

A study of Croatian-Australian identity and discrimination faced by Croatian-backed clubs in Australia's elite football leagues

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Since the 1960s, Croatian soccer clubs have been a notable feature of all major Australian cities, and a number of regional towns, with the highest-profile of these being Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia, both of which played in Australia's now defunct National Soccer League (NSL) (1977—2004). By being barred from the new A-League, from 2005-06, these clubs experienced marginalization and discrimination similar to that experienced by Irish-Catholic clubs in Scotland. The aims of this study are to explore both Croatian-Australian identity and discrimination through the lens of Melbourne and Sydney Croatia. The myths about the clubs' alleged fascist tendencies are also explored. The fascist allegations have obscured the very real discrimination faced by these clubs and their supporters, given that the end of the NSL 'removed' both clubs from the national-league when ordinary relegation was not deserved. The article draws upon interviews with two Melbourne Croatia administrators and three leaders of the club's 'MCF' ultras.

Keywords: Anticommunism, Australian soccer, Croatian-Australians, discrimination, Melbourne, Melbourne Knights

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, Croatian soccer clubs have been a notable feature of all major Australian cities, and a number of regional towns, with the highest-profile of these being Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia, both of which played in Australia's now defunct National Soccer League (NSL) (1977—2004). By being barred from the new A-League, from 2005-06, these clubs experienced marginalization and discrimination similar to that experienced by Irish-Catholic clubs in Scotland. The aims of this study are to explore both

Croatian-Australian identity and discrimination through the lens of Melbourne and Sydney Croatia.

Gerry Finn (1991a) has documented extensively the difficulties and discrimination faced by Irish-Catholic football clubs in Scotland, including Glasgow Celtic, Edinburgh's Hibernian, and Dundee United (formerly Dundee Hibernian). In the case of Dundee United, Finn (1991a) reveals how the Hibernian name was viewed as unattractive and unsettling by Protestant Scots and it was publicly acknowledged that unless the name was dropped the club would struggle to gain widespread support or Scottish Football Association (SFA) assistance. The new directors too were very keen to drop the Hibernian name and its Irish associations. The need in Dundee to have another big club, capable of being an effective rival to Dundee FC, was a motivation behind the broader community accepting Dundee United (after the name change). Finn (1991a) points out how the Irish-Scots showed their willingness to engage with the broader community by forming football clubs rather than sticking to traditional Irish sports such as Gaelic Football. They were forced to form their own clubs because of the hostility which they received due to Protestant Scots' prejudice. Finn (1991b) rejects the claim of Bill Murray (1984, p. 19) that Hibernian was the first club to bring 'sectarianism' into Scottish football and his other claim that Rangers' Unionism was a response to Celtic's success. The same story can be told about Croatian soccer clubs in Australia, which, due to their ethnic roots, are effectively barred entry to Australia's A-League. Unlike in the case of Dundee United, which was accepted once it removed all ethnic associations from its name, Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia (like the other 'ethnic' clubs from Greek and Italian backgrounds) rebadged themselves as Melbourne Knights and Sydney United, but all to no avail. As South Melbourne (formerly South Melbourne Hellas) found out, when it applied for A-League membership, and was rejected, just having a history of being formed by Greek men sixty or seventy years ago was enough to be tarred eternally with the 'ethnic club' brush by the Anglo-Australian 'mainstream'. Football Federation Australia's (FFA) decision to effectively ban clubs with even an 'ethnic' (non-Anglo) early history from the A-League has escaped serious academic criticism, other than in a 2018 article by James and Walsh (2018), and needs to be held up for what it is — discrimination. Words like 'ethnic' and 'non-ethnic', 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream' reflect the more sophisticated style of modern racism. Although the word 'non-ethnic' is ludicrous, I will use this and the other three words here, as the word 'race' is often used in academia — because these words figure prominently in prevailing dominant discourses and have enormous practical implications, for people, despite their questionable

validity. A contrasting approach to mine is Skinner, Zakus, and Edwards (2008, p. 402) where they say '[i]t is necessary for the FFA to continue to nurture the historical relationship between soccer and its ethnically-based origins, but not to the detriment of mainstream community support'. These authors use the words 'mainstream' and 'ethnic' in a non-ironic sense where they appear to *believe in* the ideas behind the words and also the thesis that 'mainstream' people should be given taken-for-granted priority over 'ethnic' people. Similarly, while the biological basis for separate 'races' has been discredited (Christian, 2011, p. 143; Dimeo & Finn, 2001, p. 34), many people think and act in terms of race being a valid category, which then creates real implications (Carrington & McDonald, 2001, pp. 1-2; Christian, 2011, pp. 138-139; Dimeo & Finn, 2001, pp. 35, 37, 38-43, 45). For example, Dimeo and Finn (2001) argue that the Irish-Catholic Scots were stigmatized as being religiously *and racially* inferior, by the majority Protestant-Scots, as the Irish-Catholics were placed in the category of a subordinate racial classification (within 'whiteness'). One reason why the Anglo-Australian 'mainstream' has so easily been able to achieve this discrimination against 'ethnic' clubs has been the alleged fascist tendencies of the Croatian clubs, which were first formed as 'countries-in-exile' by anti-communist émigrés who favoured an independent Croatia. The honour paid to World War Two Ustaše leader, Ante Pavelić (1889—1959), the last leader of an independent Croatia, prior to the 1990s (Tanner, 2019, pp. 141-167), as convincing evidence of these clubs' fascist inclinations (Hughson, 2000). However, I have seen the president of Melbourne Knights standing with a group of teenaged ultras on the terraces at Knights' Stadium, throughout the second-half of a match, to make sure that good conduct would continue.

Before an independent Croatia re-emerged, Pavelić was about the only counter-figure the émigrés had to the Yugoslav communist leader Tito. In fact, Tito's picture hung behind the bar at the Perth proyugoslav soccer club, Spearwood Dalmatinac, for many years. MCF leader Pave Jusup told me that the attraction of Pavelić was that he was the last leader of an independent Croatia, rather than fascism.¹ As sports historian Roy Hay (1998, p. 56) says, '[t]he fact that many of the early post-war immigrants were fervent anti-communists does not necessarily mean that they were completely susceptible to any kind of right-wing or fascist political appeal.' This is especially correct for Melbourne Knights, as Hay (1998) documents and explains in a 1998 article entitled 'Croatia: Community, Conflict and Culture'. As Hay (1998, p. 58)

¹ Source: Pave Jusup, group interview with author, January 11, 2011, Melbourne, Victoria, notes in possession of author.

writes, '[t]he founders of Croatia Melbourne seem to have been a group of youngsters who wanted to play football. The same was true in Geelong.' In terms of the Sydney situation, Philip Mosely (1994, pp. 35-36) stated that: 'Not all Croats were fascists, far from it, and the Ustashi old guard did not control Sydney Croatia.'

The Australian national security organization, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), estimated that approximately fifty Croatians resident in Australia in 1978 were prepared to engage in acts of violence, whilst another two to three hundred would be sympathetic and willing to assist (Blaxland & Crawley, 2016, p. 136). These are not large numbers, given the size of the Croatian communities in Australia at the time. In the 2016 Census, 133,268 persons (0.6%) identified themselves as having Croatian ancestry. The fascism allegations should not distract us from the fact that the Melbourne Knights community is largely based in Melbourne's working-class western suburbs, and is powerless and marginalized in the face of discrimination from soccer's regulators.

The trial against the 'Croatian Six,' six Croatian-Australian men, for conspiracy to bomb a Yugoslav travel-agent, and several other Sydney locations, in 1981 was widely perceived to have produced an unjust guilty verdict (McDonald, 2012). It has been claimed that ASIO would or should have been aware of the UDBA's involvement, UDBA being the Yugoslav communist regime's internal security unit. The UDBA was very keen to discredit the Croatian émigrés. John Blaxland and Rhys Crawley (2016, p. 139), authors of *The Secret Cold War: the Official History of ASIO*, state directly their opinion that the Croatian Six were 'wrongfully convicted'. The problem was that, for ASIO, the Croatian groups were classified as counterterrorists while the Yugoslav secret-service was classified as counterespionage, so different approaches were adopted. ASIO 'failed to discern... actions and intentions' of the Yugoslav secret-service within the Croatian community (Blaxland & Crawley, 2016, p. 139). In fact, ASIO knew that 'Yugoslav authorities were monitoring, penetrating and harassing Croatian groups' (Blaxland & Crawley, 2016, p. 138). While 'ASIO is not directly to blame,' Blaxland and Crawley (2016, p. 139) conclude that the Croatian Six case 'in hindsight demonstrated a lack of insight'.

The aim of this article is to explore Croatian-Australian identity through a study of the histories of Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia. A second aim, linked to the first aim, is to outline the discrimination which these clubs have faced from the Anglo-Australian 'mainstream', including the cancellation of the NSL, which forcibly removed both clubs from their rightful positions in the nation's top-tier. To analyze the issues, I use primary-data includ-

ing interviews with Melbourne Knights' president Ange Cimera; the club's secretary, Melinda Cimera; and three leaders of the 'MCF' ultras ('Melbourne Croatia Fans').

From the perspective of Muslim Arabs in the UK, Caroline Nagel and Lynn Staeheli (2008) studied the procedures associated with integration. They came to the conclusion that this group views interaction with the host-society as essential but, rather than looking at integration as 'social cohesion', they view it as a discourse between diverse-but-equal communities occupying the same geographic space. Similarly, MCF ultras regard the cancellation of the NSL and the start of the A-League as 'the Poms taking over the game'.² They regard Anglo-Australians as just another ethnic-group fighting for its place under the sun within contemporary Australia. Under this viewpoint, only Indigenous Australians can claim any special status, whereas Anglo-Australians are just a community ('the Poms') who are no more or less important than the Croatian-Australians. This view contradicts the 'Australian multicultural agenda', which, according to John Hughson (1999), has never treated the English as 'ethnics' or as an 'ethnic group'. To show their 'integrated' status, the MCF argues that the club does not 'check at the gate if you are Croatian or not', and English, rather than Croatian, is the language used around the club.³ Finn (1991a, 1991b) puts forward similar arguments to argue his case that Celtic, the club preferred by most Scots of Irish descent in the West of Scotland, is no 'less Scottish' than Rangers or Queen's Park.

This article attempts to satisfactorily answer the following research questions:

RQ1: *What do interviews with club administrators and leading ultras at Melbourne Croatia reveal about Croatian-Australian identity?*

RQ2: *How valid and proportionate would allegations of fascism be against supporters of Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia?*

RQ3: *What do the cancellation of the NSL and the introduction of the A-League tell us about the marginalization and discrimination faced by 'ethnic' soccer clubs and their supporters?*

RQ4: *What responses can be given to allegations that the Croatian clubs were exclusive organizations which marginalized Anglo-Australians?*

² Source: Pave, interview.

³ Source: Pave, interview.

HISTORY OF MELBOURNE CROATIA, SYDNEY CROATIA,
AND 'ETHNIC' CLUBS

First, I present some statistics. At the most recent 2016 Census, there were 43,688 Croatia-born in Australia, down 10.5 percent from five years earlier, which suggests an ageing community and/or declining immigration rates. There were 15,486 in Victoria (including Melbourne) and 15,638 in New South Wales (including Sydney).⁴

Why were Victoria (especially western Melbourne and Geelong) and Sydney the most popular destinations? As Matthew Taylor (2010, p. 149) explains, 'What is more, over time migrant streams, bound by social networks, become self-perpetuating, as earlier waves of migrants attracted and supported later arrivals. All these factors were relevant to the migration of soccer coaches and help to explain destination choices and patterns of settlement.'

Just after World War Two, Australia 'reinterpreted' the White Australia Policy to admit Southern and Eastern Europeans because it was perceived that their labour was needed for post-War reconstruction and for the expansion of industry. There was also a commonly-held view that a larger population was needed in order to sustain national defence as most of the northern half of the country was almost devoid of major settlements other than Darwin and Cairns. As Arthur Calwell (1946, p. 511), immigration minister in the first Chifley government, said (cited in Partridge, 1955, p. 406): 'If we are to take our rightful place in world affairs; if we are to ensure the future security of our nation, our population must be greatly augmented, both by natural increase and by planned immigration. ... The days of our isolation are over.' Three main strategies emerged: (1) an agreement with the British government for assisted migration from Britain (the migrant would only pay £10-per-person); (2) an agreement with the international refugee organization, signed in 1947, where the organization would cover shipping cost for displaced persons while the Australian government would pay £10-per-head; and (3) agreements with several European governments, including Holland and Italy (Partridge, 1955, pp. 406-407).

The annual overall target of 200,000 immigrants per year was never reached, with the 1950 number of 174,000 being the peak. Between 1947 and 1952, 700,000 migrants arrived in Australia, with government financial assistance — half of these were British and half were mainland Europeans. Historian P.H. Partridge (1955, p. 408) wrote in 1955 that 'most Australians

⁴ Source: Department of Home Affairs, *Croatia-born*, p. 1.

have always tended to patronize, perhaps even to be contemptuous of, non-British peoples, their institutions and ways'. Despite this, he says that the absorption and integration of thousands of continental Europeans 'produced very little overt tension' because 'most Australians appeared to be caught up by the interest of a bold and novel experiment' (Partridge, 1955, p. 408). I think that there was certainly tension but, and this is probably Partridge's point, very little serious violence occurred as a direct result of racial issues.

By the early 1950s, if not earlier, soccer clubs had been formed in all major cities which revolved around a particular ethnic community, such as Greek, Greek Macedonian, Jewish, Hungarian, Italian or Yugoslav (Peake, 2011, pp. 516-518). These clubs began to outshine their Anglo-Australian counterparts, both on- and off-the-field (Adair & Vamplew, 1997, p. 31), which created a major dilemma for the conservative Anglo-Australian administrators of the sport. Brawley and Radcliffe (2020, p. 32) state that 'the colonised could be invited to play against the colonisers on the assumption that their performances would be inferior and hence the scorecard itself would serve to reinforce white prestige'. White Anglo-Australian dominance was the opposite of what occurred here with the Anglo-Australian clubs being unable to remain competitive against the 'ethnic' clubs. In Sydney, the 'ethnic' clubs had been barred access to the first-division of the New South Wales Soccer Association (NSWSA) (Warren, Harper, & Whittington, 2003, p. 35). As a result, a rebel association, the New South Wales Soccer Federation (NSWSF), was set up in 1957 (Warren, Harper, & Whittington, 2003, p. 36). Realizing which way the wind was blowing, and refusing to bow to prejudices, Anglo-Australian clubs Canterbury and Auburn joined the rebel association too. The actions of the rebels led to a ban by global body Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), which meant that games could not be played against international opposition. But it is an ill wind which blows nobody any good, and the positive effect of the FIFA ban was that players could come to Australia without proper releases from their former clubs or transfer fees (Hay, 2006, p. 178; Warren, Harper, & Whittington, 2003, p. 36). The Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) 'regained control nationally' in 1961, but with the 'ethnic' clubs retained as full-and-equal members of the Sydney first-division (Kreider, 1996, p. 65). Similar to the Sydney situation, a rebel association, the Western Australia Soccer Federation (WASF), was set up in Perth in July 1960 (Kreider, 1996, pp. 63-65). Adding to the confusion of supporters, both WASF and the original association, the Western Australian Soccer Football Association (WASF), ran separate competitions from 1960-62, before the WASF emerged as the ruling body.

Lagging just behind the Italian clubs were the Croatian clubs — Adelaide Croatia was formed in 1952, Melbourne Croatia in 1953 (as SC Croatia), Geelong Croatia in 1954, and Sydney Croatia (as Croatia) in 1958 (Hay, 2001, p. 79; 'Sydney United', *Puma News: Sydney United's Official Magazine*, 8 November 1998, p. 12). Adelaide Croatia appointed the Indigenous Aboriginal-activist, Charlie Perkins (1936—2000), as captain-coach for the 1959 and 1960 seasons, which suggests at least some early openness to diversity at that club. Other Indigenous players in Perkins' team were Gordon Briscoe and John Moriarty.

Roy Hay's (2001, p. 88) ongoing research, using mostly newspaper sources, showed that it would be unfair to conclude that there was serious or recurring violence at clashes between Croatia and the Yugoslav procommunist club JUST in the 1960s. (JUST was sponsored by the Yugoslav national airline and was effectively the Yugoslav government's sporting club in Melbourne. As such, it was strongly disliked by the anticommunist fans of Melbourne Croatia.) However, off-field violence involving the two clubs intensified at national-league level in the 1980s. Hay (2001) provides a detailed breakdown of violent events in his book chapter 'Those Bloody Croatians'. For Hay (2001), further research must investigate empirically incidents and the extent of violence before theoretical advances can be made, and ethnography, with a limited number of participants, risks making observations devoid of historical context. As a traditional historian, Hay is less interested in thoughts which don't ever become actions and so escape the historical record (unless revealed by ethnography). He (Hay, 2001) argues that conflict at matches that appear to be 'pure politics', Group X-versus-Group Y, may actually have been more complex products of various localized, idiosyncratic and personality-based factors. Hay (2001) concludes that the Croatian clubs have put in major efforts to control their more volatile and political supporters and so, for him, the assessments of Mosely (1994) and Hughson about these clubs were too harsh. However, I would say that, of Hughson's articles on Sydney United's Bad Blue Boys (BBB), 'The Boys are Back in Town' (2000) and 'Football, Folk Dancing and Fascism' (1997a) could be said to be harsh, while 'A Tale of Two Tribes' (1999) and 'The Bad Blue Boys' (1997b) are more sympathetic.

SC Croatia of Melbourne merged with Ukrainian-backed Essendon Lions to form Essendon Croatia in 1974 (Gorman, 2015; Hay, 2001, p. 85). SC Croatia paid Essendon Lions \$25,000 to take over the club and their facilities at Montgomery Park, Essendon. The takeover was a back-door way to re-enter Victorian Soccer Federation (VSF) competitions. The reason for the ban from all competitions was a pitch-invasion at an SC Croatia-versus-Hakoah

match on 30 July 1972. Essendon Croatia later became Melbourne Croatia, and then, in the 1990s, Melbourne Knights. The club officially retains the Knights moniker, but, over the last ten years, has produced some merchandise featuring the 1980s-era Melbourne Croatia badge.

The National Soccer League (NSL) was established in 1977, initially comprising only clubs from the eastern states and territories plus Adelaide (Hay, 2006, p. 172; Peake, 2011, p. 516; Stewart, 1986, p. 73). It was the dream of two visionary presidents, Alex Pongrass of St George Budapest and Frank Lowy of Eastern Suburbs Hakoah. The original NSL clubs were Adelaide City (Italian-backed), Brisbane City (Italian), Brisbane Lions (Dutch), Canberra City (non-ethnic), Eastern Suburbs (Jewish), Fitzroy (later Heidelberg) (Greek Macedonian), Footscray JUST (Yugoslav procommunist), Marconi (Italian), Mooroolbark (English), South Melbourne (informally Hellas) (Greek), St George (Hungarian), Sydney Olympic (Greek), Western Suburbs (Anglo-Australian), and West Adelaide (Greek).

With the strongest clubs having departed from the Melbourne and Sydney competitions in 1977, the Croatian clubs, which remained behind, began to challenge regularly for title honours. After its two championship wins in 1978 and 1979, Essendon Croatia finished runner-up in the Victorian State League in 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983. Although the Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) was nervous about admitting Croatian clubs into the NSL (due to the risk of crowd violence in matches against Footscray JUST), it decided to admit both Melbourne and Sydney Croatia for the start of the 1984 season (Hay, 2001, p. 86; James & Walsh, 2018, p. 434). The two 'sister' Croatian clubs were and are both staunchly Croatian nationalist and anticommunist. As Hay (1994, p. 62) pointed out, '[f]or Croatians, soccer was one of the few outlets they had to express their sense of national and collective identity.' Furthermore, according to Mosely (1994, p. 35), 'Croats deliberately used their soccer clubs to express a political message that was denied them through political channels.'

One significant and infamous event occurred in the 2000-01 season when new 'non-ethnic' 'mainstream' club Perth Glory came to Knights' Stadium to play Melbourne Knights. The Perth striker of Serbian heritage, Slobodan 'Bobby' Despotovski, riled the crowd by giving them a provocative three-fingered Serbian war salute. The Knights Army (precursor firm to the MCF) or others surrounded and attacked the Perth team bus after the game, leaving the players shaken. Knights' president that year, Harry Mrksa, failed to create a great impression when he responded to media: 'Why should I apologize to them? We don't know who caused the problem.' Although Despotovski was wrong to incite the crowd with this gesture, the

Perth media used the case to highlight the penchant for violence based on overseas politics at traditional 'ethnic' clubs.⁵ The Knights and its supporter base were all blamed as a collective, whereas only Despotovski was blamed at Perth Glory with the club escaping all criticism as it had no ethnic-group affiliation. This was now the dominant narrative of the era, as it became clear that Perth Glory was leading and promoting national sentiment in encouraging a new league without ethnicity markers. The then Soccer Australia (now FFA) chairman, David Hill, said after the event 'in my view those [probable meaning: Croatian] clubs have just got to be dropped from the national league'. A moral panic (Young, 1971) was building and drastic action was just around the corner.

The NSL was cancelled, at the end of the 2003-04 season, and both Croatian clubs were then unceremoniously dumped into the Sydney and Melbourne Premier Leagues. The banning of foreign insignia, emblems or names continued up until 2019, in all states and territories, but not at amateur level. Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew (1997, p. 131) remarked presciently in 1997 that, although this policy did not conform *prima facie* to the logic of multiculturalism, that concept implied tolerance too, and not just diversity. Twelve years later, Adair (2009) made similar points, but, by that time, the destruction of the NSL was a *fait accompli*. Adair (2009, pp. 420-421) pointed to the tremendous sense of loss felt by the 'ethnic' clubs, and their supporters, but put a positive spin on it by referring to the new cosmopolitan or even postmodern leagues where ethnicity is banished. Jessica Carniel (2009, p. 80) also refers to the A-League's formation as 'an act of cosmopolitanism' while adding in parenthesis, which implies a less important point unfortunately, 'albeit a highly fraught and problematic one due to its dependency on the eradication of non-Australian nationalism'.

ULTRAS CULTURE⁶

Hooligans versus ultras

The Knights Army at Melbourne Knights (precursor firm to the MCF) and the BBB at Sydney United were ultra-style supporters which operated, to a large extent, in the traditions and ethos of the Croatian and Italian ultras

(Mignon, 2002; Roversi, & Balestri, 2002), while also being influenced by English hooligans. They, along with the Greek-Australian supporters of

⁵ Readers interested in this case can find news broadcast highlights by typing 'Bobby Despotovski Melbourne Knights' into YouTube's search function.

⁶ This section draws heavily upon a book by the author, *Goodbye Leederville Oval*, which he self-published in 2017.

Sydney Olympic and South Melbourne Hellas, must be duly recognized as being the first sets of fans to bring European ultras culture to Australia. Southern and Eastern European ultras groups, historically, have been more organized, more carefully political, more visual, and more likely to be accepted as a stakeholder group by their club than the typical English hooligan firm. For the English and Scottish hooligans, the skinhead era was roughly up to 1983—84 and the casual era after that, with 1989 being the end of the initial heyday of the style. Now ultras culture is more dominant worldwide than hooligan culture, although the cultures are not completely mutually exclusive. France was an interesting case, for a time, since it is or was dominated by English-style hooligans in the north and by Italian-style ultras in the south (Mignon, 2002). We now see ultras-style groups emerging in Scotland such as Green Brigade (Celtic) (formed 2006); Union Bears (Rangers); Motherwell Boiz (Motherwell); St Mirren's North Bank; and even at League Two (fourth-tier) Edinburgh City and at Fort William in the fifth-tier Highland League.

Fluid 'post-modern' 'neo-tribes' (Armstrong and Hughson)

Next, I review the ethnographic academic research on hooliganism that began in the 1990s with two landmark PhD theses, one in the UK by Gary Armstrong on Sheffield United's Blades firm (later published as *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score* (Armstrong, 1998)) and one in Australia by John Hughson on Sydney United's Bad Blue Boys from the early 1990s. Subsequent articles by Hughson synthesizes key findings of these two studies and relates some of Armstrong's key findings to the unique context of south-west Sydney's Bad Blue Boys (BBB), a group of Croatian-Australian teenagers who are, or perhaps were, hardcore supporters of Sydney United. It should be pointed out that these 'anthropological' authors have been criticized on a number of grounds by other academic researchers.⁷ Armstrong (1998) has also criticized the early-dominant Leicester University School approach of Dunning and Williams.

Using the anthropological approach, Armstrong (1998) focuses on the disorganized nature of Sheffield United's Blades' firm and the fluidity of group membership. People come to and go from the Blades, according to the needs of their lives at particular stages, and no-one is ever 'bound' to the Blades in any sense. People connected with the Blades acknowledge that hooliganism is an acquired taste and a profession at the edge of even hardcore fan support (Allan, 1989, p. 109). Armstrong (1998, p. 306) talks in

⁷ See, for example, Dunning, Murphy, and Waddington (2002).

terms of fluid 'post-modern' 'neo-tribes' and this terminology and its associated logic is taken up by Hughson (1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2000) in his ethnographic study of Sydney United's BBB.

Armstrong (1998) points out that firm allegiance is bounded and held in tight check. It is generally subordinated to ordinary relationships so that a Blades member would put to one side (or suppress) his hostility towards Sheffield Wednesday's 'Owls' hooligans when relating in the normal way to friends, family members and work colleagues. When Blades and Owls meet outside of match days the context is often ambiguous and people have to determine whether this is a 'football context' where fighting is justified or not. When groups of Blades or Owls invade each other's pubs on London Road or West Street on a Friday night, this is a football context whereas if Blades or Owls are socializing with women or with non-hooligan mates this is not a football context and so football-related violence is unacceptable.

Social class

In terms of the socio-economic background of English hooligans, Armstrong's view differs somewhat to that of the Leicester University School. Armstrong and Harris (1991), proponents of the anthropological approach, support the 'working class in general thesis' whereas Dunning (1994) and Dunning et al. (1991) argue that 'the core football hooligans come predominantly from the *rougher sections* of the working-class' (Dunning et al., cited in Astrinakas, 2002, p. 91, emphasis added). The Leicester University School's term 'core football hooligans' is relevant when discussing that School's 'phases of hooliganism' theory, which can be used to analyze the extent and speed of the diffusion of hooligan styles to Europe and beyond.

Degrees of organization (Armstrong and Hughson)

The early (proto-)firms of late 1960s and early 1970s England were, literally, neighbourhood gangs joined up together into very loose alliances on match days. The Mile End Mob, known for its famous 'Mile End' chant on train station platforms en route to Upton Park, fits into this proto-firm category (Pennant & Smith, 2007) as do the earlier versions of Portsmouth-based proto-firms prior to the 6.57 Crew. These proto-firms were generally more disorganized than the 'casual' firms of the 1980s which gave up working-class skin-head gear for the designer-wear 'casual' style of the Italian ultras (an interesting case of diffusion of fashion moving in the opposite direction from the usual trend). John O'Kane (2006) explains that Celtic's firm formed as a literal amalgamation of neighbourhood Glasgow gangs. Celtic's firm was formed to counter the earlier formation of other firms such as Aberdeen Soccer

Casuals (ASC). The behaviour of Aberdeen's firm in 'invading' Glasgow and causing mayhem and damage was seen by Celtic people as damaging the reputation and health of Glasgow and the pride of the Celtic club. The formation of Celtic Soccer Crew is consistent with Dunning's (1999) theory of firms being aimed at safeguarding the reputation and pride of a district.

Casual nature of group ties (Armstrong and Hughson)

Armstrong (1998, p. 266) emphasizes the casual nature of group ties and the recognition that a person was not morally bound to the firm in any way if he/she decided to give up football or hooliganism as part of a natural evolution within his/her own personal life. Some people might 'come out of retirement' for big matches against the Owls or if a confrontation came to them (Armstrong, 1998, p. 266). They would often continue to go to games and London Road Friday night pub sessions but sit with non-hooligan mates or sit with Blades, but not leave the pub to meet a challenge outside (Armstrong, 1998, p. 266). Generally, Hughson's (1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2000) account of the BBB supports this. He tells the humorous example of one Croatian-Australian hooligan with his girlfriend being ridiculed by the group for his love interest to the extent that over time he, and others in similar positions, disappeared to the fringes of the group or left it entirely. This hooligan was taunted by the Croatian word for 'slippers' which signifies domestic bliss and a certain married lifestyle. Key members of the BBB (and successor firms) at Sydney United and the MCF at Melbourne Knights believe that one's obviously displayed loyalty should be to the firm, to the soccer club, and to the Croatian community.

Guerilla patriotism of Polish ultras (Nosal, Kossakowski, and Woźniak)

Nosal, Kossakowski, and Woźniak (2021, p. 2051) write that 'there are certain symbols which divide the society: controversial figures, historical events which are difficult to assess, symbolic songs or slogans confusing for the public opinion also appear in the stadiums'. They give as an example the honour showed on the Polish terraces during the past decade to the Cursed Soldiers, members of Polish anticommunist guerilla forces formed in the last stages of World War Two, which were historically unsuccessful (at the time). Fans who revere such 'unusual' heroes are described by the authors as 'anti-establishment, victimised, ready-to-fight pro-national attitude — *guerilla patriotism*' (p. 1051, emphasis original). Later, they add the word 'apolitical' (p. 2061), which may be a step too far as anticommunism is a specific political position as is right-wing 'blood and soil' nationalism. They list characteristics of *guerilla patriotism* as follows: specific symbols, the feeling of being

marginalized, the sense of being scapegoated, internal enemy, anti-establishment attitudes, tactics, being beyond current politics (meaning the mainstream two-party system), fragmented picture, selective patriotism, and critical redefinition of official patriotism. There are obvious similarities here with the MCF at Melbourne Knights, with the exception that staunch Croatian nationalism and anticommunism have always permeated that club — from the boardroom, where the Croatia name and flag were unashamedly used, to the terraces and all the places in between. However, the stance of the club was opposed by supporters of the Yugoslav procommunist club Footscray JUST and by Anglo-Australians who perceived that northern hemisphere political troubles should be left behind in Europe.

Nosal, Kossakowski, and Woźniak (2021, p. 2061) call for more research into the topic of *guerilla patriotism*, so we hope to be part of a new research area here. A contrast must be made though between left-wing fans of Bohemians Praha 1905, Celtic, and St Pauli, and right-wing fans of other clubs, although Celtic at least have a firm concept of a unified Irish nation in mind, which is a form of nationalism. These authors give the example of some Celtic fans in Glasgow singing IRA songs or adding on shouted sections ‘and the IRA’ and ‘fuck the Queen and the UDA’ to the Celtic song ‘Willie Maley’, which is purely about football. A young man informed me in a Paisley (nine miles west of Glasgow) Irish pub last week that ‘80% of Celtic fans don’t sing add-ons’ and he whistled to rebel songs (but sang along to ‘Streets of New York’, a non-rebel, non-sectarian song). There are similarities and differences here — the IRA are or were a left-wing Republican group rather than right-wing. The young fan is of the type of new fans, seen at Celtic, Rangers, Hearts and Hibernian, who want to be seen as taking the moral high ground by eschewing any expressed identification with paramilitary groups.

Only the IRA’s violence is now deemed unacceptable by many, not their political stance. To illustrate this point, the former political wing of the Provisional IRA, Sinn Féin, won the Northern Ireland election this year (2022), ironically enough, while Rangers’ fans were over in Seville at the Europa League final. These rebel songs and the songs in Poland may be a tribute to those who died for the cause, which might include near or distant relatives; as well as a *reenactment* of a time of individual and community trauma and struggle as a way to heal from the events and to both distance oneself from the events (placing them inside inverted commas, as different from real-life) and show commitment to the cause. The IRA’s agenda no longer literally exists, as paramilitary groups laid down their arms in the Peace Process, so there is both a separateness and a closeness to the events and beliefs recalled in songs.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Late in 2009 or early in 2010, I decided to research the topic of the cancellation of the NSL, the establishment of the A-League, and the marginalization of the 'ethnic' clubs under Frank Lowy's FFA regime. I sent an email to each one of the Sydney and Melbourne-based, ex-NSL 'ethnic' clubs, asking them for an interview for my research project. Only one replied, Melbourne Knights, and so I headed to Melbourne and interviewed Knights' president, Andjelko 'Ange' Cimera, on 16 February 2010. Later, on 11 January 2011, I returned to Knights' Stadium and interviewed Melinda Cimera, Club Secretary and Ange's daughter; and three MCF leaders, Pave Jusup (then twenty-two), Kova (then twenty-six), and Sime (then twenty-two). The interview with Ange Cimera lasted 100 minutes, the interview with Melinda lasted 90 minutes, and the interview with the MCF leaders lasted 120 minutes. The first two interviews took place in the club office while the last took place in the Batcave social club at Knights' Stadium.

I stood with fifty or sixty MCF members on the eastern terraces for four home matches during the 2010 and 2011 seasons, including a 'friendly' against Sydney United and a regular game versus Springvale White Eagles. Attending these games gave me exposure to the dominant practices and discourses of supporters, including the MCF.

All interviewees were offered anonymity, but only 'Kova' and 'Sime' preferred to be referred to only by their nicknames. All other interviewees requested that their full names be used or indicated that they did not want or need anonymity. Tape-recording was not used, according to interviewees' preferences. Interviews were conducted in English language.

As with Gary James' (2020) research on Manchester City Women's Team, no restrictions were placed upon me as to what could or could not be discussed or written about. Interviewees felt strongly that they had nothing to lose by total honesty since they had no faith that the FFA would reverse its longstanding intransigence towards the 'ethnic' clubs. However, one positive move has been the introduction of an FA Cup-styled FFA Cup, which does allow for second-tier clubs to play against top-tier opposition in the occasional cup contest.

FINDINGS

Croatian-Australian identity (the transition from 'Croatia' to 'Knights')

For Knights' president, Ange Cimera, the 'Croatia' name was needed back when there was no independent Croatia in Europe, but, at the present time, the name is not crucial because people in soccer regard 'Knights' as synon-

ymous with 'Croatian community'.⁸ The club has always been for those who self-identify as Croatian, rather than Yugoslav, but welcomes supporters of both Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split. Melinda Cimera, Club Secretary, explained to me how one club committeeman had suggested that the club adopt the moniker 'Reds', but younger committee members refused because of the procommunist associations of the word.⁹ Later, the club became 'the Knights', which is an acronym for *Klub Nogometa i Gdje Hrvati Takmice Srcem* (meaning: football club and where Croats battle with their heart) (Gorman, 2014). So 'Knights' is a carefully and skilfully-coded word, and is not as generic a moniker as it might seem to the uninitiated. This coding explains the name's attraction to supporters.

Melbourne Knights still sits at the apex of Croatian sporting clubs in Melbourne, mainly due to the fact that it was a successful performer in the NSL for a number of years and was the first club of Mark Viduka. However, other Croatian clubs, such as St Albans Saints SC and Dandenong City SC, are beginning to throw their weight around and question whether Melbourne Knights still deserves to stay unquestioned at the top of the imaginary pyramid.¹⁰ The younger generation has no, or very few, personal memories of the Knights' NSL triumphs, and the club has not been a stellar performer in either the FFA Cup or the National Premier League Victoria (NPLV) (formerly VPL). The traditional hierarchy of the Croatian-backed clubs has become blurry now that Dandenong City also competes in the NPLV. At the time of our 2011 interview, and, again, in the 2022 season, St Albans Saints was also in the NPLV.

Discrimination

When the researcher asked Ange Cimera for his comments on the cancellation of the NSL and the beginning of the A-League, he answered as follows:

Ange Cimera: *Look, as far as the end of the NSL is concerned, it was disappointing in the way they did it. With the Crawford Report, we knew what was coming, we suffered, we didn't play in any competition for over a year; we were out of soccer for fourteen months.*

I have no problems with what they were trying to do, but the way they did it was not fair to clubs that have been there fifty years or so.

⁸ Source: Ange Cimera, interview with author, February 16, 2010, Melbourne, Victoria, notes in possession of author.

⁹ Source: Melinda Cimera, interview with author, January 11, 2011, Melbourne, Victoria, notes in possession of author.

¹⁰ Source: Pave, interview.

[Frank] Lowy gets a lot of credit for destroying the clubs. He should get a lot of credit for destroying the clubs. ... He's the man of the time; everyone kisses his ass, but he destroyed every club that meant something to our soccer community, not only here but in Sydney as well.

The depth of negative feeling, which exclusion from the A-League generated at Melbourne Knights, can be seen clearly by Cimera's further comments (below) that 'they need to stop ethnic cleansing'.¹¹ 'They' here refers to the soccer regulatory body, but 'mainstream' fans that supported the regulator's actions would be caught up as a guilty party by association:

Researcher: *What are your goals for the Knights?*

Ange Cimera: *We just want to stabilize the club; we have a young team now. We will survive; we have our core of supporters. We own our own ground and facilities; no-one can force us to do anything. Thirty or forty years later we will still be the Knights backed by the Croatian community, but second, third or fourth generation. Do we want to join the A-League? No, not the way it is set up now. If Marconi, Sydney United, us and South [Melbourne] could get promoted and relegated, then yes. We would need three or four leagues with promotion and relegation. A small club needs to have a goal — to be able to get promoted to the A-League. At the moment we just want to survive until they stop ethnic cleansing.*

The term 'ethnic cleansing' was used twice by Cimera, at around the 42nd and 96th minutes, so it was not a slip of the tongue. Although some people might regard the term as inappropriate here, it is correct to say (1) that the 'ethnic' clubs have been 'cleansed' from Australia's top-tier; and (2) one reason is ethnicity. The MCF leaders express their interpretation of the 2003-05 events as 'the Poms taking over the game'. They simply chose to perceive the issue as the Anglos gaining ground, in an intergroup tussle of political wills, reversing the coups achieved by the rebel 'ethnic' clubs in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The MCF leaders see no normative or ethical basis behind the creation of the A-League, and regard all of the arguments backing its creation as pure ideology designed to further vested interests. Kova says: 'We are just like Liverpool — they are living on their former glories just like us.'¹² This comment obviously was made years prior to Liverpool's 2019/20 English Premier League title. Pave added: 'Why should

¹¹ Source: Ange Cimera, interview.

¹² Source: Kova, interview.

we not be in the top division? We are the club of Mark Viduka.’¹³ Ange Cimera compared the club to Leeds United and Luton Town, arguing that, despite falling down the divisions, they still keep their names and identity: ‘Leeds United may have dropped down two divisions, but they are still Leeds United — they have still got the name, Luton Town also’.¹⁴ But Mr Cimera also points out that, when clubs fall down the divisions in England, they are not treated as insignificant pariahs or disrespected: ‘In England you don’t get wiped clean, [with people] saying ‘you don’t exist anymore, we only want the A-League’’.¹⁵ Former Soccer Australia Chairman David Hill made the following comments a few years prior to the reconstruction: ‘I have a problem with the ethnic clubs in Melbourne and Sydney and in particular with the two Croatian clubs and the League would be better off without them.’¹⁶ Hill introduced ‘non-ethnic’ ‘mainstream’ clubs Northern Spirit and Perth Glory into the NSL, but it was only Frank Lowy who would later remove all ‘ethnic’ clubs and start a new league.¹⁷

As Melinda Cimera told me, it was the ‘ground zero’ or ‘scorched earth’ ideology, which dominated discourses within the sport in the 2003-05 period, that were the most hurtful and offensive — the notion that the game had to be saved by gallant ‘white knights’ (literally they were white), Prime Minister John Howard and FFA chairman Frank Lowy.¹⁸ The people at Melbourne Knights saw the ideology as pure institutionalized racism and discrimination. The ‘ground zero’ ideology presented the NSL as corrupted by continental European ‘feudal-style’ leaders, such as Tony Labbozetta of Marconi-Fairfield, and it utilized racial stereotypes of secretive Southern European mafia-types, at odds with Anglo-Australian values. These discourses and stereotypes were accepted by the majority of people within the sport; and even those that found them distasteful and unfair kept quiet as they believed that the short-term upheaval and hurt feelings would, in utilitarian terms, be for the greater good of all. Very few academics spoke out to condemn the prevailing winds of discourse back then.

¹³ Source: Pave, interview.

¹⁴ Source: Ange Cimera, interview.

¹⁵ Source: Ange Cimera, interview.

¹⁶ Source: Cited in Croatia Sydney Soccer Football Club Limited v Soccer Australia Limited, No. 3525/97, unreported 23 September 1997 (Einstein J) at 71, cited in Nimac, Dušević, Lozina, and Nimac (2008, p. 202)

¹⁷ See Hay and McDonald (2007, p. 300) for a good introduction to Northern Spirit and Perth Glory.

¹⁸ Source: Melinda Cimera, interview.

Ange Cimera raised another point of disagreement between A-League and Melbourne Knights. If a Premier League player transfers to an A-League club, the maximum transfer fee is capped at \$10,000 (\$3,000 until recently), which is insufficient compensation for the effort and money involved in nurturing a player through the junior underage teams.¹⁹ As James and Walsh (2018) argue, this is a form of surplus-value expropriation by A-League clubs, at the expense of Premier League clubs. If the player later goes overseas, some money should find its way back to his original Premier League club. Two examples here will suffice. Mate Dugandžić was put on a free transfer to A-League's Melbourne Victory from Melbourne Knights in 2009, after the Knights had spent \$30,000 on him as a junior, including sums paid for him to spend time in the Under-19s system at Dinamo Zagreb.²⁰ (Why transfer him for free? Because he deserved the right to play at the highest level, and \$3,000 is negligible anyway.) Another Knights' junior, Danny Tiatto, after playing for Manchester City and Leicester, switched to A-League club Brisbane Roar in 2007. The Knights received nothing for him either. By contrast, in the NSL-era, Tim Cahill was sold by Sydney Olympic to Feyenoord for £1.62 million.

The 'ground zero' ideology was a response to how some Anglos felt alienated by the predominance of 'ethnic' clubs in the NSL. For example, how would an Anglo-Australian (or an African-Australian) living in Adelaide choose a team when the only NSL clubs in Adelaide were Adelaide City (Italian) and West Adelaide (Greek) (James, Tolliday, & Walsh, 2011)? The A-League was designed to solve this particular dilemma in a once-and-for-all, top-down manner (James, Tolliday, & Walsh, 2011, p. 115; James & Walsh, 2018, p. 435). Although there was community consultation (James, Tolliday, & Walsh, 2011, p. 115), only voices which supported the A-League and the 'ground zero' ideology were heeded. In that new world of Modern Football (the A-League was marketed as 'Modern Football', with the implication being that 'Old Soccer' was ethnic, violent and corrupt), tradition and prior achievements counted for nothing. The hypocrisy of the system was evident when Scotland's Celtic FC aka Glasgow Celtic played friendly pre-season matches against A-League clubs in Australia in 2009 and 2011. A moment's reflection would have led one to conclude that, had Celtic been based in Australia, it would have been denied A-League admission due to its 'ethnic' name, colours and ideology. When I asked Ange Cimera whether the

¹⁹ Source: Ange Cimera, interview; Gorman (2015).

²⁰ Source: Ange Cimera, interview.

Knights would ever make an A-League bid, he responded in the negative.²¹ The precondition, from his viewpoint, would have to be a system of three or four divisions, all operating on a national basis and with promotion-and-relegation. Cimera is still waiting for the day when ‘they stop ethnic cleansing’. Despite Cimera’s comments to me, in 2010, it is likely that Knights would want to join any new national second-division.

A humorous and cynical interaction between Pave and Kova occurred during our interview as the casual atmosphere of the empty Batcave social club on a quiet weekday began to take hold. Wrestling with the White Australia Policy, and its ideological groundings, which reified whiteness, the exchange reveals their own personal struggles living in modern-day Melbourne plus an awareness of what the club’s founders had experienced in even harsher times:

Kova: For a multi-cultural country it [Australia] is still very racist.

Pave: It is an undercurrent; you have to understand what the double-speak is to understand what they are really doing. When the Socceroos play there are [Anglo-Australian] people behind it but there is tension. There is still an ‘us-and-them’ mentality but it’s not out in the open. We never said [at Knights] that ‘everyone’s welcome’ but we also never check at the gate if you are Croatian or not. We are not holding meetings here in Croatian are we?

Kova: It comes back to the White Australia Policy; they are white, we are olive.

Pave: But we came in under the White Australia Policy.

Kova: They wanted people with the big tits really [laughs]. It’s like David and Goliath but we don’t have a Jewish name [all laugh].²²

Kova’s barbed comment ‘they are white, we are olive’ shows the ‘us-and-them’ mentality which has developed, on both sides of the divide. Kova mentions ‘we are olive’ as a literal physical distinction to the prized ‘white’ classification, and he appears to portrays it as both the ideology of the Anglo-Australians, as well as an obvious trite point about skin colour. Pave brings up the ironic and contradictory fact that it was the expansion and modification of the White Australia Policy, away from its earlier perceived purity, when ‘white’ meant English, Scots, Irish, Western Europeans and Northern Europeans only, that let the Croatians arrive in the country. The

²¹ Source: Ange Cimera, interview.

²² Source: Pave and Kova, interview.

name was kept, but the colour criteria appeared broader, and the only way that the two interviewees can resolve this contradiction on-the-spot, while maintaining their masculine style of humour, is to refer to 'big tits' being in demand. This keeps up the narrative of difference, while making the government officials of the day appear lascivious. An unnecessary reference to Jews adds a final touch of extra masculine humour to Kova's rejoinder.

Was there 'reverse discrimination' against Anglo-Australians at the 'ethnic' clubs? Perceptions here differ. But Pave is quick to point out two things. In his words, 'we are not holding meetings here in Croatian, are we?'²³ Secondly, 'we never check at the gate if you are Croatian or not.'²⁴ These two quotes, taken together, suggest that a non-Croatian person would not be excluded, or feel excluded, from meetings, the grandstand or the terraces for reasons of language or ethnicity. The 'inner sanctum' of the directors' lounge may or may not be closed off, but directors' lounges generally, and across all industries, are rarely beacons of enlightenment and inclusion, especially regarding women and minorities.

The 'ethnic' clubs are widely credited with bringing European ultras culture to Australia (Hughson, 1999, p. 21), and there are connections between MCF and the 'real' Bad Blue Boys of Dinamo Zagreb. The old ultras group, the Knights Army (now defunct), had 150 paid-up members (James, Tolliday, & Walsh, 2011, p. 117). It disbanded at the end of the second-last NSL season, 2002-03. By contrast, the MCF, formed around 2006-07, has 15 to 30 core members, swelling up to 150 at big games. There has always been 'the core, the same seven or eight blokes there from the start'.²⁵ Pave told me the story of a regular MCF member who stood with the group for two years every match-day before it was realized that he was not ethnically Croat. Because most of the young MCF people have Australian accents, this story is inherently plausible. He had been nicknamed 'West Ham' because he always wore a West Ham United replica shirt at matches. Of course, he was still fully welcome to stand with the MCF after his ethnicity was 'exposed'. He had never pretended to be anything other than a supporter.

CONCLUSION

There are two separate issues here. On the one hand, as covered in the previous section, the two Croatian clubs have suffered long-term and inexcusable discrimination by being effectively banned from the A-League. The NSL

²³ Source: Pave, interview.

²⁴ Source: Pave, interview.

²⁵ Source: Pave, interview.

memories are disappearing further into the past. On the other hand, the two clubs continue to operate as the sporting arms of their respective Croatian social clubs. They are key immigrant social organizations, vital for building bonding and bridging social capital. However, these two issues are linked in practice. By no longer being *national-league* clubs, other Croatian clubs wonder why the Melbourne Knights and Sydney United should remain hegemonic and at the top of the hierarchies in their respective cities.

The singing of the word 'Ustaše' (a fascist organization formed by Pavelić) on the terraces, after a goal, is not so easy to interpret. (On the other hand, the word *ustanik* (plural: *ustanici*) simply means insurgent or rebel.) Like 'Old Firm' (Celtic-versus-Rangers) songs, this 'song' seems to be a rhetorical reenactment of past identities and struggles, a link back to a time (in Australia) when life was much more vulnerable and precarious due to the hegemony of the communist regime (and its presence in Australia) and the traumas associated with life in a new land where racialized discourses of all types were prevalent and emasculating.

Following Nosal, Kossakowski and Woźniak (2021), *guerrilla patriotism* inspired and united the Knights Army and MCF as they waged continual metaphorical war on two fronts: against the procommunists and the Serbs, and against the controlling regulatory body of Australian soccer. The political position of Melbourne Knights and Sydney United is complex in practice though — apparently right-wing in terms of their staunch anticommunism and Croatian nationalism, but MCF members often wear merchandise of both left-wing Celtic and the militant left-wing Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFFMEU), which at one time had an advertising sign at a prominent position at Sydney United's Edensor Park. The Celtic aspects are due to the Catholic roots and Viduka, while the CFFMEU merchandise may be due to working-class, masculine identities and one link or affirmation to the *local* which they willingly make. The complex identity of MCF fandom, as suggested by these various, apparently contradictory loyalties, thus mirrors comments by Nosal, Kossakowski, and Woźniak (2021).

Nosal, Kossakowski, and Woźniak (2021, p. 2059) write that 'it is hard to imagine that historical figures of a different kind could serve as role models'. What are we to make of the support for Tito at Footscray JUST and Spearwood Dalmatinac? Firstly, they were clubs which represented the communist regime and its supporters. For them, for that era, they were establishment, not anti-establishment, clubs. JUST disbanded in 1990, its purpose served. I do not know whether JUST had ultras, and it is unlikely that Dalmatinac did. Although communist guerrillas can be seen as warriors, such

as in their retreat to the forests during World War Two, their prime image is as a ruling regime. This does not inspire idolization from ultras types.

Lastly, I accept that water has passed under the bridge, but the present author, and many others, will continue to push for a national second-division, with promotion-and-relegation to and from the A-League, so as to provide tier-two clubs with a pathway to the top-tier. It could be that the new 'diversity and inclusion' culture will work in favour of the 'ethnic' clubs, since, in this day and age, all identities are viewed as acceptable and worth promoting. It is very interesting that these clubs, which were seen as politically incorrect, should now find that the wheel has turned 180-degrees. In the present environment, the new 'diversity and inclusion' culture may be something which can be used to advance their positions. To quote a sub-heading in one of Hughson's articles, the time might be right to 'seize the multicultural moment'.

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