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## Fascism, separatism and the *ultràs*: discrimination in Italian football

Christos Kassimeris\*

*Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences, European University, Cyprus*

The game of football is known as much for its mass appeal as for its nation-building properties. In the case of Italy, just as dictator Benito Mussolini employed the game to promote a distinct sense of national identity, contemporary extreme right-wing parties have proved determined to exploit the popularity of football in order to support their inherently xenophobic views. Hence, this essay reveals the impact of Mussolini's nationalistic strategies on the development of the beautiful game in Italy, assesses the degree of football's political manipulation during the country's more turbulent years until now, and consequently addresses the disturbing, yet overlooked, issue of racism in Italian football.

### Italianizing the popular game

Where Catholicism and socialism clearly failed to manipulate the vast popularity of the game of football in Italy,<sup>1</sup> nationalism and, in particular, Benito Mussolini proved far more successful. The national football team of Italy played its first international game in May 1910 against France wearing all white, predominantly due to the cost of coloured outfits. The year after, Italy's national side sported blue for the first time, *azzurro* in Italian, to honour the royal family.<sup>2</sup> This could have been football's first encounter with Italian nationalism; however, the Italian football governing body had previously decided, in 1908, to expel from the football league all clubs that featured foreign players and relegate them to a specially designed competition. This unmistakably racist policy lasted for less than a year, since Italy's major football clubs refused to squander their foreign talent.<sup>3</sup> Yet the relentless campaign of Italian nationalists never ceased to aspire to the promotion of a distinct collective identity that would unify the nation. Hence football was renamed *calcio*, after the Florentine ball game, and the *Federazione Italiana Football* was re-baptized *Federazione Italiana del Giuoco del Calcio* in 1909.<sup>4</sup> The Italianization of the popular game continued when Benito Mussolini came to power, as a number of football clubs were forced to abandon their original names. For example, Associazione Calcio Milan was renamed Milano and Football Club Internazionale Milano became Ambrosiana,<sup>5</sup> named after the patron saint of Milan, since its original name perversely denoted the communist 'Internationale'.<sup>6</sup> Worthy of note is the fact that

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\*Email: c.kassimeris@euc.ac.cy

Football Club Internazionale Milano emerged from the ranks of Associazione Calcio Milan, merely because the latter insisted on employing exclusively Italian players.<sup>7</sup>

The Italian regime fulfilled its expectations when the Viareggio Charter was implemented in 1926. Despite its otherwise progressive nature, as the *Serie A* and *Serie B* national football leagues and professionalism were established, the Viareggio Charter also prohibited the use of foreign football players.<sup>8</sup> Just as the game of football was exclusive to Italian players by 1928, since foreigners were deemed untalented and lacking the necessary commitment,<sup>9</sup> ten years later the positive qualities of the game were altogether eclipsed when Jews were banned from football, in line with the Nazi policy already put into effect in Germany and occupied Austria.<sup>10</sup> Evidently, the only foreigners permitted to play were the offspring of expatriate Italians from Latin American countries, more often than not Argentina and Uruguay. The regime capitalized on Italian football when the game's most unusual agents – the national authorities, instead of the relevant governing body – decided to translate all English football terms to Italian.<sup>11</sup> The intentions of Mussolini to exploit the mass appeal of the game materialized with the construction of impressive football stadiums, which facilitated the cause of the regime's propaganda apparatus.<sup>12</sup> Two of these truly magnificent pieces of architecture comprise the Stadio Mussolini in Turin, completed within six months in 1931, and the Littoriale in Bologna, which features a remarkable statue of Mussolini on horseback and the Marathon Tower. It may also be noted that 'towers in general were striking symbolic features of Fascist architecture which represented "a combination of the medieval civic power and an abstract symbol of authority"'.<sup>13</sup> Another stadium appropriately named to serve Mussolini's propaganda was the home of Associazione Calcio Fiorentina, the Giovanni Berta, named after a navy officer who was 'martyred' at the hands of communists.<sup>14</sup>

Naturally, these awesome structures necessitated the presence of football giants proficient in delivering the message of fascism at home and abroad, thus rendering themselves the most prominent ambassadors of the regime.<sup>15</sup> Bologna Football Club 1909 was one such successful club at both national and European level, having won five domestic titles between 1929 and 1941,<sup>16</sup> as well as the Coppa d'Europa (1932 and 1934) and the Paris Exhibition tournament (1937).<sup>17</sup> Other clubs were forced to merge so as to create more competitive teams. Associazione Calcio Fiorentina was formed after Palestra Gimnastica Libertas and Club Sportivo di Firenze merged, following Palestra's promotion to *Serie A*,<sup>18</sup> while Associazione Sportiva Roma was founded in 1926 when three clubs from Rome (L'Alba, La Fortitudo and La Roman) merged into one – Società Sportiva Lazio opposed the merger, however.<sup>19</sup> Sadly, the beautiful game of football had to endure yet another embarrassment when the regime demanded that all football players give the Roman Salute prior to kick-off, just as a small Fascist emblem decorated the shirts of the Italian national football team.<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, perhaps, the regime's obscene manipulation of the game culminated in Italy winning the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, held in Italy and France respectively, and the Olympic football tournament of 1936 in Berlin.<sup>21</sup> It is noteworthy that the Italian regime advertised, if you will, the 1934 World Cup by including posters that featured mighty Hercules with a foot on a ball, all the while saluting in Fascist fashion. Obviously, success at home – during the same World Cup competition – produced the necessary grounds for the regime to highlight the qualities of Fascism. Needless to say, Mussolini's presence during the inaugural World Cup was quite dominant, as the archives of the Union of European

Football Associations stress that ‘The Italian dictator’s passion for football may have had something to do with a number of questionable refereeing decisions which seemed to go in the home side’s favour’.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Mussolini revealed, once more, his dictatorial qualities when he cabled a message to the Italian national football team that succinctly read ‘Win or die’ only a day before the 1938 World Cup final.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, reflecting its ambition for territorial expansion and regional domination, given the national football team’s triumphant campaign, ‘Italy often played in international friendlies against Central European teams, states of the former German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, an area central to the geopolitical interests of Fascist Italy’.<sup>24</sup>

### The politicization of Italian football

In Italy, football culture and fandom alike are clearly defined by as much political terms (the *ultràs*) as geographic (the *mezzogiorno*); therefore, differentiating between left-wing Associazione Calcio Milan and right-wing Football Club Internazionale Milano,<sup>25</sup> as well as separating Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio in the north from Società Sportiva Calcio Napoli based in the southern part of the country. It seems that ‘violence between ultras groups will actuate the geo-cultural animosities that fracture Italy’s sense of national identity. Medieval hostilities across the *mezzogiorno*, between Italy’s north and south, continue in matches like Atalanta and Napoli.’<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Finn and Giulianotti noted that ‘quasi-racial ideologies permeate the *mezzogiorno* division of north and south, while more subtle forms of racial categorization pervade the popular imagination when relating international fixtures to European politics’.<sup>27</sup> Rivalry between such clubs is often expressed through the *ultràs*, organized groups of fans commonly mistaken for hooligans, by means of admittedly fascinating choreographies staged on their respective *curva*. The *curva* is typically located behind either of the two goalposts and concerns a particular area on the terraces of the stadium that is typically ascribed sacrosanct attributes that approach the concept of territoriality. While in defence of the *curva*, the *ultràs* will not hesitate to employ nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric. In other words, ‘The *curva* was a small “mother country”, a logic which was very close to extreme right-wing values, that facilitated racist and xenophobic behavioural patterns inside the stadia’.<sup>28</sup> Along similar lines,

Dal Lago describes Italian football culture as ‘a form of extended municipalism’. The battle lines of the football ‘ultras’ are those of the ancient rivalries between regions and towns. When supporting their national team abroad, Italian fans may, like other nations, temporarily suspend traditional city and regional antagonisms.<sup>29</sup>

However, the context of those battles would soon acquire a new dimension that transcended mere regionalism. The arrival of immigrants in the late 1980s provided some inherently chauvinistic political parties such as the *Lega Nord* (Northern League), with the opportunity to promote a sense of intolerance that soon after infiltrated the ranks of *ultràs* by means of displaying Fascist symbols and repeating racist and anti-Semitic chants in football stadiums across the country.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, ‘It is noteworthy that the *Lega Nord* targets immigrants not necessarily because of their opposition to ethnic diversity, but because of their separatist views.’<sup>31</sup>

Yet the first to suffer from racial abuse during football matches were not targeted because of their skin colour or country of origin. On the contrary, it was white (Caucasian) southern (slightly darker perhaps) Italians.<sup>32</sup> It appears that 'this racism was especially evident in games involving northern and southern teams. With the rise of the regionalist Lega Nord in the 1980s, a party hostile to the south that frequently referred to southerners in racist terms, regional sentiments proliferated on the terraces.'<sup>33</sup> Evidently, Italians who claimed ancestry from the country's southern, poorer part were habitually called *Negro di Merda*, black shit, merely because of the region's close proximity to the shores of Africa.<sup>34</sup> In defiance of the inherently racist conduct of the northerners, supporters of Società Sportiva Calcio Napoli wave flags of the American Confederation and display banners that read 'Welcome to Africa' so as to proudly highlight their southern identity, though in a rather humorous manner.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly,

When the World Cup Finals were held in Italy in 1990, however, the 'ultra' groups could not overcome their parochial hostilities to join forces against international rivals. The Napoli fans abandoned the Italian national team to support their local hero Maradona, who was playing for Argentina, while northern 'ultras' demonstrated their hostility towards Maradona, Napoli and the southern region by supporting any team playing against Argentina. This resulted in even skinhead/racist elements among the northern fans cheering in passionate support of Cameroon, rather than give any encouragement to their traditional regional enemies.<sup>36</sup>

A number of those extreme elements were often recruited by like-minded groups similar to those that had once facilitated the emergence of the *ultras* in the 1970s, inspired as they were by the political divide that characterized Italy at the time. For instance, the extreme right-wing party Italian Social Movement was instrumental in organizing the *ultras* of both Football Club Internazionale Milano and Società Sportiva Lazio.<sup>37</sup> On the whole, 'The heterogeneity of Italy's party politics has stoked ultra rivalries as their clubs and home towns have become associated with particular leanings'.<sup>38</sup>

What is certainly fascinating is that

The names of ultra groups tend to reflect three identifying elements: the club that they support; the political turmoil and paramilitarization of Italian society during the 1970s and 1980s; and their interests in global youth culture. At Roma there is the Comando Ultra Curva Sud, designating the south curva (end) of the capital's Stadio Olimpico. At Milan, there is the Brigade Rossonere, signifying the red and black colours of the club; similarly at Verona, there is the Brigade Gialloblu, indicating their colours of yellow and blue. Aspects of youth culture are reflected by the Drughì at Juventus, named after the gang from the novel *A Clockwork Orange*, the Teddy Boys at Udinese; the Skins at Inter; or even the Freak Brothers who follow Ternana.<sup>39</sup>

Political developments in the 1970s divided Italy between 'right' and 'left' to an extent where fan groups, too, were deeply affected. Newly emerged *ultras* groups were formed to fill the vacuum created after the banning of extreme formations, such as the Italian Social Movement, as the latter sought to recruit members from the realm of football.<sup>40</sup> The *ultras* 'were commonly affiliated with formal political networks of all persuasions'<sup>41</sup> and, therefore, their agendas and slogans were appropriately adjusted to meet the particular needs of right- and left-wing groupings. These groups

were formed within the context of acute political and civil conflicts, notably in the complex relations between the Italian state and paramilitary terrorists operating from the extreme left and right. Ultras groups borrowed to some extent politically from these revolutionary movements and attaching anti-State symbolism to their banners and songs.<sup>42</sup>

Within this context, the first *ultràs* group was formed in 1968 by fans of Associazione Calcio Milan and was named *La Fossa dei Leoni* ('The Lion's Den'), even though the term '*ultràs*' was actually first employed in 1971 by supporters of Unione Calcio Sampdoria based in Genoa. Soon after, more *ultràs* groups were formed throughout the country named, more often than not, after the sort of political terms that best described Italian society at the time.<sup>43</sup>

Evidently, as King argues:

The rise of the ultra movement in Italy in the 1970s was closely associated with political movements on both the left and right but this association waned in the 1980s. The political neutralisation of ultra groups in the 1980s favoured the re-emergence of extreme right groups in the grounds and from the end of the 1980s racism against immigrants became increasingly common at Italian grounds. This was assisted by the development of xenophobic political groupings such as the Northern League, the National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*), the Lombard League and the Tricolour Flame (*Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore*), along with the growth of skinhead and other extreme right-wing groups at that time. Formal connections between these rightist parties and ultra groups soon developed.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, 'the fan base became less political and more purely antagonistic, with an increased incidence of racist and xenophobic outbursts, including, among some northern ultras, a pronounced anti-Southern Italian sentiment'.<sup>45</sup> No Italian stadium could escape the humiliation of racist chants, banners displaying Fascist symbols and, occasionally, violent acts attributed to intolerance, as skinhead and extreme right groups came to dominate the terraces and the adjacent surroundings of football grounds. Almost every *curva* in Italy was a bastion of xenophobia, for the most part, in the north. Separatism, too, had a great impact on Italian football as the aforementioned political parties further divided an already fragmented society.<sup>46</sup>

More recently, according to Podaliri and Balestri,

an increasingly systematic recruitment campaign of young militants and effective political activists has been noticed. The demonstration of the evident mixture between right-wing politics and football comes from the numerous career opportunities offered to some ultra leaders because of their ability to supply votes and gaining a consensus among young people. There are, for example, Parliamentary Members belonging to National Alliance who come from the Verona *curva* supporters. But it is above all inside the local governments that the presence of subjects connected to xenophobic and racist movement is observed. In Rome, for example, during the administrative elections of November 1993, a total of thirteen elected representatives belonging to right-wing lists came from the Roma and Lazio *curva* supporters.<sup>47</sup>

The obvious politicization of football is best demonstrated in Silvio Berlusconi's successful leadership of both Associazione Calcio Milan and his *Forza Italia* political party.<sup>48</sup> As it happens, the name of his party is a famous football chant used widely throughout the country,<sup>49</sup> while his position at the helm of a truly illustrious football club has been fundamental in his equally glorious political career.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Berlusconi is one of the rare exceptions among the breed of politicians,



who has succeeded in interchanging the all-important ‘politicization of football’ with the ‘footballization of politics’ in an attempt to prolong his stay in power.

The extreme right-wing parties and groups that promote xenophobia, anti-Semitism anti-Islamism and racism, such as the Northern League, the National Alliance, *Forza Italia*, *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore*, *Forza Nuova* and *Fronte Sociale Nazionale* relish support in northern Italy.<sup>51</sup> As one might expect, such parties and groups target immigration, to an extent where they consider it as a major threat to Italian society,<sup>52</sup> and, given that ant-discrimination laws still depend heavily on relevant European Union legislation, all issues related to immigration remain, by and large, unresolved. In fact, only the Italian Constitution of 1948 provides some guarantees against discrimination, which are still insufficient.<sup>53</sup> It is worthy of note, however, that

Public awareness of the problem of racial and ethnic discrimination is quite recent in Italy, and also recent is the introduction of clear legal remedies for those who are victims of discriminatory acts. Such delay has many causes. One, of course, is that – compared to other European countries – Italy has become only relatively late a country of immigration, thus postponing the rise of problems of contact with racial and ethnic groups perceived as ‘different’.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, racist acts in Italy – at least those recorded by the local authorities – are few, though it is quite possible that certain related incidents are merely classified as ordinary offences. In any case, the vast majority of racist acts during 2004 occurred in northern and central Italy (53% and 40% respectively), whereas the southern part of the country claimed some 7%.<sup>55</sup> In reference to the subject under examination, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance noted that

There have been such acts during football matches and the Italian authorities are trying to eliminate them by establishing specialised bodies within the police that close co-operate with supporters’ organisations while the Ministry of the Interior and the Italian football authorities have expressed their determination to impose fines and even suspend football matches where such incidents occur.<sup>56</sup>

### **The footballization of Italian politics**

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia published the ‘Racism, Football and the Internet’ report in 2002 revealing that Italian sites maintained by football fans are among the most racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic in Europe, together with those managed by Spanish supporter groups.<sup>57</sup> The following section of the report is, by any standard, alarming:

In the site of the Padova group called ‘Juventude Crociata’ football takes second place to politics. Most pages in the site are used to disseminate racist and xenophobic kind of propaganda. Group members declare themselves to be followers of an extreme right-wing political party called Forza Nuova, whose site is among the group links. The Pro Patria supporter group site shows more interest from football, but Fascist symbols and racist references are still abundant. What seems to be really alarming in this site is the area containing songs and chants (presented in a downloadable format). This section contains stadium chants as well as other slogans like ‘there are no Italian niggers’ and the monkey imitation racist supporters make when a black player touches the ball. A different analysis is necessary for the site of Lazio ‘Irriducibili’, the main supporter group of the Lazio team. This site, technically excellent, has been added to

the most racist ones not only and just because it contains a large number of racist messages in the guestbook, fascist symbols, racist and anti-Semitic statements in other pages, but because we consider it to be especially dangerous. This group is well-known world-wide because of its racist expressions and many other smaller groups often tend to imitate it. It is no coincidence that almost all the Italian and Spanish sites with racist content contain a link to this site; it is also hardly a coincidence that in many foreign guestbooks (e.g. Chelsea and Paris Saint Germain) individual supporters referred to Lazio's supporters' fascism and racism.<sup>58</sup>

As it happens,

The Irriducibili have formed a link with the extreme rightist remains of Chelsea's old hooligan gang, the Headhunters, since Lazio's games against Chelsea in the Champions League in the 1999–2000 season. The Irriducibili are a prominent example of a politically motivated racist ultra group. In their banners and their chants, they draw on standard nationalistic and supranational notions of race and whiteness.<sup>59</sup>

It is worthy of note that

Since Mussolini's rise, Lazio has always had associations with fascism and was explicitly connected with Mussolini himself. However, from the late 1980s this connection has been reinvigorated and re-emphasised by the Irriducibili ultras. They have employed Lazio games as a means of expressing their extremist views on African, Albanian and other Balkan immigrants and refugees. It is significant that the increasingly politicised racism of this group emerged just as immigration to the region of Lazio itself increased.<sup>60</sup>

Although Società Sportiva Lazio was, allegedly, supported by Benito Mussolini, it is not certain that the nationalistic views of the club's supporters echo the Italian dictator's aspirations.<sup>61</sup> In any case, the area that the Irriducibili occupy on the terraces of the Stadio Olimpico is fittingly named *curva in nero*, black curve, as the choice of colour matches the shady nature of all things Fascist.<sup>62</sup> The fans of Società Sportiva Lazio revel in their racist identity and take pride in Italy's Fascist legacy, often singing the national anthem and making Fascist salutes at the same time. They are also known for their anti-Semitic views, usually aired at the expense of city rivals Associazione Sportiva Roma fans. Rome's other football powerhouse has had a number of presidents with Jewish origins in the past, hence the club's subjection to anti-Semitic chants. In general, racism has taken its toll on Italian football as the following examples illustrate. Racism in Milanese football was closer related to fans of Football Club Internazionale Milano until the arrival of Paul Ince in 1994. More-than-just-neighbours Associazione Calcio Milan, on the other hand, featured Ruud Gullit in its ranks, who dedicated his 1987 'European Player of the Year' award to Nelson Mandela. Ince, however, was often subjected to racial abuse when playing away from home. On one such occasion, Ince was being derided by the fans of Unione Sportiva Cremonese and when he attempted to ridicule them by applauding their actions the match official, ironically, had him booked for contempt. Another disturbing incident concerns the failure of Udinese Calcio officials to secure the services of Israeli international Ronnie Rosenthal because of local anti-Semitic demonstrations. Tim Parks, in *A Season with Verona*, recorded a number of incidents where supporters of Hellas Verona Football Club engaged in racist chanting. His book also highlights cases where fans of the club, based in the northern part of the country, abused supporters of clubs from the south.<sup>63</sup> All in all, it



appears that racism in Italian football reflects impressions of the body politic, given that Umberto Bossi, at the time Minister of Reform (what an oxymoron), called immigrants ‘Bingo Bongo’ during an otherwise normal political speech. Combating xenophobia was, therefore, the intention of the Italian Football Federation when the use of banners that had racist connotations was banned from stadiums in January 2000. In this case, the local football governing body was merely responding to Società Sportiva Lazio fans’ display of a huge banner commemorating the death of ‘Tiger’ Arkan, a notorious war criminal.<sup>64</sup> Beyond any doubt, the intervention of the Italian Football Federation was imperative. As it happens, a few years earlier a section of Hellas Verona Football Club exceeded even the most racist fan’s expectations when they burned a black dummy in 1996 to underline their strong opposition to their club recruiting a black player. However, the Italian football governing body’s response to racism has not always been as vigorous. In 2005 Mark Zoro of Football Club Messina Peloro was severely abused by fans of Football Club Internazionale Milano to such an extent that he picked up the ball at some point during the game, asking the match official to end the game in protest at racist chanting; but the referee was not prepared to take such a radical decision. The Italian Football Federation responded by merely devoting the next Italian Cup ties and *Serie A* matches to anti-racism – no fine or penalty of any kind was imposed. Fortunately, football players are sometimes far more willing to make a compelling statement against racism. Following the racial abuse of Treviso Football Club’s Nigerian-born Akeem Omolade in 2001 by the club’s own fans, his teammates all appeared on the pitch in the next home game with their faces painted black.<sup>65</sup> Sadly, Zoro suffered more racial abuse the year after at the hands of Football Club Internazionale Milano fans but, once more, the Italian Football Federation took no action, despite the fact that FIFA’s regulations envisage the deduction of league points and even stipulate the relegation of clubs whose fans are repeatedly found guilty of racist acts.<sup>66</sup> As if maintaining some corrupt tradition, Zoro was abused, yet again, when Football Club Internazionale Milano hosted Football Club Messina Peloro in December 2006. Except for the ‘customary’ racist chants and jeering, every time the player touched the ball, the Milanese fans displayed a banner that read ‘*Zoro infame. Il razzismo non è un ululato ma i lamenti di un invasato*’, which translates to ‘Zoro is a disgrace. Racism is not wailing, but the lament of an obsessive’.<sup>67</sup> However, ‘At some clubs such as Lazio or Fiorentina, monkey chanting is not merely a way of upsetting opponents . . . it is politically motivated or instrumental’.<sup>68</sup> Given that black football players in Italy first appeared around the early 1980s, the response of the Italian Football Federation was long overdue and quite ineffective – particularly when considering that FIFA’s anti-racism regulations had already been in effect since 2000.<sup>69</sup> Surprisingly, the Italian football governing body adopted FIFA’s guidelines as recently as 2006.<sup>70</sup> In the meantime, Paolo Di Canio of Società Sportiva Lazio saluted his club’s fans twice by raising his arm in the well-known Fascist manner. What is promising is the reaction of the club Di Canio played his football for. Having explicitly declared his admiration for Benito Mussolini, the club’s officials distanced themselves from the player, who later received a pitiful fine and a one-match ban,<sup>71</sup> even though the fans’ appreciation of his off-the-pitch skills must have been enough to account for the fact that ‘Di Canio’s fascist salute features on unofficial merchandise sold outside the Stadio Olimpico’.<sup>72</sup> On the whole, racism in Italian football appears greatly related to the country’s historical background and contemporary political developments. The *ultràs* are actually a very accurate reflec-

tion of Italy's polarized society in the 1970s, although their racist conduct pertains to the sudden influx of immigrants during the 1980s. The sheer existence of political parties generating a strong sense of nationalistic fervour and intolerance, eventually, produced the necessary grounds for extreme groupings such as the *Irriducibili* to surface. While somehow associated with Italian dictator Mussolini, this hard-core group of football fans simply survived – thrived rather – by targeting immigrants and all things not Italian. The display of symbols that celebrate a shameful and much forgotten part of the continent and, of course, Italy's past epitomizes the ethnocentric conduct of a section of supporters.<sup>73</sup> The effects on football notwithstanding, politics seem to blend well with the popular game in Italy.

### Conclusion

In Italy, the proper development of football, or *calcio* to be more precise, was held captive by obscene nationalistic aspirations emanating from an innately xenophobic political environment that sought to attain control over every cultural aspect of the country. Actually, it seems that the manipulation of football was not just another nation-building plan of no particular significance, but a well-conceived strategy devoted entirely to the promotion and reinforcement of a distinct national identity. Mussolini and his like had obviously recognized the game's unifying capacity and other relevant qualities long before the game reached maturity in Italy. Hence, the Fascist leadership was provided with an excellent opportunity in terms of shaping the beautiful game in such a manner that would, naturally, serve the cause of the regime, while also enhancing the popularity of football and Mussolini alike. It suffices to say that serving the regime was almost synonymous with propagating xenophobia across the country. It is noteworthy, however, that the popular game prospered during Mussolini's stay in power, even though some unorthodox measures were adopted to facilitate its expansion.

Evidently, the approach of modern-day extreme right-wing parties to football differs little from the policies adopted by the Italian dictator. These political formations, too, have sought to exploit the immense popularity of the game for the sheer purpose of advancing their prejudiced agendas, all the while blemishing the image of football. The use of racist language in political discourse, either directed to fellow-Italians from the southern part of the country or foreigners from distinct ethnic backgrounds, is suggestive of their ethnocentric stance. While the political division of Italian society accounts for the emergence of the *ultras*, nevertheless, racial abuse in football stadiums is solely attributed to the persistently secessionist, xenophobic campaigns of the aforementioned parties and groups. Whether victims of separatist objectives that near absurdity or the 'common' racial abuse habitually directed at foreigners, Italian authorities (footballing or otherwise) have yet to combat discrimination in football effectively.

The 'politicization of football' might have had a negative impact on the diffusion of the popular game in Italy; however, it did contribute towards its rapid development and the success that crowned the efforts of Italy's clubs and national team at international level, thus serving the cause of the game, albeit in an unconventional fashion. The 'footballization of politics', on the other hand, proved detrimental for the course of the game, given the political connotations embedded in the objectives of both the *ultras* and, sure enough, the extreme right-wing formations. Distorting with relative ease and in an admittedly preposterous manner the actual

substance of socio-political issues pertaining to domestic divisions or immigration has already compromised the integrity of a game that has the capacity to promote integration under much different circumstances. On the whole, the ‘footballization of politics’ has overwhelmed the qualities of the popular game, oddly enough, by merely taking advantage of football’s mass appeal while oversimplifying social and political phenomena that command far greater attention.

## Notes

1. Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 16–22.  
Agnew, *Forza Italia*, 55.  
Foot, *Calcio*, 17–18.
2. *Ibid.*, 1.
3. Kuper, *Soccer Against the Enemy*, 27.
4. Connolly and MacWilliam, *Fields of Glory, Paths of Gold*, 49.
5. Flutlicht. ‘Different Roots – One Game’, 1 Nov. 2006, available at <http://www.flutlicht.org>
6. Foot, *Calcio*, 37–38.
7. Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 63.
8. Agnew, *Forza Italia*, 58.
9. Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 64–6.
10. *Ibid.*, 79.
11. *Ibid.*, 127.
12. *Ibid.*, 153–5
13. *Ibid.*, 139.
14. Agnew, *Forza Italia*, 57.
15. Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 173–4.
16. *Ibid.*, 142–44.
17. Foot, *Calcio*, 112–13.
18. *Ibid.*, 355.  
Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 3.
19. Connolly and MacWilliam, *Fields of Glory, Paths of Gold*, 50–1.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 176.
22. Podaliri and Balestri, ‘The Ultràs, Racism and Football Culture in Italy’, 89.
23. Giulianotti, *Football*, 56.
24. Finn and Giulianotti, ‘Epilogue’, 261
25. Podaliri and Balestri, ‘The Ultràs, Racism and Football Culture in Italy’, 95.
26. Carnibella *et al.*, *Football Violence in Europe*, 69.
27. Podaliri and Balestri, ‘The Ultràs, Racism and Football Culture in Italy’, 95–6.
28. European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, ‘Racism in Rural Areas’, 177–8.
29. Foot, *Calcio*, 309.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Giulianotti, *Football*, 160.
32. Lanfranchi with Wagg, 129–30.
33. Carnibella *et al.*, *Football violence in Europe*, 69.
34. King, *The European Ritual*, 231.
35. Giulianotti, *Football*, 56.
36. *Ibid.*, 54.
37. King, *The European Ritual*, 231.
38. Hazard and Gould, ‘Three Confrontations and a Coda’, 202.
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