculated. But all this was motivated by a higher purpose. At stake was the fate of the nation. He sacrificed individuals for what he thought was the greater good. And he did do a lot of good,

²⁹ "‘Sono fascista ma non un razzista’. Di Canio si difende dalle accuse", *la Repubblica.it*, 23 December 2005. Last accessed 23.12.2017, at <http://www.repubblica.it/2005/l/sezioni/sport/calcio/dicaniosalut/noraz/noraz.html>.

³⁰ On Fascist racial policy, see Gillette (2003), Ipsen (1996), Sarfatti (2006) and Livingston (2014).

from introducing national pensions, from modernizing the railways to restoring pride to an entire people. (Di Canio, 2001: 311)

It is an interesting defence of Mussolini that justifies the means, such as the murder of the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti and the total abrogation of democracy and civil rights, for the ends, the apparent rescuing of the country. It is pure populism at best, fake history at worst, albeit one that has growing support in Italy where expressing esteem for Fascism and its deeds is no longer unusual.

Siniša Mihajlović

Christian Bromberger has suggested that “If the general style and make-up of a team allows the expression of a collective identity, the individual player wins the favour of different sectors of the public according to the qualities that he demonstrates” (Bromberger, 1999: 114). Clearly relevant to Di Canio, it is also interesting when applied to former Lazio player Siniša Mihajlović who, in 2000, called Arsenal’s Patrick Vieira “a fucking black monkey” during a Champions League match in which Lazio fans also “taunted Arsenal’s black players and hurled objects at the team” (Brodkin, 2000). Commenting on the incident, Di Canio did not condone Mihajlović but also questioned what had provoked him. His criticism was strongest however for Vieira: “By going public with it, one of the basic rules of football was broken: the idea that what happens on the pitch stays on the pitch” (Di Canio, 2001: 303). It is indicative of how there is still a sense in Italy that the football stadium operates in a separate sphere, detached from the norms and laws that govern everyday life. The result is a type of ‘free zone’ where anything goes. The Anne Frank stickers are the most recent example of this, but a comparable incident almost twenty years earlier reveals a further reason for the existence and growth of extremism in Italian football: the inability or lack of desire by the authorities to tackle the problem.

In January 2000, days after the assassination of the Serbian paramilitary leader Željko Ražnatović, more commonly known as Arkan, the *Irriducibili* unveiled a banner declaring ‘Honour to the Tiger, Arkan’. The former leader of the Red Star Belgrade *ultras* who commanded the paramilitary ‘Serbian Volunteer Guard’ – known as ‘ARKAN’s Tigers’ – during the Yugoslav Wars, he was indicted for crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, and violations of the laws or customs of war by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, 1997). According to *Irriducibili* spokesmen, their gesture had nothing to do with politics but because “Arkan was a great Red Star *ultra* and friend

of [Siniša] Mihajlović who is our friend and in the past has recognised our losses by placing flowers beneath the *curva*" (Caccia, 2000). Mihajlović himself contributed to the problem by describing Arkan as a "hero for the Serb people" in an obituary he wrote.³¹ While supported by Alessandra Mussolini,³² the banner was almost unanimously condemned. This included Lazio's Croatian striker Alen Bokšić, who claimed he would have left the field had he been playing.³³

The Arkan banner finally forced the authorities into action,³⁴ but while neo-Fascist flags and banners have almost disappeared from Italian stadiums due to careful surveillance of fans entering and fines imposed upon the respective clubs, the Anne Frank stickers prove that such attitudes and the capacity to act have not been eliminated. This raises an obvious question and introduces a final important point when examining the clear presence of neo-Fascism within Italian stadiums: How is it that fans are able to carry out such activities with impunity, with no intervention from the authorities? The answer connects contemporary football with that of the Fascist regime, via the municipal authorities who have built and still own the stadiums.

Neo-Patrimonial Football

In his 2014 text entitled *Governing the Italians*, Sabino Cassese, an Emeritus Judge in the Constitutional Court, argued that the weaknesses of the Italian state have resulted in a separation between legal Italy and real Italy – the Italy that exists in the statute books as opposed to that of everyday life – and that these shortcomings have overseen the development of a public administration that is weak when dealing with the strong and strong when dealing with the weak. The relationship of disloyalty and mistrust between the people and the state has created a malaise which manifests itself in low electoral turnout, worrying levels of tax evasion and avoidance, corruption, and the predominance of organised crime. Incapable of carrying out its functions,

³¹ "Mihajlović su Arkan e la guerra in Jugoslavia", *il Post*, 1 April 2006. Last accessed 07.01.2018, at <http://www.ilpost.it/2016/04/01/mihajlovic-condo-sky/>.

³² "Striscioni dell'Olimpico. Un'altra bufera sul calcio", *la Repubblica.it*, 31 January 2000. Last accessed 07.01.2018, at <http://www.repubblica.it/online/sport/anticipo/polemiche/polemiche.html>.

³³ "Boksic e lo striscione-Arkan. 'Io avrei smesso di giocare'", *la Repubblica.it*, 31 January 2000. Last accessed on 07.01.2018, at <http://www.repubblica.it/online/sport/anticipo/arkan/arkan.html>.

³⁴ One of the plans to deal with offensive banners was to suspend the match and allow time for their removal. Increasingly tough legislation has been introduced, often by decree law, which by-passes parliamentary debate to impose emergency legislation, e.g., the Pisanu Law following the death of policeman Filippo Raciti in 2007. With little positive effect, such laws have made it increasingly difficult for non-*ultrà* fans to attend matches. Alongside the expansion of DASPO (*Diffida ad Assistere alle manifestazioni sportive*) football banning orders, these have reinforced the *ultras'* sense of persecution and legitimacy as the true voice of football fans.

the inefficient state turns to external resources and parallel organisations to strengthen it. Frequently unaccountable, inefficient and corrupt, they only weaken it further. Cassese did not discuss Italian sport, but his argument is easily applicable and evident in how *calcio* has been developing.

As the authority and power of the state has been challenged, changed and increasingly diminished over the last two decades, so then have influential actors across politics and business stepped in to fill the void and accumulate resources to the detriment of others. For *calcio*, this has created a number of interdependencies between clubs, television, business and politics that have shaped the game's production and consumption. Many of these changes derive from the arch neo-liberalist Silvio Berlusconi who used AC Milan to promote his business brand and extend political connections, thereby encouraging other industrial families to do the same.³⁵ The new relationship between politics and football was consecrated when Berlusconi became Prime Minister. His government's *salva-calcio* law enabled clubs to delay repaying tax debts and would also have allowed them to offset the devaluation of their players against tax, that is, had European Union's anti-trust regulations not blocked it. Having spent heavily to promote his brand through football, AC Milan would have been a major beneficiary, along with the likes of Lazio and Parma. The extent of the connections between business and football and the FIGC's weak regulatory capacity was evidenced by the collapse of the Parmalat and Cirio companies and the direct impact upon Lazio and Parma.³⁶

The absence/weakness of the state, as argued by Cassese, can thus be seen to have contributed to a crisis of authority in *calcio* that prohibits the creation and implementation of essential reforms, safety regulations, and measures to establish and impose acceptable standards upon the game. Within the UK, the obligation for safety and the associated economic costs reside with the clubs, who use stewards and third-party security firms to establish and maintain order. With clubs made accountable for the behavior and welfare of their consumers, police activity is restricted to public order roles away from stadium. By contrast, various branches of the Italian state and military police forces employ traditional patterns and methods of control to maintain order within Italian stadiums, which is presuming they are able to enter in the first place. Lazio's *curva nord* and Roma's *curva sud* at the Stadio Olimpico were notorious as self-regulating, no-go zones for police.

³⁵ The Tanzi family who owned Parmalat dairy produce company bought Parma; Sergio Cragnotti, the owner of the Cirio canned food brand, bought Lazio.

³⁶ On the administration, governance and regulation of recent Italian football, see Hamill *et al.* (2010).

Exempting club presidents from *de facto* responsibility for what goes on within their stadiums is intensified by the fact that so few clubs (almost none, in fact) actually own their stadiums. The majority belong to the local municipal authority, many of which were first constructed under the Fascist regime and designed as multi-sport venues for the specific use and benefit of the local community rather than uniquely for football clubs. Moreover, not only are they old, many are also considered buildings of historical value with protection orders that seriously restrict their redevelopment, which leaves them unsuited to the modern, corporate, income-generating 'game' which professional football has become. Consequently, as Italy's economic fortunes have worsened over the last twenty years, so too have municipal authorities suffered from increasingly smaller budgets to spend on maintaining let alone improving sporting facilities. In the UK, in addition to the huge amounts of wealth generated by television rights for coverage of the Premier League, clubs receive financial support from central government initiatives and funded agencies to modernise their stadiums, most notably after the 1989 Hillsborough disaster. UK stadiums have thus become part of a wider leisure experience that clubs can exploit seven days per week whereas in Italy, where various governments have employed little more than knee-jerk crisis management, the necessary changes required for true modernisation remain blocked by the neo-patrimonial relationship between football, politics and business. Thus, the government regulations that have been introduced have tended to focus on those who attend matches rather than the game and its infrastructure, which has augmented the sense of persecution and anger among fans. As Doige has argued:

The communal nature of Italian stadiums is clearly reductive. At the current time, no one is considering the experience of fans [...] By permitting clubs to own their own ground, they will be inclined to consider the experiences of their own fans. If the clubs can invest in the facilities then they can begin to capitalize on these investments and begin to compete with other leagues. They can also attract a wider range of fans, rather than the predominantly masculine fans that frequent the stadium nowadays. (2015: 104)

The lack of investment has thus contributed to unsafe stadiums, falling attendances, reduced revenues, and a continuing crisis within Italian football that has stimulated and permitted a growth in violence and extremism for which nobody appears to accept responsibility. In terms of modernising *calcio*, only Juventus has shown any initiative with its construction of the

Juventus Stadium³⁷ that opened in 2011, although it must also be noted that the club has almost unrivalled access to private capital. Elsewhere, stadiums built in the 1920s and 1930s have fallen into disrepair with little renovation since the works undertaken for the 1990 World Cup. Thus, the modernisation of Italian football is dependent upon both the money and will to implement and enforce necessary changes. With both of these severely lacking, they can be seen to have contributed to many of the extremist incidents discussed, which includes the representation and growth of Fascism and racism within Italian stadiums, a phenomenon that continues to go unchecked.

Conclusion

History is rarely linear, and the pathway from Fascist football in 1930s Italy to neo-Fascism in the stadiums of today is far from direct. The regime's investment, exploitation, and propagandising of the game was significant and left an enduring footprint through its stadiums and the national league, Serie A. Fascism was not, however, rooted deeply enough in Italian society for its postwar survival and positive memory to be seen as inevitable. The ideological and class conflict in the midst of the fight for liberation from 1943-1945 created a division in Italy along political lines that has never been fully reconciled. The consequence has been a divided memory of the past that has been further fuelled by ignorance, periods of extreme political violence, and an inefficient state apparatus that rewards connections over talent and, in the early postwar years, provided a welcome refuge for those with nostalgic memories of the past.

The neo-Fascist presence has never been strong enough to seriously threaten a return, but it did slow processes, change, and reforms that might have seen the development of a more efficient country and one in which such nostalgia was positively discouraged. Thus, the politicised Italian stadiums of today reflect the country's postwar development and some of the fundamental weaknesses that have made it so difficult to govern effectively. The absent state has frequently shown itself as both incapable of creating law and enforcing what legislation already exists. Evident cases in point, the stadiums became vacuums of authority that accommodated the politics of the Italian *piazze*. Public and more or less *de facto* autonomous spaces, while they were initially exploited by both left- and right-wing extremists, they have increasingly become the domain of neo-Fascist groups wishing to express what would normally be considered unacceptable speech. Thus,

³⁷ It was renamed the Allianz Stadium in July 2017.

while the far right's contemporary association with football can be traced back to Italian Fascism of the 1930s, it is the state's weaknesses in terms of governing and guiding post-Fascist Italian society that has been fundamental in enabling a concerted attempt to revise Italy's past and has allowed this situation to develop unchecked in football stadiums. Ranging from the production of a more palatable version of history to the direct rehabilitation of Fascism, the link from Mussolini to the Anne Frank stickers at the Stadio Olimpico is clear.

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Futebol, fascismo e adeptos na Itália moderna

Este artigo analisa a relação entre o fascismo e o futebol na Itália, desde as origens do regime em meados da década de 1920 até aos nossos dias, e tenta explicar a presença contínua da extrema-direita no jogo. Contextualizando o desenvolvimento do futebol italiano na história pós-guerra do país, argumenta-se que, embora o regime fascista tivesse lançado as bases do jogo contemporâneo, a sua influência não foi suficientemente profunda para explicar a presença da extrema-direita nos estádios italianos desde os anos 80. Situando a politização do futebol italiano nas teorias da memória pós-fascista e através da análise de incidentes específicos de atividade pró-regime e antisemita dentro dos estádios, este artigo argumenta que o fracasso em combater a presença da extrema-direita é consequência direta da fraqueza/ausência do Estado italiano.

Palavras-chave: adeptos; futebol; Itália; memória; neofascismo.

Football, fascisme et supporters dans l'Italie moderne

Cet article se penche sur la relation entre le fascisme et le football en Italie, à compter des origines du régime, dans les années 1920, à nos jours et tente d'expliquer la présence continue de l'extrême droite dans ce sport. En contextualisant le développement du football italien dans l'histoire de l'après-guerre du pays, nous soutenons que, bien que le régime fasciste ait lancé les bases du jeu contemporain, son influence ne fut pas suffisamment profonde pour expliquer la présence de l'extrême droite dans les stades italiens depuis les années 80. En situant la politisation du football italien dans les théories de la mémoire post-fasciste et par le biais de l'analyse d'incidents spécifiques de l'activité pro-régime et antisémite dans les stades, cet article défend que l'échec constaté dans le combat à la présence de l'extrême droite est une conséquence directe de la faiblesse/absence de l'État italien.

Mots-clés : football; Italie; mémoire; néofascisme; supporters.

