The Game of the Italians: Football and Dual Identity in Argentina 1910-1935

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Abstract: In 1934 Italy won the football World Cup with four Argentine-born players in their squad. Whilst this reflected Argentine footballing excellence during the era, it was also recognition of the close relationship between Italian and Argentine national identity born from mass immigration from Italy to Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. Using the case study of football, this paper challenges existing assumptions surrounding national identity construction in Argentina that has largely neglected the role of dual identity amongst immigrant groups, and which has focused instead on assimilation and a discourse of the Argentine 'melting pot' in bringing these disparate elements into a national whole. In contrast to a concurrent narrative of nativizing Argentine football from British influence in the 1910s, this paper makes the case that it was the Italo-Argentine community that held influence in the sport, both at a playing and boardroom level over the next two decades. It will demonstrate how football afforded Italo-Argentine community the opportunity to celebrate both their Argentine and Italian identity through the example of Genoa's 1923 tour to Argentina. Moreover, we examine how the reverse migration of footballers from Argentina to Italy from 1910 further complicated ideas of national identity.

Keywords: Sport; Identity; Argentina; Migration; Ethnicity; Assimilation

Rezumat: În 1934, Italia a câştigat cupa mondială la fotbal cu patru jucători născuţi în Argentina în echipă. În timp ce acest fapt reflectă excelenţa Argentinei în domeniul fotbalului în acel moment, el reprezintă şi o recunoaştere a relaţiei strânse dintre identitatea naţională argentiniană şi italiană apărută în contextual imigraţiei în masă din Italia în Argentina la începutul secolului XX. Folosind studiul de caz al fotbalului, acest studio dialoghează cu prezumţiile

existente în privința construcției identității naționale în Argentina, care au neglijat în mare măsură rolul identității duale în rândul grupurilor de imigranți și care s-au focalizat în schimb asupra asimilării și a discursului referitor la 'cazanul de topit' argentinian și rolul acestuia în a reduce această diversitate de elemente într-un tot național. În contrast cu o narațiune concurentă, referitoare la 'nativizarea' fotbalului argentinian sub influență engleză în anii 1910, această lucrare sugerează rolul comunității italo-argentiniene în consolidarea acestui sport, atât în privința jocului în sine cât și la nivelul decizional, în următoarele două decenii. Lucrarea va demonstra cum fotbalul a oferit comunității italo-argentiniene oportunitatea de a celebra atât identitatea lor italiană cât și cea argentiniană prin exemplul turului genovez în Argentina din 1923. În plus, studiul va examina cum migrația în revers a fotbaliștilor din Argentina în Italia, începând cu 1910 a complicat și mai mult problema identității naționale.

Cuvinte cheie: sport, identitate, Argentina, migrație, etnie, asimilare

Introduction

As Nancy Struna has noted, sport has long been regarded by academics as a way of illustrating social formation within individual nation states and territories. As such, the understanding of sporting social history can tell us much about how national identities are constructed and evolve over time.[1] John Wilson contends that leisure activity has long since been a medium through which societies have projected nationhood and established national identities. More importantly in the Argentine context where the country was fundamentally shaped by mass immigration, Wilson highlights sport's capacity 'to integrate existing conglomerates into national communities'.[2]

Ranaan Rein's 2015 historical exploration of *Fútbol, Jews and the Making of Argentina* explicitly recognised the role of dual identities, ignored by other scholars. His study of one specific ethnic group was prompted by a recognition that 'very little has been written about ethnicity and sports in immigrant societies such as Argentina'. However, by focusing solely on the Jewish community, Rein gives no sense of the contribution of larger and more influential immigratory communities, a gap this research fills.[3] In the wider historiography of Argentine identity,

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[1] Nancy Struna, 'Social History and Sport', in Jay Coakley – Eric Dunning (eds), *Handbook of Sports Studies* (London: Sage Publishing, 2007), pp.189–90.

[2] John Wilson, *Politics and Leisure*, (London: Routledge,1988), p.149.

[3] Ranaan Rein, *Fútbol, Jews, and the Making of Argentina*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p.1.

writers like Samuel Baily, Dorna Zaboli and Fernando Devoto have shown that there is a role for examining dual-identity, in which the children and grandchildren of immigrants did not entirely forego celebrating their ethnic heritage.[4] Indeed, Devoto observes that 'It is somewhat paradoxical to note that in Argentine historiography unlike that in the United States, scholars have been reluctant to describe the nation as a multi-ethnic society'.[5]

In using the case study of the relationship between the demographically important Italo-Argentine community and football, this paper advances the historical understanding of dual identity in nations shaped by immigration. We explore how football offered a way for the Italian community to exert a greater influence in Argentine society than their absolute numbers would otherwise suggest, investigating the agency of the collective as administrators, players and supporters. Furthermore, by investigating the case study of Genoa's 1923 tour to Argentina, we show how the sport gave the Italo-Argentine community opportunity to express their Italian identity.

Whilst the presence of dual Italo-Argentine identity within Argentine football reflected wider complications surrounding Argentine national identity, the same was true in terms of narratives of Italian national identity. The fluid nature of national identity amongst Italo-Argentines was reflected by the labour migration to Italy of dozens of Argentine footballers from the 1910s to the 1940s and further confused by their incidence in the Italian national team, exemplified by the presence of four Argentine-born players in Italy's 1934 World Cup-winning team. Zachary Bigalke has approached the issue through an in-depth study of the Italo-Argentine involvement in that World Cup victory,[6] one that has also attracted the interest of Simon Martin due to the links between Italian football and the Fascist state.[7] Meanwhile, scholarship by Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor has focused principally on the migratory

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[4] Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City. 1870–1914*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999; Dorna Zaboli, 'Italian Immigration to Argentina 1880–1914: Assimilation or Rejection of Argentine Society', *Glendon Journal of International of International Studies*, Vol.8, No.1–2 (2015): 1–15; Fernando J. Devoto, 'Progress and Politics of the First Italian Elite of Buenos Aires 1852–80', in Donna R. Gabaccia – Fraser M. Ottanelli (eds), *Italian Workers of the World*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 2001.

[5] Devoto, 'Progress and Politics of the First Italian Elite of Buenos Aires 1852–80', pp.41–2.

[6] Zachary Bigalke, *"If They Can Die for Italy, They Can Play for Italy!" Immigration, Italo-Argentine Identity, and the 1934 World Cup Team*, MA Thesis, Manuscript, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2017.

[7] Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp.58–65.

phenomenon that they suggest began in 1925 with Torino's signing of Julio Libonatti, something that aroused 'ambiguities' enabling different interpretations of national identity to be applied in the respective countries.[8] Much of the existing literature posits that this migratory flow was the result of regulatory changes within Italian football included within the 1926 Carta di Viareggio which banned foreign players, but allowed for the contracting of South American players with Italian heritage.[9] This paper argues that footballing interactions between the two nations ran much deeper than this and began at an earlier point than otherwise suggested. It investigates these 'ambiguities' more deeply to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and complexity of dual Argentine and Italian identity within Italy.

Football and National Identity Construction in Argentina

To exploit the opportunities afforded by the opening up of the *pampas* for cattle and sheep ranching, and cereal cultivation for the transatlantic export market, Argentina needed labour and lots of it.[10] Influenced by Social Darwinism and Herbert Spencer's theories of racial determinism, Argentine nation-builder, Juan Bautista Alberdi argued that the route to his country's progress lay in 'improving the blood line' of its population, with immigration from Europe perceived as the answer. [11] Predicting the impact that mass immigration would have on the shaping of Argentine identity, Alberdi wrote in 1852:

> Do not fear, then, the confusion of tongues and races. From Babel, from the chaos, there will emerge, some bright, fine day, the South American nationality. Our soil adopts men, it attracts and assimilates them and makes our land theirs.[12]

State financial assistance was made available for immigrants to cross the Atlantic following the 1876 Avellaneda Law, whilst Argentina's temperate climate was also attractive to them. Argentina's 1869 population of 1.8 million more than quadrupled to 7.8 million by 1914 as foreigners accounted for half of the inhabitants of the capital, Buenos

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[8] Pierre Lanfranchi – Matthew Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp.72–81.
[9] Martin, *Football and Fascism*, pp.58–65.
[10] Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America*, (London: Penguin, 1992), p.283.
[11] Juan Bautista Alberdi, 'Immigration as a Means of Progress', in Gabriela Nouzeilles – Graciela Montaldo (eds), *The Argentina Reader*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 100.
[12] Ibid, pp.95–101.

Aires, even allowing for the number of Argentine-born offspring born to earlier immigrants.[13] Although some immigrants settled in provincial cities such as Rosario, Córdoba and Mendoza, or worked in the countryside, the vast majority remained at their first point of arrival, Buenos Aires, where the greatest demand for labour existed.[14] Better skilled, and endowed with greater literacy than the existing *criollo* inhabitants from the popular classes, these immigrants therefore improved the human capital available in Argentina.[15] Collectively nicknamed *gringos*, foreign immigrants had myriad reasons for going to Argentina. Some went to escape persecution, some to escape poverty and make a new life for themselves, whilst other *golondrinas* ('swallows') migrated back and forth across the Atlantic back to capitalise on the opportunity to earn money during the harvest seasons of both Argentina and Europe.[16] Crucially, each contributed to new understandings of national identity.

Italian immigration was the most numerous in Argentina, accounting for almost half of all foreigners there by 1914 (see Table 1). Early immigration came from the more prosperous, northern regions of Italy such as Liguria, Sardinia, Piedmont and Tuscany, but later arrivals in the late nineteenth century originated principally from the poorer southern regions of Apulia, Calabria, Campania and Sicily. It was Italian entrepreneurs who dominated Argentina's incipient industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century, owning more than half of the country's factories, and becoming key players in the Argentine economy. As with other immigrant groups, the Italian community formed their own mutual aid societies, banks and newspapers, the most prominent of which was *La patria degli Italiani*, published between 1877 and 1930.[17]

The impact of mass immigration aroused debates within Argentine intelligentsia about the country's identity as the government wrestled with how best to assimilate these arrivals into a common purpose. Those born on Argentine soil, regardless of parentage, were automatically granted

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[13] Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, (University Park Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), pp.10–11; María Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina: Historia del País y de su Gente* [Argentina, History of the Country and its People], (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2012), p.325.

[14] Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, p.11.

[15] Colin M. Lewis, *Argentina: A Short History*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), p.102.

[16] Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina*, p.391; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, p.14; República Argentina, *Tercer censo nacional, leventado el 1° de junio de 1914,* (Buenos Aires: República Argentina, 1916), pp.403–17; Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1970), pp.42–3.

[17] Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina*, pp.39–4; Colin M. MacLachlan, *Argentina: What Went Wrong*, (Westport: Praeger, 2006), pp.45–6.

citizenship based on *jus soli*. Therefore, the idea of being *criollo* or a native Argentine was being reinterpreted as the result of mass immigration. The conventional and original understanding of the term *criollo*, 'Creole' related to the white Argentine-born descendants of Spanish colonists, dating back to the sixteenth century.[18] State-led attempts at the assimilation of these 'new' *criollos* came with the instruments under its direct control, principally education and the military as they sought to incorporate immigrant populations into a 'hyphen-less' Argentine nation.[19]

The introduction of state primary schooling in 1884, which was free, mandatory and secular, meant that the children of immigrants, whether they originated from Italy, Spain or elsewhere were inculcated with Argentine patriotism.[20] This was done through *mitrismo*, a historiographical current based on the writings of former president Bartolomé Mitre which created a pantheon of national military and civic leaders in what became known as the 'Official History' of Argentina.[21] Used in schoolbooks, this civic version of national identity was designed to elicit an emotional response in which the newly arrived immigrant and the *criollo* could unite in a sense of *argentinidad*.[22] Meanwhile, the Argentine-born sons of immigrants became liable for a year's military conscription at the age of twenty. It was policy to mix conscripts from different areas of the nation and socio-economic backgrounds in order to accelerate assimilation.[23] Nationalist intellectual Manuel Gálvez even suggested that this road to assimilation would be most quickly achieved in military combat, claiming: 'War would convert the foreigners to Argentines and the cosmopolitan spirit would be destroyed beneath the vast patriotic fervour'.[24]

Although enabling the assimilation of youngsters, these policies largely passed by large swathes of the adult immigrant population, who in many cases lacked sufficient knowledge of Spanish to absorb it. Despite many immigrants arriving in Argentina with the intention of making a

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[18] Michael Goebel, *Argentina's Partisan Past*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p.43.
[19] Donna R. Gabaccia – Fraser M. Ottanelli (eds), *Italian Workers of the World*, (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2001), p.3.
[20] Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, p.15.
[21] Goebel, *Argentina's Partisan Past*, pp.29–9.
[22] Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.188.
[23] James Scobie, *Argentina: A City and a Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.190–5; Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina*, p.423.
[24] Manuel Gálvez, *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga: Opiniones sobre la vida argentina* [The Diary of Gabriel Quiroga: Opinions about Argentine life], (Buenos Aires: Arnoldo Moen & Hno., 1910), p.78.

new life for themselves, only 2.25% of the foreign-born population took Argentine citizenship. Two key reasons account for this. Firstly, with citizenship came certain civic responsibilities, including military service. Secondly, their status as foreigners meant immigrants retained the legal protection of the diplomatic missions of their original countries whilst simultaneously enjoying the safeguards of the Argentine Civil Code.[25] For many immigrants this was a price worth paying for not having access to direct political participation. This reticence to become citizens created tensions between *criollos* and immigrants, who in the 1900s and 1910s were held to blame by *criollos* for increasing social conflict within Argentina as the introducers of socialism and anarchism, with workers acting collectively in meaningful ways for the first time. By contrast, hard-working *gringos* were equally scornful of what they saw as the idle nature of the *criollos*.[26] In 1909, the Italo-Argentine writer Eduardo Maglione argued that immigrants had actually improved Argentina culturally and economically, and that attempts to assimilate them to the 'indolent and ignorant creole mentality' would set back this improvement'.[27]

As an attempt to square the circle of forming a national citizenry out of these distinct social groupings of *criollos*, immigrants, and the descendants of immigrants, President Roque Sáenz Peña introduced the 1912 electoral reform law bearing his name. The Sáenz Peña Law, including other measures like secret ballots, granted the vote to all men holding Argentine citizenship. As a result, far more immigrants became naturalized, whilst their Argentine-born children felt a greater kinship to the land of their birth than those of their forebears, giving rise to a more civically active and homogenous society.[28]

Despite the concerns of nationalists, a discernible identity emerged from the cosmopolitanism of Buenos Aires at the most basic level. Immigrants from different backgrounds intermixed with working-class and middle-class *criollos* at a neighbourhood basis to create an organic hybrid civic society rather than disperse into ethnic ghettos, as happened in other countries of high immigration such as the United States. The lack of cultural homogeneity enabled the incorporation of

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[25] Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina*, p.325.

[26] Ibid, pp.446–7.

[27] Eduardo F. Maglione, 'Cosmopolitismo y espíritu nacional' [Cosmopolitanism and national spirit], *Renacimiento*, II (November 1909), pp.320-6.

[28] Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina*, pp.446-7; Jorge A. Nállim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism in Argentina*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p.27; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, pp.37–8; Matthew B. Karush, *Workers or citizens: democracy and identity in Rosario, Argentina, 1912–1930*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), p.26.

immigrant customs and words, principally from Italy, such as *chau* (goodbye) and *pibe* (street kid), contributing to a new vernacular known as *lunfardo* and the emergence of new cultural expressions like the tango (which also incorporated Afro-Argentine influences).[29] The mutation of Spanish into this local slang became the *de facto* language of the street, and was transformed into the written word with its adoption in popular media outlets such as the magazine *Caras y Caretas* as it competed for sales in a changed cultural market place.[30] It was within these rapidly urbanised cosmopolitan *barrios* of Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities, that football became an agent for the establishment of a shared local identity. Football supplemented, and to an extent, supplanted extant national identities, acting as an engine for integration and assimilation as the Genoan, Asturian, *criollo* and Englishman played side by side or stood together on the terraces.[31]

The key to football's broader diffusion across both ethnic and class boundaries was its simplicity. Language was not implicitly a barrier, as this could be overcome with mutually understood gestures and body language, whilst the background noise from the crowd often rendered talking on the pitch redundant. Moreover, as a new cultural phenomenon (to working-class Argentina), participants had no pre-existing notions of how the game should be played, allowing for home-grown idiosyncrasies to evolve, eventually forming a footballing identity that became apparent when transposed against foreign touring teams. Economically, football was a cheap sport, requiring only a ball, goal posts and space to play, enabling participation by the popular classes who were otherwise excluded from elitist sports such as golf, tennis and rowing. Neither was it necessary to be a player to feel part of the collective experience. One could also do so as a spectator, expressing partisanship for those wearing the shirt of their local neighbourhood or co-workers.[32]

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[29] Scobie, *Argentina: A City and a Nation*, pp.190–5.

[30] Geraldine Rogers, *Caras y Caretas, Cultura, Política y Espáactulo en los Inicios del Siglo XX Argentina* [Caras y Caretas, Culture, Politics and Spectacle at the Beginning of the 20th Century], (La Plata: EDULP, 2008), pp.230–2.

[31] Horacio Rosatti, *Cien años de multitud: historia de Boca Juniors, una pasión argentina: I. El period amateur* [One hundred years of multitude: History of Boca Juniors, an Argentine passion], (Buenos Aires, Galerna, 2009), pp.19–21 and pp.59–60; Martín Caparrós, *Boquita* [Little Boca], (Buenos Aires: Booklet, 2012) p.18; Rein, *Fútbol, Jews and the making of Argentina*, pp.45–6.

[32] Rosatti, *Cien años de multitud I*, pp.19–21; Tony Mason, *Association Football & English Society 1863–1915*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp.24–31; R. Holt, *Sport and the British*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp.153–4.

It was this simplicity that enabled football to take a foothold amongst the popular classes. Whilst Chris Gaffney has suggested that football was able to develop unopposed by other sports, the popularity of pelota – a high-speed racquet game – amongst the Basque community did offer just such a challenge to football at the end of the nineteenth century as matches achieved attendances commensurate with football games.[33] The first pelota court in Argentina was opened in Buenos Aires in 1882 at Plaza Euskara and an 1885 match between two of the era's biggest pelota stars, Pedro Zavaleta and Indalecio Sarasqueta, attracted a crowd of 8,000, much larger than any attending football at this time.[34] However, where the two sports diverged was the ability of football to break across ethnic lines, something that pelota was not able to do with such success. The technical nature of pelota, rather like cricket in Argentina, militated against its cultural transfer beyond Basque immigrants. Reputedly, President Julio Roca and Buenos Aires Mayor, Torcuato de Alvear, watched matches in 'puzzlement' at the inauguration of Plaza Euskara.[35]

The ethnic heterogeneity within neighbourhoods in Argentine cities meant that the tendency to form football clubs along national immigrant lines was far less prevalent than in neighbouring nations like Chile and Brazil. In those two countries, clubs such as Unión Española, Audax Italia and CD Palestino in Chile, and Palestra Italia (later Palmeiras) and Vasco da Gama (founded by Portuguese) in Brazil, were formed by, and represented distinct immigrant groups. [36] The lack of ghettoization meant that this process scarcely occurred in Argentina. Amongst clubs of the British community, those that were explicitly ethnically British, such as Old Caledonians and St. Andrew's Athletic Club, had only a limited longevity.[37] Clubs formed explicitly along ethnic lines were not established until the 1950s, with the arrival of Sportivo

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[33] L. Contreras, *Buenos Aires Fútbol* [Buenos Aires Football], (Buenos Aires: Olmo Ediciones, 2013), p.21; Chris Gaffney, 'Stadiums and society in twenty-first century Buenos Aires', *Soccer and Society*, Volume 10, Issue 2, (2009), pp.160–4; César R. Torres, 'South America', in S. W. Pope – John Nauright (eds), *Routledge Companion to Sports History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.557.

[34] Ariel Scher et al, *Deporte Nacional*, (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2010), pp.86–8.

[35] Vic Duke – Liz Crolley, 'Fútbol, Politicians and the People: Populism and Politics in Argentina, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 18:3, (2001): 100; Torres, 'South America', p.557.

[36] Brenda Elsey, *Citizens & Sportsmen*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp.138–40; Greg Bocketti, 'Italian Immigrants, Brazilian Football, and the Dilemma of National Identity', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 40, (2008), pp.275–83.

[37] Rosatti, *Cien años de multitud I*, pp.19-–21; Caparrós, *Boquita*, p.18; Elsey, *Citizens & Sportsmen*, pp.138–40; Bocketti, 'Italian Immigrants, Brazilian Football, and the Dilemma of National Identity', pp.275–83.

Italiano (1955) and later followed by Deportivo Español (1956) and Deportivo Armenio (1962), by which time the assimilation of immigrants into Argentina was an accomplished fact.[38]

La Italianización de la Argentina

In 1923 an advertisement for Bariatti and Co furniture appeared in the pages of *La Nación*:

> "Genoa Club" Young footballers … welcome to this great land of Argentina, where the effort and honest labour of OUR BEST have found real success.
> OUR COMPANY, of Italian origin, is eloquent testimony of Argentine hospitality in its consistent and incomparable progress.[39]

It reflected a discourse held in the 1910s and 1920s surrounding the assimilation and integration of immigrants into a unified Argentine society, one that continued to vex politicians and intellectuals of various viewpoints. If one group magnified these debates, it was the Italian community, which accounted for almost half of the immigrant population, and who embodied both Argentine and Italian identity.

As well as control of the Argentine economy, the dominant nature of the Italian cultural contribution to the *crisol de razas*, in terms of linguistics, customs and gastronomy led *criollo* nationalists to fear that Argentina was actually being Italianized, rather than the Italian community being Argentinized.[40] Italo-Argentines were seen as infiltrators, with the writer Ricardo Rojas arguing that they, 'have become dangerous as the result of their excessive quantity'.[41] It was a theory synthesized in the 1924 book by Néstor Maciel, whose title summed up the apparent threat, *La Italianización de la Argentina*.[42] As María Sáenz Peña suggests, the nature of Italian immigration, in which the ratio of arrivals was 2:1 in favour of men, meant that marriages with *criolla* women were the norm. This combined with lower rates of marriage within the *criollo* population led intellectuals to predict that by the middle of the twentieth century,

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[38] Alejandro Molinari – Roberto L. Martínez, *El Fútbol: La conquista popular de una pasión argentina*, (Avellaneda: Editorial de la Cultura Urbana, 2013), pp.147–8.
[39] *La Nación*, 20 August 1923, p.7.
[40] Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, pp.134–41.
[41] Ricardo Rojas, *La restauración nacionalista*, [The Nationalist Restoration] (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, 1909), pp.469-71.
[42] Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, p.19; Rosatti, *Cien años de multitud I*, pp.59–60; MacLachlan, *Argentina What Went Wrong*, pp.46–9.

'Argentina would be an Italo-American republic'.[43] It was a feeling exacerbated by the presence of so many Italian-only institutions across Argentina, beginning with the establishment of the Italian Hospital of Buenos Aires in 1858. By 1904 there were 121 Italian societies in the city of Buenos Aires alone, with a combined membership of 100,000. Among the most influential of these were the Unione e Benevolenza mutual society which had branches throughout Argentina, in cities like Córdoba, Río Cuarto and Rosario, and the Dante Alighieri Association which sought to preserve Italian culture within the community. In the religious sphere the Salesian order were also influential especially in the provision of education in Italian schools.[44] These various institutions acted interconnectedly, uniting Italo-Argentines around a common idea of Italian identity.[45]

Just as within the British community in Argentina, the First World War consolidated notions of dual identity within the Italo-Argentine collective. Although not in the same proportions as their British-Criollo counterparts, some 32,000 answered the call to fight for Italy when they joined the War in 1915. Although ultimately the decision to enlist was an individual one, peer group pressure was brought to bear on those called up by the Italian consulate. For example, the Circulo Italiano in Buenos Aires expelled any man of fighting age who did not return to Italy and enrol in the armed forces.[46] Indeed, the Italo-Argentine community celebrated the contribution made and lives lost in support of Italy's wartime effort with the unveiling of plaques within Buenos Aires in 1920.[47]

In the socio-political field, a more militant unionisation in support of workers' rights by socialists and anarchists was often led by Italians, such the anarchist Pedro Gori. As a result, the blame for worker agitation and resulting social strife was laid squarely on the shoulders of these outsiders, leading to the introduction of the 1910 Law of Social Defence, designed to deal with foreign-born political agitators.[48] This militancy was also seen in football, as players sought to improve their working conditions. A 1931 strike held by members of the Asociación Mutualista Footballers was led by several players from the Italian community including, Juan Scurzoni, Bartolucci and Hugo Settis. Denounced as anarchists by the footballing authorities of the Asociación Amateur Argentino de Football (AAAF), these ringleaders were deemed no longer eligible to play for Argentina because of their 'subversive' activity.[49]

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[43] Sáenz Quesada, *La Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 2009, pp.393–4.
[44] Ibid, pp.393–4 and pp.469–70.
[45] Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.121–3.
[46] Fernando J. Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2006), p.319.
[47] *La Nación*, 23 May 1920, p.6.
[48] Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, pp.102–12.
[49] Osvaldo Bayer, *Fútbol Argentino*, (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2010), p.38.

It was in the entrepreneurial field that Italian immigrant impact on Argentina was most evident. In a more pronounced way than other immigrant groups, such as the Spanish, the Italo-Argentine community were driven to succeed economically – to *Fare l'America*, 'make it in America' – and attain social mobility within Argentine society.[50] This work ethic combined with a greater level of literacy resulted in Italian immigrants and their families being at the vanguard of an emergent bourgeoisie of entrepreneurial industrialists and shop-keepers, introducing new techniques from Europe and filling the void of incipient industrialists which was not filled by native Argentines.[51] This work ethic enabled these Italo-Argentines to assume the economic dominance in Argentina vacated by the British after the First World War, owning more than half of the country's industrial production.[52]

Like their fellow entrepreneurs in the USA and other industrializing and increasingly urbanized societies, Italo-Argentine businessmen used the popularity of sports clubs for their own commercial or political ends. The 1912 Sáenz Peña electoral reforms saw an immediate impact in terms of political participation amongst the Italian community. The Socialist victory in the Buenos Aires by-elections of 1913, brought Italian immigrants like Nicolás Repetto and Mario Bravo into the Chamber of Deputies for the first time.[53]

The Argentine democratic club model in which football clubs were owned by members rather than by shareholders, meant that football acted as an excellent proving ground for incipient political careers, with elected roles within clubs offering a platform for demonstrating fitness for office in a wider setting, as well as building a personal support base amongst club members.[54] This can be seen in the example of River Plate. After the club's first president Leopoldo Bard completed his mandate in 1908, his seven successors up until 1931 all came from the Italo-Argentine community, using the position as a springboard for political office, as well as utilising their commercial and professional positions to improve

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[50] Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Time*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1924), p.423.

[51] Lewis, *Argentina: A Short History*, p.102; Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*, p.93; Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, pp.48–51.

[52] MacLachlan, *Argentina What Went Wrong*, p.30.

[53] Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism*, p.123; Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*, p.200.

[54] Dilwyn Porter, 'Entrepreneurship', in S. W. Pope – John Nauright (eds), *Routledge Companion to Sports History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp.197–8; Joel Horowitz, 'Football Clubs and Neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires before 1943: The Role of Political Linkages and Personal Influence', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 46, (2014): 561; Vic Duke and Liz Crolley, *Football, Nationality and the State*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p.103.

the club's facilities and ensure their continued success in club elections.[55] By the club elections of 1928, 65% of those bidding for office were Italo-Argentines. Among them was Antonio Zolezzi, who after arriving from Genoa as an immigrant, founded a business in the *barrio* of La Boca before becoming two-time president of River. As a Socialist councillor, Zolezzi used his political influence to obtain subsidies from the Buenos Aires metropolitan government for River and their erstwhile neighbours in La Boca, Boca Juniors.[56]

Meanwhile another Genovese, José Bacigaluppi, helped lead the club out of a troubled financial situation, setting them on the course to become the global institution that they are today.[57] He became president of River in 1921, who had until that point led a nomadic existence since their foundation in the *barrio* of La Boca in 1901. Recognising the need to stabilise the club in one location where it could grow a mass membership, Bacigaluppi told a meeting of the club's management committee, 'River is not a club for a *barrio*, it is for a city.'[58] Bacigaluppi was symbolic of the aspirational social mobility within the Italian community. Whilst the club's founding members could be found in the main among the working class of La Boca's dockworkers, he managed a business that dealt in the sale of land in the rapidly growing city and was well placed to find a site for a stadium big enough to match his ambitions for the club. Thanks to his contacts, Bacigaluppi was able to secure the rent of a huge site in the exclusive northern *barrio* of Recoleta from the Buenos Aires to Pacific Railway company for five years. From a base of 400 in 1920, the membership grew more than seven-fold to 3,493 in 1922 thanks to the move.[59]

Whilst football clubs were not exclusively Italian in make-up, there is sufficient evidence to show that from the 1910s until the 1930s Italo-Argentine players rose to the top in terms of talent and influence and were widely considered to be the best players in the Argentine game. Using the cover stars of the influential sports magazine *El Gráfico* as a barometer of prominence, we can see the overwhelming presence of Italo-Argentine players. The first player to appear on its cover was Américo Tesorieri on 8 July 1922, and from that point until the end of 1930, of all the players that appeared on the cover of *El Gráfico* more than once, 80%

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[55] Miguel Ángel Bertolotto, *River Plate. Mientras viva tu bandera* [River Plate. Whilst your flag flies], (Buenos Aires: Atlántida, 2016), p.22.

[56] *Boletín Oficial de River Plate*, Año 1, No.3, January 1929, p.4; Diego Barovero, *Caudillos and protagonista politicos en La Boca del Riachuelo*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2013), p.39.

[57] *Boletín Oficial de River Plate*, Año 1, No.3, January 1929, p.4; *Boletín Oficial de River Plate*, Año 2, No.7, May 1929, p.10.

[58] Carlos Aira, *Héroes de Tiento*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Fabro), 2015, p.115.

[59] *Boletín Oficial de River Plate*, Año 1, No.3, January 1929, p.4; *La Nación*, 6 December 1925.

came from an Italian background, with Raimundo Orsi and Roberto Cherro each appearing on the cover no fewer than five times. Meanwhile their level of influence can also be seen in a 1941 article by the renowned journalist, Félix Frascara. In discussing the nine players who had been the 'architects' of the *rioplatense* style of play up until that time, six of them were Italo-Argentines: Natalio Perinetti, Luis Ravaschino, Bacchi, Roberto Cherro, Chiesa and Cesáreo Onzari.[60] Another way of assessing the impact of Italo-Argentines on Argentine football is the make-up of the country's national team. After Anglo-Criollo players started to leave the scene, the Italian collective began to assume their influential role, which for much of the 1920s saw Italo-Argentines make up two-thirds of the team as Table 2 shows.

Heavy Italo-Argentine influence could also be seen in the support base of some of Argentina's biggest clubs. Although founded by players from a cross-section of Argentina's immigrants, Vélez Sarsfield's establishment in the Liniers district which was heavily populated by Italo-Argentines, saw that community account for 55% of the club's membership by 1924. Indeed, in 1914 the club changed the colour of its shirt to that of the Italian tricolour in homage to its support base, whilst the Italo-Argentine building magnate, José Amalfitani, president between 1923 and 1925 and from 1941 to 1969, left such an enduring legacy that the club's stadium is now named after him.[61]

Another way of assessing ideas of dual identity is to examine relationships between the point of departure and that of arrival for immigrants. The tour of Italian champions Genoa to Argentina in 1923 is instructive in demonstrating how these notions of dual identity were reflected through football in the context of wider relations between the Italo-Argentine community, of which 800,000 still held Italian passports, and the Argentine state.[62] As previously mentioned, Italian immigration regained momentum after the First World War, with 100,000 arriving in 1923 alone, more than double the number migrating to the United States. This meant that the 1.2 million Italians resident in Argentina was greater than the population of Rome.[63]

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[60] *El Gráfico*, 24 January 1941, pp.18–20.

[61] Club Atlético Vélez Sársfield, *Memoria y Ejercicio 1924*, (Buenos Aires: C A Vélez Sarsfield, 1925), pp.40–7; Club Atlético Vélez Sársfield, *Memoria y Ejercicio 1931*, (Buenos Aires: C A Vélez Sarsfield), 1932, pp.42–56; Club Atlético Vélez Sársfield, *Memoria y Ejercicio 1934*, (Buenos Aires: C A Vélez Sarsfield, 1935), pp.20–2.

[62] *La Nación,* 11 August 1923, p.7.

[63] *La Nación*, 9 October 1923, p.5.

Genoa was a significant connection given the iconic role played by the Ligurian city as the port of departure for the vast majority of the millions of Italian emigrants to Argentina.[64] Thousands of Italo-Argentines lined the dockside of Buenos Aires to welcome the Genoa team as they arrived on the *Principessa Mafalda* on 16 August. The make-up of this impromptu welcoming committee crossed class lines as the middle-class Italian merchants and small industrialists rubbed shoulders with the proletariat from the *conventillos* in a unified demonstration of their Italian-ness.[65] The great interest of the Italo-Argentine community manifested itself in myriad ways, the extent of which was not seen before or after for any touring teams. FIAT, who established its first factory in Argentina that year, made seven of its modern 515 models available to Genoa's entourage to transport themselves around Buenos Aires for the duration of their visit.[66]

For the second of Genoa's three matches a silver trophy was donated for the winners by the Nuevo Banco Italiano, prompting *La Nación* to argue: 'It is fit to assert that the banking institution was an exteriorisation of confraternity between the Italian and Argentine nations'.[67] The duality of identity was reflected in Genoa's opening match against Zona Norte at the stadium of Sportivo Barracas. In advance of kick-off there was an unscheduled fly-past in honour of the visitors by Italo-Argentine pilots led by Captain Eduardo Oliveiro who served in the Italian air force during the First World War.[68] Meanwhile, thirty thousand fans speaking Spanish, Italian and the hybrid Italian-inflected Lunfardo dialect, packed the stands displaying both Argentine and Italian flags.[69] Later tours by Italian clubs, such as that by Torino in 1929 engendered nothing like the same level of affection as that bestowed upon Genoa. Distaste towards the Fascist regime within the Italo-Argentine community, as well as Argentine cultural nationalists, was manifested by the whistling of the Bologna team, intimately linked with the regime when they gave the Fascist salute ahead of one of their 1929 tour matches.[70]

Rimpatriati: Italo-Argentines in Italian Football

The presence of Italo-Argentines in Italian football since the 1910s has largely been overlooked in the existing literature. Moreover, by pre-

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[64] Lanfranchi – Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, pp.72–81.
[65] *El Telégrafo de la Tarde*, 16 August 1923; *La Nación*, 22 July 1923, Section 2, p.3.
[66] Aira, *Héroes de Tiento*, p.138.
[67] *La Nación*, 22 August 1923, p.8.
[68] *La Nación*, 20 August 1923, p.6.
[69] Aira, *Héroes de Tiento*, pp.140–1.
[70] Martin, *Football and Fascism*, pp.194-7; *La Cancha*, 3 August 1929.

dating the rise to power of Mussolini's Fascist regime, their existence cannot be solely attributed to nationalist policies, and are resonant of the more personal and familial debates surrounding identity on the part of individual Italo-Argentine families. These footballers were the offspring of the 750,000 Italian returnees from Argentine migration between 1871 and 1950. Whilst Bigalke identifies that the return of Italian families reflected more general patterns of transitory transatlantic migration, we go further in explaining their specific contribution to Italian football.[71] The significance of their upbringing in Argentina was that they learned the sport in the *potreros* of Argentina cities like Buenos Aires and Rosario, where football was more developed than in Italy, honing skills that enabled them to flourish in Italian football after returning with their parents to the land of their ancestors.[72]

The first Italo-Argentine to make an impact was Cesare Lovati. Born in Buenos Aires on Christmas Day 1891, midfielder Lovati made his debut for AC Milan in 1910 before going on to play six times for the Italian national team.[73] Another feature of these *rimpatriati* or returnee players, was the incidence of siblings in the same teams. Although a year or two apart in age, they were often selected *en bloc* because they were collectively better than their Italian peers. The four Mosso brothers – Eugenio, Francisco, Julio and Benito – left Mendoza for Turin as teenagers in 1912 to return to their parents' native Piedmont. All played for Torino, with Eugenio representing Italy.[74] Meanwhile, the three Boglietti brothers – Ernesto, Romulo and Octavio – also migrated to Turin in the early 1910s, aged 14,13 and 12 respectively. Romulo debuted as a teenager for Juventus in 1913, having already played for Gimnasia y Esgrima de General Paz in his native Córdoba, shortly to be followed into the Juve side by his brothers.[75] Moreover, we can see the examples of the Badini brothers born and raised in Rosario, who returned as teenagers to their parents' native Bologna, with Angelo and Emilio starting to play for the club in 1913, soon to be followed by their two younger brothers. The integration of the Badinis, Bogliettis, Mossos and others into Italian football were early examples of how players who learned their football in Argentina, offering something different in terms of ability and playing style, alerted Italian clubs to the possibilities offered by Italo-Argentine

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[71] Bigalke, '"If They Can Die for Italy, They Can Play for Italy!"', pp.93–4.

[72] Salvatore Lo Presto, *Tango bianconero: Dai Fratelli Boglietti a Dybala e Higuaín* [Black and White Tango: From the Boglietti Brothers to Dybala and Higuaín], (Turin: Bradipolibri, 2017), pp.8–9.

[73] Fabrizio Melegari (ed.), *Almanacco Ilustrato del Calcio 2019*, (Modena: Panini, 2018), p.626.

[74] Lo Presto, *Tango bianconero*, p.8.

[75] Ibid, pp.8–15.

players. As such, these footballing representatives of dual identity cannot simply be dismissed as the offspring of *golondrinas* who just happened to be born in Argentina. As we can see from Table 3, four of the eleven Italo-Argentines to have worn the *azzurri* of the Italian national team up until 1935 came from this first wave of *rimpatriati*.

The first player to cross the Atlantic for purely economic reasons was Libonatti who joined Torino from Newell's Old Boys in 1925 after being talent spotted by the Italian club's president, Enrico Marone, whilst in Buenos Aires on business as owner of the Cinzano drinks company.[76] But as has been widely reported in the existing literature, it was nationalist reforms of the Italian game enshrined in the 1926 Carta di Viareggio that led to the real talent drain of Italo-Argentine players to Italy. These signings were an imaginative response on the part of Italian clubs to the Charter, which scaled back the signing of foreign players from powerful neighbouring Danubian countries like Austria, Yugoslavia and Hungary, from two per team in 1926 to none by 1928. The rationale behind this policy being that the Italian league championship should not became an extension of the Austrian and Hungarian leagues, thus aiding the development of young Italian players.[77] The pretext that the Argentine players were brought back because of their Italian cultural roots was something of an oxymoron; they were in fact repatriated *exactly* because they offered something different to what already was on offer in Italy. Indeed, in another contradiction they became direct replacements for the now excluded Austrians and Hungarians, thus perverting the Charter's original intentions.

This second migratory wave, which included the cream of Argentine footballers such as Raimundo Orsi, Renato Cesarini and Guillermo Stábile occurred as the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini used football to create a feeling of unity and national sense of purpose that had been undermined by mass emigration from the economically undeveloped country. This had seen an international Italian diaspora of six million people living outside the peninsula by 1914, a sizeable proportion of which lived on the banks of the Río de la Plata. Considered part of the Italian race, these descendants of emigrants, were welcomed 'home' with open arms as being members of a 'Greater Italy', whose extremity went beyond the geographical confines of the Italian peninsula, with citizenship granted on the basis of *jus sanguini*.[78] It was a refrain

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[76] Lanfranchi – Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, pp.72–81.

[77] John Foot, *Calcio*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), p.25; Martin, *Football and Fascism*, pp.63–5.

[78] Lanfranchi – Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, pp.72–73; Martin, *Football and Fascism*, pp.63–5; Foot, *Calcio*, pp.429–31.

taken up in a 1931 article published in *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and reprinted in its entirety in Argentina by *La Nación*. According to the Italian newspaper:

> The repatriated are authentic Italians, and if their denomination as regards citizenship, is that of Italo-Argentines, the blood is clearly Italian even when the right of [South] American citizenship through place of birth has been assigned in addition to the Italian citizenship that they have not lost. And when these elements return to the Fatherland it is not that they reassume Italian citizenship because one does not acquire that which he has not renounced.[79]

What was seen in Italy as an 'inevitable repatriation of Italian citizens', was regarded differently in Argentina. The exodus of Argentina's top players enabled *El Gráfico* to expound a nationalist narrative, in which Italian immigrants were perceived to have been 'improved' by *criollo* ways and went home as 'Super-Italians' and *criollo* footballing missionaries. As the magazine explained when Guillermo Stábile left in 1930 after top-scoring for Argentina at the World Cup:

> We must not be egotistical. Orsi, Cesarini, Stábile and those crossing frontiers in search of better horizons, to other countries that need them, must be seen in the same way as Old Spain saw its conquerors leave. They go to conquer other lands. The country is now a little small for us, and a good football lesson given on one of our pitches no longer dazzles anyone. For many years we have perfected the art of dribbling and scoring goals. For that reason, it is necessary to go abroad, the good players that do us proud abroad are working patriotically.[80]

According to Osvaldo Bayer, this was the start of, 'a colonial bleeding that remains even today – and more than ever – is suffered by *criollo* football'.[81] The Italian response was unequivocal. *La Gazzetta dello Sport* argued:

> The laments that flourish in the South American periodicals every time a local player takes the steam ship are perfectly understandable from the sporting and sentimental point of

[79] *La Nación*, 15 March 1931, Section 2, p.6.
[80] *El Gráfico*, 25 October 1930, p.37.
[81] Bayer, *Fútbol argentino*, p.25.

> view, but are radically absurd when they appear in nationalist terms: for Argentines don't leave for Italy; Italians return to Italy … Without money it is said they would not come … nobody could blame them if an Italian from [South] America returned to Italy in the same way that nobody would think it strange if a player from the South of Italy would pack his suitcases to play for a club in the North. It is a question of distance and not of principle.[82]

Italian citizenship had associated civic duties like military service, a serious consideration given Italy's colonial forays into the Horn of Africa in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Italy coach Vittorio Pozzo justified the selection of Italo-Argentines for the national team on this basis, famously claiming, 'If they can die for Italy, they can play for Italy!' and was not a flippant remark given that he himself had fought in the Italian Mountain Infantry during the First World War.[83] The first to do so in the Fascist era was Libonatti, adding 17 appearances for the *Azzurri* to the 15 international caps he earned for Argentina. The presence of Italo-Argentines in the blue jersey represented a reversal of the detrimental effect of Italian emigration, as members of the diaspora contributed to the greater national good by playing for Italy. There were dissenting voices though. Italy's coach Augusto Rangone resigned in June 1928 in protest at the fast-tracking of Orsi into the national side.[84]

There was a significant precedent for utilising Italo-Argentine sportsmen to showcase the Fascist regime. Although born in Italy, the swimmer, Enrique Tiraboschi, was raised in Argentina, and reached international prominence in August 1923 when he swam the English Channel in a record time. In an open letter to the Argentine people published in *La Nación*, Italian prime minister, Benito Mussolini wrote:

> The wonder achieved by Tiraboschi has shone with new light the name of Italy, having repercussions today throughout the entire world … Today an Italian unites the glory of his native country to the land that gave him hospitality, Italy sends an enthusiastic greeting to the great Argentine people, that

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[82] *La Nación*, 15 March 1931, Section 2, p.6.

[83] Cited in Brian Glanville, *The Story of the World Cup*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p.25; Pierre Lanfranchi, "La Première Guerre Mondiale et le développement du football en Europe: l'example italien" in Yvan Gastaut – Stéphane Mourlane, *Le football dans nos sociétes*, (Paris, Autrement, 2006), p.141.

[84] Lanfranchi – Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, pp.72–81.

> represent so nobly and with such energy the immortal Latin gaze.[85]

Italy's victory at the 1934 World Cup with four Italo-Argentines – Monti, Demaría, Orsi and Guaita – in the squad, highlighted this duality of identity, with *El Gráfico* contradicting the ethnocentric theories of its writers by reporting 'the numerous Italian community from our country have celebrated this triumph with a rejoicing that they have perfect right to'.[86] For its part *La Nación* reflected the almost interchangeable notions of identity amongst Italo-Argentines in an article entitled, 'Three cheers for Italy':

> For us the Italian triumph has two aspects equally full of spontaneous sympathy; that which Italy deserves from us as a nation intertwined with our nationality in permanent character through blood, love and recognition, and the other flowing from the injection made by the inclusion of four Argentine lads that were key to the fight for the trophy.[87]

Had the Argentine team progressed further in the competition than the first round, it would have been interesting to see exactly how these loyalties would have been reconciled, especially in the event of the two nations playing each other directly. Bigalke suggests that lack of contact at international level meant that elite players were not forced into emotional or moral decisions about who to represent internationally, and as such acted in a mercenary way by playing for which country was most beneficial to their financial situation.[88] However, it can be argued that such judgement calls were more complex for Italo-Argentine footballers. It was a complexity summed up by a later *rimpatriato*, Omar Sívori, 'I am the grandson of an Italian from Chiavari (near Genoa), something which allows me to be Argentine and Italian at the same time'.[89] The choice of national jersey was an overt way of deciding on national identity, given that in international football players could only represent one country at a given time. Emotional considerations also came into making such decisions. For example, Luis Monti chose the *Azzurri* of Italy after being scapegoated for Argentina's defeat in the 1930 World Cup Final against Uruguay. He had claimed, 'All the Argentinians had made me feel like

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[85] *La Nación*, 21 August 1923, p.1.
[86] Néstor Saavedra, 'El poeta de la zurda', in Carlos Poggi (ed.), *El Gráfico 90 años*, (Buenos Aires: Atlántida, 2009), pp.56–7.
[87] *La Nación*, 14 June 1934, p.1.
[88] Bigalke, '"If They Can Die for Italy, They Can Play for Italy!"', p.77.
[89] *Mundo Deportivo*, 8 May 1962, p.23.

rubbish, a maggot, branding me a coward and blaming me exclusively for the loss against the Uruguayans'.[90] However, not every player who migrated to Italian football could be lured into wearing the Italian jersey. Argentina's 1930 World Cup goalscoring hero, Stábile joined Italian club, Genoa shortly afterwards, with *El Gráfico* noting: 'Stábile goes to Italy, not to defend football in the peninsula, but to defend *criollo* football, since he is a *criollo* player'.[91] In Stábile's case, this was not an exaggeration. Alone of the *rimpatriati*, Stábile refused to accept Italian citizenship or selection for the Italian national team, seeing the move to Genoa as purely an economic one, like the old *golondrinas*, to help his young family. After returning to Argentina, Stábile later had a long and successful period as coach of the national team that only ended after the tumultuous defeat to Czechoslovakia at the 1958 World Cup.[92]

The alacrity with which some of the early *rimpatriati* served their mother country in the First World War in the same way as Italian-born footballers such as national captain, Virgilio Fossatti, ensured their commitment to Italy was not questioned in the same way as later arrivals.[93] Francisco Mosso and Ernesto Boglietto both fought in the army, whilst Romulo Boglietto served in the nascent Italian air force.[94] Pozzo's criteria of selecting players for national team duty on the basis of their willingness to die for Italy, soon looked empty, however, when just four months after making his debut for Italy in May 1935 (see Table 3), Alejandro Scopelli, along with fellow Italo-Argentine players, Guaita and Andrés Stagnaro escaped across the French border to avoid fulfilling their call-up to fight in Abyssinia.[95] The incident changed the tenor of the relationship between Italo-Argentine footballers and the Italian press, who began to see them as mercenaries with no emotional bond to the land of their ancestors.[96]

Whilst it is commonly argued in the existing literature that the introduction of professionalism in Argentina in 1931 and Italy's military involvement in Abyssinia, and later in the Second World War led to the wholesale return repatriation of Italo-Argentines to Argentina, this was not the case.[97] A good number stayed until well into the 1940s, and it was

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[90] Cited in Andreas Campomar, *¡Golazo!*, (London: Quercus, 2014), p.145.
[91] *El Gráfico*, 25 October 1930, 37.
[92] Miguel Ángel Bertolotto and Sergio Danishevsky (eds), *Argentina Mundial. Historia de la Selección*, Buenos Aires, 2002, p.30.
[93] Lanfranchi, "La Première Guerre Mondiale et le développement du football en Europe: l'example italien", p.141.
[94] Lo Presto, *Tango bianconero*, pp.8-15.
[95] Foot, *Calcio*, pp.429-31.
[96] Cited in Lanfranchi – Taylor, *Moving with the Ball*, pp.72–81.
[97] Bigalke, '"If They Can Die for Italy, They Can Play for Italy!"', p.96.

the ruination of Italy's economy by the War that was the most decisive factor in their ultimate return.

Conclusion

By the time Argentina played in the 1930 World Cup it was clear that Argentina was still some way from exhibiting a national identity that was inclusive of all its citizens. Our case studies have shown that amongst the biggest immigrant grouping in Argentina, the Italo-Argentines, dual identity remained an important factor in Argentine society. Although active agents in the Argentine economy and civil society, feelings of *argentinidad* did not preclude simultaneous emotions of Italian-ness. This was highlighted during Genoa's 1923 tour of Argentina when the Italo-Argentine community felt able to celebrate both their Italian heritage and identification with their Argentine homeland. The dominance of Italo-Argentines at all levels of Argentine football from the early 1920s reflected what could be described as an Italianization rather than a *criollización* of Argentine football, mirroring the concerns of Argentine nationalists that Argentina was in danger of becoming an Italian colony.

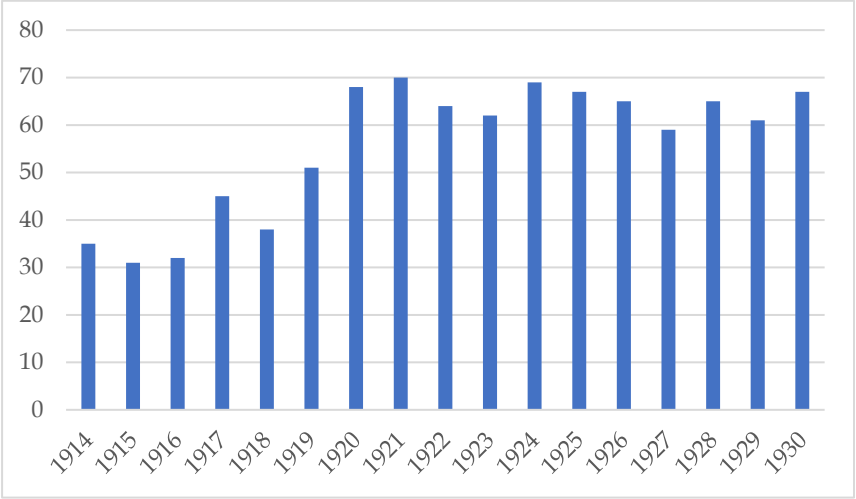
This discourse was further complicated by the reverse migration of the top Italo-Argentine players who were central to Argentine success at the 1928 Olympic Games and 1930 World Cup to Italy in the 1920s and 1930s. Their departure was perceived in the Argentine press in colonial terms. Whilst reaching the finals in the aforementioned competitions reflected Argentine prestige at a world level, the subsequent departure of Argentina's elite players and the presence of Orsi, Guaita, Monti and Demaría in Italy's World Cup win in 1934 World Cup-winning side reflected Argentina's weakness in the global marketplace and subservience to its effective neo-colonial sporting masters.

Table 1: Net Immigration to Argentina 1857-1914 by Nationality

Italians	2,283,882
Spanish	1,472,579
French	214,198
Russians	160,672
Ottomans	136,079
Austro-Hungarians	87,108
Germans	62,006
British	55,055

Source: República Argentina, *Tercer Censo Nacional Levantado el 1° de Junio de 1914*, (Buenos Aires: República Argentina, 1916), p.201.

Table 2: Percentage of Italo-Argentine Players in the Argentine National Team by Year



Source: Calculated from data in Rubén René Macchi (ed.), *Desde 1893 Hasta 1981 Toda la Historia de la Selección Argentina*, (Buenos Aires: GAM ediciones, 1981), pp.4-103.

Table 3: Italo-Argentines in the Italian National Team 1914-1935

Player	**Year of Birth**	**Date of Debut**	**Italy Caps**
Eugenio Mosso	1895	05/04/1914	1
Cesare Lovati	1894	18/01/1920	6
Adolfo Baloncieri	1897	13/05/1920	47
Emilio Badini	1897	31/08/1920	2
Julio Libonatti	1901	28/10/1926	17
Raimundo Orsi	1901	01/12/1929	35
Renato Cesarini	1906	25/01/1931	11
Attilio De María	1909	27/11/1932	13
Luis Monti	1901	27/11/1932	18
Enrique Guaita	1910	11/02/1934	10
Alejandro Scopelli	1908	12/05/1935	1

Source: Fabrizio Melegari (ed.), *Almanacco Illustrato del Calcio* 2019, (Modena: Panini, 2018), pp.611-39.