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## **Changes in the ethnic identification of women's soccer clubs in Adelaide: the case of Adelaide City Women's Football Club**

Edoardo Rosso

(Flinders University)

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper focuses on women's soccer, one of the fastest growing sports in Australia, and in particular on the aspect of the ethnic background of Adelaide-based clubs. The paper aims to illustrate the shift in ethnic image that has occurred in recent years amongst Adelaide clubs, formerly associated with the Italian community, and to investigate the reason(s) behind this shift. Methods include interviews and correspondence with officials, sponsors, players and coaches of a local women's soccer club (Adelaide City Women's Football Club - ACWFC), officials of the South Australian Women's Soccer Association (SAWSA) and a literature review. The outcome is an inside perspective on the phenomenon of the abandonment of the Italian background of Adelaide women's soccer clubs. The project's significance relates to the exploration of a field, ethnicity in women's soccer in Adelaide, which links the important framework of ethnic community identity to a national fast-growing sport such as women's soccer.

### **Introduction**

The year 2006 was indeed a remarkable one for Australian soccer. With the first season of the new national 'A-League' successfully concluded, the national team participating in a FIFA<sup>1</sup> World Cup after 32 years of absence and the recent incorporation of Football Federation Australia (FFA) in the Asian Confederation, soccer is, under many instances, consolidating its place in the Australian sporting universe. Due to a recent change of name of the national governing body, from Soccer Australia into Football Federation Australia, the world's most popular sport (Mosley & Murray 1994) gained a new sort of "official title dignity". Its newly officialised condition of 'football' seems to raise the game to the rank of the other popular football codes, in a country where, until only a few years ago, it was markedly relegated to its ethnic dimension and derogatorily described as 'wogball' (Danforth

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<sup>1</sup> Federation of International Football Associations.

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2001, p. 369). In this study, the two terms 'football' and 'soccer' are used interchangeably, for both the men's and the women's version.

Mosley and Murray (1994) explain that soccer experienced its greatest growth in Australia during the years of mass immigration after World War II, dominated in particular by European migrants. Soccer became the game of the immigrants and, by the 1960s, it was consistently denigrated by large parts of the Australian-born population, which saw it as a possible threat to the more popular codes of Australian Rules, Rugby League and Rugby Union. In a climate of initial discrimination, soccer became extremely popular with a multitude of ethnic groups that settled in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, and often soccer clubs represented the basis of local community life, companionship, support and identification (Mosley 1997). Ethnic clubs grew and dominated Australian soccer until the early 1990s, when the Australian Soccer Federation, as part of a policy of economic expansion and promotion of the game to a wider and less segmented audience, commenced a radical de-ethnicization of the game, banning clubs bearing an ethnic name from participating in the 1992-93 National League competition (Danforth 2001). This was not sufficient, however, to erase the ethnic heritage of many soccer clubs, such as the Italian-based Adelaide City Soccer Club, which, in fact, continued to represent local ethnic communities (Charles 1994).

In the mid-1990s, the clubs involved in the re-badged National Soccer League were prompted by the governing body of Australian soccer to establish women's soccer teams, in the hope of further expanding the interest for the game and widening its societal base of support. This was the case of the unofficially 'Italian' Adelaide City Soccer Club, which fielded its first women's side in 1997 (Prodromou 2004). Women's soccer became one of the fastest growing sports in the past decade, both in Australia and worldwide (Football Federation Australia 2005), and it is interesting to ponder whether the same values of ethnic identity that have so characterised the men's game in Australia (Danforth 2001) are likely to be reproduced in its women's version. In the case of Adelaide City, the club rapidly removed itself from the original ties with the Italian community of Adelaide, and embarked on a steady policy of multiculturalism, which contributed to its growth well beyond the expectations of its founders (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). Similarly, most of the Adelaide-based women's soccer clubs, even though in some instances their relationship with particular men's clubs and therefore with particular ethnicities are evident, do not identify themselves with ethnic communities and do not carry out any social function based on ethnicity (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006).

This study aims to evaluate the extent of the shift that Adelaide City Women's Football Club (accordingly to its new official name) has performed, in terms of ethnic identification, from Italian to multicultural. In doing so, this paper will investigate the history of Adelaide City Women's Football Club (ACWFC), its current and past links with the local Italian community, its current ethnic composition and its members' perception of the club's current and past ethnic 'flavour'. Drawing largely on information collected by means of interview, this study presents a perspective from the inside on the changing ethnic character of one of the largest women's soccer clubs in Adelaide, reflecting one of the dominant themes of Australian soccer in its transition from its ethnic phase to a mainstream phase (Danforth 2001). The paper includes the methodology of the study on the changing ethnic identification of Adelaide City Women's Football Club, a literature review, a section dedicated to the history of Adelaide City Football Club that introduces the issues of ethnicity implicit

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in Australian soccer, and a section dedicated to Adelaide City Women's Football Club, its history and its cultural identity.

### Methodology

Qualitative research methods, in particular semi-structured interviews, were the key to accessing detailed information about ACWFC's history, as well as important elements of the club's current approach to the issue of ethnicity. ACWFC also has a website that provides information about the club's history, current teams, club sponsors and the various events that contribute to the club's sporting and social life.

Adelaide City has been chosen as a case study to represent the changing values of ethnic identification attached to women's soccer clubs in Adelaide because it was founded as a branch of a club with a clear ethnic identity, Adelaide City Soccer Club (Charles 1994; *La Fiamma* 1963). However, today the Italian origins of the women's club are barely observable due to a policy of discouraging ethnic exclusivity, which has been pursued throughout the club's history. Another significant factor that determined the choice of this club was the involvement of the investigator in the club's sporting activities at the time of research. This favoured privileged contacts with other club members as well as a clear understanding of the club's dynamics and policy approaches.

This paper is part of a more comprehensive study of local women's soccer, which constituted the core of the author's Honours thesis on the geography of Adelaide women's soccer (Rosso 2006). The original information presented in this paper was collected through personal communication and contributes to the discourse of ethnicity and sport in Australia, particularly to the changing ethnic character of local soccer.

The information relative to the proportion of Italian players and committee members comes from the ACWFC database, managed by the club administrators. The percentages shown in the paper referring to club members with Italian surnames are only an approximate indication of the people of Italian ancestry involved with the club; however they help to place in context the data provided by some interviewees on the Italian incidence in the first years of the club.

Seven interviews were conducted with club members and sponsors. In order to achieve a variety of points of view, interviewees were chosen according to their age, position and role in the club, duration of involvement with the club, ethnic background and availability. The name and the exact role of each respondent are omitted for privacy; however, following the work of McCalman (1984) pseudonyms reflecting the age, gender and ethnicity of the interviewees were used. Participants were chosen among players, coaches and technical staff, board members and sponsors. Some have been with the club since its foundation, some have joined ACWFC recently, some are of Italian heritage and some are not. At the time of the interviews, all respondents were over 18 years of age.

Finally, a review of literature concerned with sports issues, in particular with the theme of ethnicity in sport, was conducted in order to provide a conceptual framework for this study.

## Literature review

For the purpose of this work, the cited literature has been classified into three main thematic groups: the history of Australian soccer, social issues in sports, with particular attention to community identification in sports and gender issues in football, and themes of community ethnic identity, particularly with regard to Italian communities in Australia. The main aspects evidenced by the reviewed literature are the fundamental role played by the ethnic communities in the development of soccer in Australia (for example Mosley 1997; Mosley & Murray 1994), and the importance of the game in reinforcing community ties and ethnic identity (for example Danforth 2001; Charles 1994).

The most influential body of literature for the background of this study refers to the development of soccer in Australia and its links with ethnic communities, in particular the Italian community. The more general literature on ethnicity in sports is analysed in order to provide an appropriate scenario for the discussion of ethnic identity relative to Adelaide City Women's Football Club. Concepts of community identity, such as ethnic belonging, are useful to better understand the relationship between sporting clubs and the local Italian community.

The literature on the history of Australian soccer includes Mosley and Murray's (1994) chapter on soccer in *Sport in Australia: a Social History*, edited by W. Vamplew and B. Stoddart; Mosley's works on soccer and the Italian community in *Sporting Immigrants* (1997, edited by P.A. Mosley, R. Cashman, J. O'Hara and H. Weatherburn); the history of Adelaide's ethnic soccer clubs (Charles 1994); a newspaper article from *La Fiamma* (1963) on the local Italian soccer club; the history of Port Pirie's Italian soccer clubs (Corrieri 1992); and Harlow's (2003) comprehensive *History of Soccer in South Australia 1902-2002*. Mosley and Murray (1994) present the history of football in Australia, highlighting its initial popularity with the migrants and the working class countered by the hostility of the Australian general public. They note how community clubs where soccer was often the primary activity were extremely important for non-English speaking migrants in the mass migration period after WWII, and how the game in Australia in those years became a 'league of nations' (Mosley and Murray 1994, p. 223). They also describe its transition from being an ethnic game to a multicultural game, due to the perception of sponsors that the majority of the public could not identify itself with the ethnic clubs that dominated the scene until the 1990s. Mosley (1997) reinforces the concept of close association between soccer and immigrants in Australia, as the game was introduced by British migrants and it boomed due to the massive migration intake of the post WWII years. He accounts for the many Italian clubs in Australia and recognises the importance that the Italian community played in the development of the local game. He explains that soccer clubs were an important means of community sustainability among the migrant groups in the 1950s and 1960s, enabling social interaction, support links, individual expression and recreation, as well as social recognition within the ethnic group itself. He highlights the ethnic character of many soccer clubs as an important social heritage of Australia, however he recognises the need for the mainstream society to identify with the game if Australian soccer is to expand. Charles (1994) provides a valuable outlook on the historical evolution of Adelaide-based ethnic soccer clubs, making clear that ethnic identity is still a significant element of Adelaide soccer culture. In particular, Charles (1994) reports the history of Adelaide City Soccer Club and accounts for its marked Italian heritage. Adelaide City Soccer Club, or more precisely Juventus, as the club was known until

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1976, is the subject of a special report on the Italian community of Adelaide, published by the Italian community newspaper *La Fiamma* in 1963. In this article, the club is described as the most glorious example of Italian football in Australia, founded in 1940 under the guidance of the Italian vice-consul at the time. The importance of the club and its contribution to the national, but especially the South Australian soccer scene, appears clear also in the work of Harlow (2003), who traces the history of soccer in South Australia from its beginning to 2002. Another account of Italian football club history in South Australia is given by Corrieri (1992), who reveals the annals of Port Pirie-based Savoy and Virtus clubs.

The literature on social issues in sports is indeed extensive, however for the purpose of this paper it is limited to issues of ethnicity and gender. Particular attention has been given to community identification and gender issues in sport. Community identification in sport is discussed from the point of view of ethnicity in Australian sports (Danforth 2001; Brabazon 2000; Adair & Vamplew 1997; Lynch & Veal 1996;); the sense of belonging to a sporting community (Gil 2002; Phelps 2001); nationalism fostered by sport (Bandyopadhyay 2003); and racism in sport (Jarvie 2000). Furthermore, Collins (2000) offers a review of current sport studies research undertaken in Australia and New Zealand.

Gender issues in sport are discussed in the light of the constraints on women's participation in sport (Sleep 1998). An examination of literature concerned with gender issues in world sports includes historical developments, ideology of women's sports, and the association between masculinity and sport (Theberge 2000); the role of women in Australian sport (Adair & Vamplew 1997); and the prejudice of male sports towards women's sports (Lynch & Veal 1996). Women's soccer is treated in academic journals specialising in football, such as *Football Studies* (vol. 6, no. 2, 2003; vol. 4, no. 2, 2001; vol. 1, no. 2, 1998) and *Soccer and Society* (vol. 4, no 2-3, 2002; vol. 3, no. 2, 2002), which published numerous studies with a largely sociological and historical approach. Interestingly, Australian women's soccer is not included in the special issue on women's soccer of *Soccer and Society* (2003, vol. 4, no. 2-3) that critically discusses the history of the game across 16 countries, including USA, Canada, China, Korea, India, Denmark, England, Germany, Norway, Ireland, Sweden, New Zealand, Senegal, Nigeria, South Africa and Brazil, nor is it examined elsewhere. Literature on women's soccer can be analysed considering examples from countries in which the game has become popular (Markovits & Hellerman 2003; Hall 2003; Fasting 2003; Hjelm & Olfsson 2003; Hong & Mangan 2003; Jinxia & Mangan 2002; Bourke 2003; Brus & Trangbaek 2003; Williams 2003), and countries where it still struggles to express its full potential (Pfeitzer 2003 and 2001; Marschik 2003 and 1998; Cox & Thompson 2003; Saavedrs 2003; Majumar 2003; Kho 2003; Votre & Mourao 2003). Common constraints for the development of women's soccer include financial limitations, cultural barriers, elitism, mismanagement and prejudice.

Themes of ethnic identity and community identification in Australia are analysed by Jakubowicz (1989), Cahill and Ewen (1987), Vasta (1995), and Baldassar (1999). Jakubowicz (1989) suggests that a significant constraint for multicultural policy in Australia is the underlying diversity of cultural histories and barriers that undermine the relationship between many non-English speaking working class people, and provide the ground for growing racism. Cahill and Ewen (1987) explain that ethnic youth take definite pride in their cultural heritage, however they are a social group particularly at risk, especially those who cannot count on the support of their community and who experience financial struggles. Vasta (1995), in analysing the transformation in Italian-Australian family culture, underlines the changing

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position of women in Italian families and Italian communities, due to enhanced knowledge, social relations and social awareness. Baldassar (1999 a) provides an interesting insight on Italian-Australian youth in Perth, and proposes the theory of "invention of ethnicity" (Baldassar 1999 a, p. 209) to describe immigrants actively taking parts in mainstream social life but maintaining their cultural ties alive. This opposes the thesis of "loss of culture" (Baldassar 1999 a, p. 206), which argues that ethnic groups have no choice but to slowly give up their traditions under the pressures of modernisation. A further article from Baldassar (1999 b) evidences the generational changes in Italian-Australian communities, especially with regard to female emancipation.

This literature review establishes the basis upon which to analyse the changing value of ethnicity relating to several Adelaide-based women's soccer clubs, which will be disclosed through the case study of the formerly Italian community-based Adelaide City Women's Football Club.

### **From Savoia to Adelaide City Women's Football Club**

To reveal the history of Adelaide City Women's Football Club, it is necessary to commence from the history of its 'mother club', the men's club of Adelaide City, and to consider the environment of Australian soccer in the mid-1990s, when ACWFC was founded.

ACWFC was founded in 1997 by the Adelaide City Soccer Club, in order to fulfil its National League commitment towards the promotion of women's soccer (Prodromou 2004). Briefly after its foundation, however, the women's club decided to separate from its 'male parent' and commenced a new adventure on its own. As a club official (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006) points out, the distance between the women's and the men's club has increasingly widened since the foundation of ACWFC, and the heritage of the women's club remains observable only in its colours and its name. The black and white stripes are the only feature that still link the club to its ethnic origins, when members of the Italian community of Adelaide in 1946 formed a soccer club called Juventus, named after the famous Turin-based Italian side (Adelaide City Football Club 2006). Early on, the board members of Adelaide City Women's Football Club made the decision to discourage ethnic exclusivity in the new club and to remove themselves from the ethnic framework of the men's club, thus promoting the image of a multicultural environment (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). The policy of multiculturalism followed by ACWFC represents an interesting example of the changing relationship between the ethnic communities of Adelaide and the city's soccer scenario, historically dominated by men's clubs with a definite ethnic background (Charles 1994), but increasingly 'contaminated' by women's sides which, with some notable exceptions, do not perceive ethnicity as a convenient vehicle of identification.

### **Adelaide City Football Club: the history of an ethnic club**

Adelaide City (men's) Football Club celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006, and, although it is no longer defined by the marked ethnic character of its early days, its Italian heritage is still widely perceived and recognised in the local sporting community (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006).

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The club was initially founded in 1940 by a group of football enthusiastic Italian immigrants, including the vice-consul Felice Rando (*La Fiamma* 1963), who called the club Savoia, in honour of the Italian Royal Family (Charles 1994). Savoia lasted only a few games in the local second division (*La Fiamma* 1963) before it was dismantled, due to the internment by the Australian government of some of Adelaide's Italians for security reasons (Charles 1994). As Charles (1994) notes, the Royal Family was no longer a favourite banner for Italians in South Australia, and when new members joined the original group of 1940 to re-establish the soccer club, a new name was chosen after the well-known Italian club Juventus (*La Fiamma* 1963). Interestingly, Adelaide Juventus could not wear the famous black and white stripes (as did Juventus FC in Italy) until 1949, when the local football federation changed the rule that prevented more clubs wearing the same colours. Juventus was, until then, forced to wear a navy-blue top bearing a white 'J', given that black and white were the colours of the Port Adelaide team (Adelaide City Football Club 2006).

In the same year, another club was founded in South Australia by Italian migrants, sharing more than the ethnic background with the Adelaide club. The Savoy Soccer Club of Port Pirie inherited the name of the former Adelaide Savoia (Corrieri 1992), and, as Adelaide City did (Mosley 1997), survived and succeeded as an Italian ethnic soccer club for over fifty years.

After establishing its base of support and its regular presence in the local premier division, Juventus went on to win its first championship in 1953 (*La Fiamma* 1963). Since then, the club has won sixteen titles in sixty years, including three national leagues (Adelaide City Football Club 2006), repaying the massive support received by the Italian community of Adelaide, which participated enthusiastically and in significant numbers in the endeavours of the club (Charles 1994). Charles (1994) reports that the support received by the Italian community and the close association between the Italians and the club contributed, in a certain measure, to the stigmatisation and ethnic discrimination that many immigrants experienced in the years of mass migration. The club came to be associated with derogatorily labelled ethnic supporters, but in exchange provided a vehicle of ethnic pride and ethnic identity for many of the Italian immigrants who suffered social discrimination in those years (Charles 1994).

The ethnic component of soccer and the excess of nationalism that it has sometimes generated among soccer fans several times provoked adverse reactions in the media and the game's governing institutions. As Mosley (1997) explains, ethnic soccer supporters, although in general less frequently and less violently than the press reported, have at times engaged in riots, transferring onto the soccer scene social and political traumas that often had historical roots which proved too hard for the mainstream Anglo-Australian public to understand. 'Ethnic violence' associated with soccer (Charles 1994, p. 38), together with the growing popularity of the game among the numerous immigrants, which was seen by many Australians as a threat to other football codes, caused general antagonism towards the Australian ethnic-based system (Mosley 1997). Furthermore, the exasperation of the media, which often capitalised on the selling ability of ethnic riots at soccer games, exacerbated the growing xenophobia against the perceived foreign game throughout the 1960s and prompted the various soccer associations to take action for the de-ethnicization of the game (Mosley 1997). Policies limiting the use of ethnic names, widely adopted by South Australian teams between the 1950s and 1970s (Harlow 2003), were enforced at various times in the different states in the 1960s and the 1980s (Mosley 1997). The approach against the ethnic clubs system became part of the national policy at the

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beginning of the 1990s, when the national federation, following the recommendations of the Bradley report of 1992, banned ethnic names from being used by all the clubs involved in the National Soccer League from 1992-93 onwards (Danforth 2001).

Adelaide City Soccer Club was at the centre of the ethnic name debate well before the 1990s. As early as 1953, the president of the then Adelaide Juventus, convinced that the problem was the excessive nationalism of some supporters, proposed the idea of abolishing ethnic names as a means of distancing the soccer clubs from violent spectators (Charles 1994). In 1976, the club became known as Adelaide City (Charles 1994) and participated in the foundation of the first National Soccer League (Adelaide City Football Club 2006). The change of name, clearly an attempt to seek support transcending the Italian community, did not mean an abandonment of the club's ethnic roots (Charles 1994). On the contrary, the club remained closely associated with the Italians of Adelaide, who kept referring to it as Juventus, regardless of the fact that any nationality was welcome at the club and that players of nationalities other than Italian were playing for their team (Charles 1994).

While Adelaide City voluntarily changed its name to represent the people of Adelaide instead of the Italian people of Adelaide in the national league (Charles 1994), most ethnic clubs in Australia opposed the ban of ethnic names that followed the Bradley Report (Danforth 2001). They perceived the resolution as an abuse of their right to show pride in their ethnic origins, and argued that ethnic support was the prime characteristic of soccer and that such a rule would have destroyed the system (Danforth 2001). Indeed, as Danforth (2001) notes, this policy does not match the ideal of a multicultural nation, as a dichotomy between 'ethnic' and 'Australian' would not exist in a truly multicultural society.

The underlying reason for the ban of ethnic names was, as Mosley and Murray (1994) point out, largely economic. The Bradley Report of 1992, as well as a marketing study commissioned by the National Soccer League in the late 1980s, were attempts by the soccer administrators to make the game more attractive for non-ethnic spectators and to foster its growth in Australia (Danforth 2001). The case of Adelaide City illustrates, to a certain extent, the complex situation in which Australian soccer clubs and officials found themselves from the 1960s onwards: even though their ethnic connections constituted their original base of support, soccer administrators were eager to widen their audience and to include the mainstream Australian public, sponsors, and television contracts (Danforth 2001). As Charles (1994) notes, banning the ethnic names did not prevent soccer clubs from maintaining their links with the ethnic communities that they represented. In other words, the policy resulted in a mere re-packaging of the same product (Danforth 2001), and in fact did not produce the expected success during the 1990s.

### **Adelaide City Women's Football Club: multicultural soccer?**

In the scenario of frustrated expectations of growth in which Australian soccer found itself in the mid-1990s, a new attempt was made by the national soccer administrator to broaden the audience of the game, this time not centred on ethnicity, but on gender. In 1997, each club participating in the National Soccer League had to build a women's team (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006). Adelaide City was no exception and invested some of its board members with the task of creating a women's section of the club. (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). As one of the club founders notes (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006), Adelaide City

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Women's Football Club started as a response to the political necessity of the men's club, not as an independent event within the South Australian women's soccer scene, which had had its own soccer association since 1978. On the other hand, although the club was founded much later than other women's soccer clubs in Adelaide, it could count on the expertise of administrators and coaches who were already involved with an important local sporting institution such as the Adelaide City men's club. In 1997, the new women's club presented only one team, which played in the third division of the SAWSA (South Australian Women's Soccer Association) league, and, despite its limited availability of players and resources, was immediately promoted to second division (Prodromou 2004). Since then, the club has grown to become one of the largest and most successful in South Australian women's soccer: in 2006 it had seven teams, five of which were junior teams, and it can pride itself on numerous local and interstate trophies awarded in its brief history (ACWFC 2006).

ACWFC was initially founded as a section of the men's club, which was widely recognised as an Italian club (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). Its roots are identifiable in the former Juventus club and in the Italian community of Adelaide, which, as one of the initial founders recalls (ACWSC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006), provided a lot of support to the new institution. The support of the Italian community was critical for the newly-formed women's club, given that, soon after its formation, conflicting forces internal to the men's club resulted in a gradual marginalisation of the women's side, and ultimately compelled the women's club administrators to separate from the main club (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). When the separation became unavoidable, several members of the Italian community of Adelaide who were sponsoring the men's club decided to abandon the men and support the women, because of suggestions of corruption within Adelaide City men's and the enthusiasm of the promising women's counterpart (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). These sponsors were attracted by the fact that they could support a fresh institution, free from stale politics and discontent, but at the same time remain loyal to the colours and name that they had supported for many years. One of the men's board members who was given the task of setting up the women's club remembers how Italian sponsors were instrumental in the success of the women's side:

I took capital out of this enchantment of traditional sponsors of the men's club and got them on the side of the women's club, because they still wanted to back Adelaide City, they just didn't want to back the men (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006).

Although ACWFC was founded by Adelaide City's officials and it formally remained a section of the men's club for two years, in reality it was conceived not as an integral part of the existing club, but as a sort of separate entity with which the men's club had to deal (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006). While the playing equipment and the playing field were originally supplied by the men's club, the women's section had to rely on its own ability to raise funds and find sponsorships for its sustainment (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006). This was one of the causes of the fallout between the men's and the women's officials, as when the women's side demonstrated its ability to provide for its own financial needs, the men's board tried to take advantage of the situation by demanding the women's club share their sponsor's financial support (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006). Moreover, the men's club embarked on a strategy of bullying the women's officials, aimed at establishing

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control over the blossoming and promising structure of ACWFC (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). As soon as the obligation for national league clubs to have women's teams expired, due to a change in national policy, Adelaide City Football Club denied the use of the playing field for the women's club. This incident prompted ACWFC to look for an alternative venue and ultimately detach from the men's and take full responsibility for its future (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006).

They tried to exploit us, tried to dictate to us, in terms of what we should and we shouldn't do, where we should play and where we shouldn't play, things like that... (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006).

They were only giving us the pitch, we had a separate committee (...) we found our own sponsors (...), the girls were paying their fees, the balls came from the club, yes, from Juventus (...). The committee of Adelaide City told me that it was no longer possible to use the pitch that they had given us at the start (...) not only that, they told me, look that we don't need the girls any more (...), the club president wanted us to hand over our sponsors to the major team, that's why our committee thought if we could separate (...) because the only thing the club was doing, Adelaide City, was trying to take our sponsors... (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006. Translated from Italian, see Appendix 1 for original transcript).

The women's club moved to the facilities of Campbelltown City Soccer Club, another Adelaide-based Italian club, thanks to connections between ACWFC members and the Campbelltown administrators, and remained there for a whole season, however the separation with Adelaide City was not yet official (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006). During that year, the founders of ACWFC, strengthened by the support of a few important sponsors, decided to separate from the men's club and to obtain their own playing venue, on the corner of South Terrace and Hutt Road in Adelaide (ACWFC interview, *Guido Terenzi* 2006).

In 1999, Adelaide City Women's Football Club incorporated its name and formally became independent from the men's club. As several interviewees point out, ACWSC made a point of distancing itself from the image of its founding club, although it retained the name and the black and white stripes. The change of image wanted by the newly-independent club officials was aimed at suggesting the idea of a friendly environment, where people and players of all nationalities were welcome (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). The club was created by an Italian club and Italian heritage was certainly part of its history, but there was a general consensus among the board members to promote a policy of open multiculturalism, as opposed to strengthening the club's ethnic connections.

The multicultural policy embraced by ACWFC did not attempt to deny its ethnic origin, and the club retained a large base of Italian officials, coaches, players and sponsors, particularly in its early years, when ACWFC had about 70-80 per cent of its members and players from an Italian background (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006). Regrettably no official data, such as newspaper records, club database records or club affiliation records are accessible for a more accurate quantification of this claim. The estimation, however, seems plausible in consideration of the markedly ethnic social networks that enabled the foundation of the club in terms of access to players and coaches. Furthermore, it is consistent with the account of all the interviewees who witnessed the first years of the Adelaide City

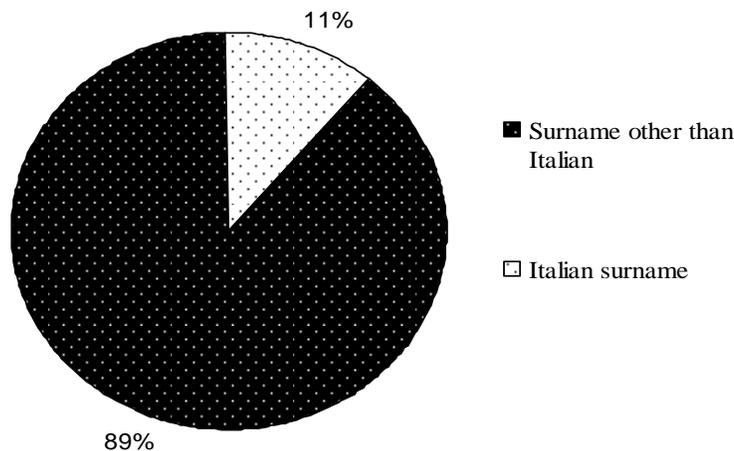
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women's club. All the people interviewed, who have spent more than six or seven years at ACWFC, agree that when they first joined, the club's Italian heritage was much more evident than it is today, especially with regard to the proportion of players with an Italian family background. The ethnic influence was also perceivable during the club's functions, which were consistently held at Italian clubs and where many of the participants belonged to the Italian community:

When we started, all the functions were at Italian clubs, and there was an Italian coach, a couple of (Italian) coaches, but since then I think it has developed into a more multicultural (club) (ACWFC interview, *Susan Wilkins* 2006).

Most of the interviewees point out how the club's connection with the Italian community has changed in the second half of its history, as its ties to the Italian community gradually weaken. This is observable not only in the numbers of players with an Italian background, but also in the coaching staff and the club board: although the Italian presence is still an important characteristic of the club, it is gradually diminishing. One event that several respondents indicated as a clear example of the club's increasingly multicultural character, was the recruitment of international players, in particular Danish and Norwegian players, who contributed significantly to the club's sporting success and to its change of image (ACWFC interviews, *Thomas Kowalsky, Susan Wilkins, Tony Perini* and *Guido Terenzi* 2006).

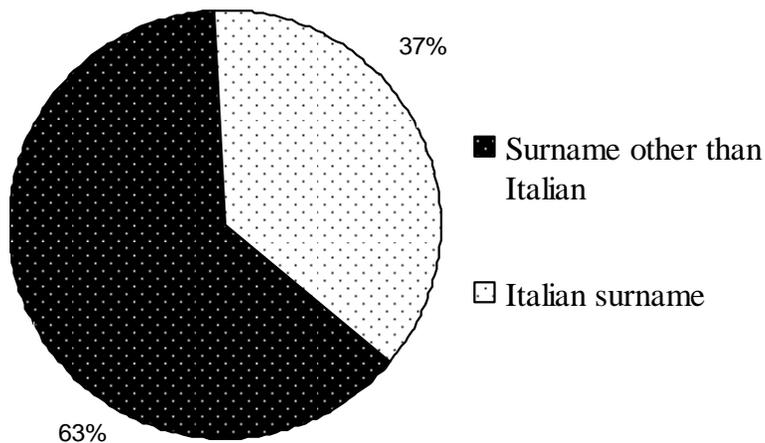
Figure 1, 2 and 3 show respectively the proportions of players, committee members and technical staff with an Italian surname in 2006. Tony Perini (ACWFC interview 2006), who has been with the club since its very early stage, suggests that its changing ethnic composition is also a consequence of the growth of women's soccer as a sport. He states that the popularity of the sport is increasingly attracting players from diverse backgrounds, age groups and socio-economic status, and this is reflected in the increasingly varied player base of many clubs.



**Figure 1: Percentage of Adelaide City Women's Soccer Club players with an Italian surname in 2006**

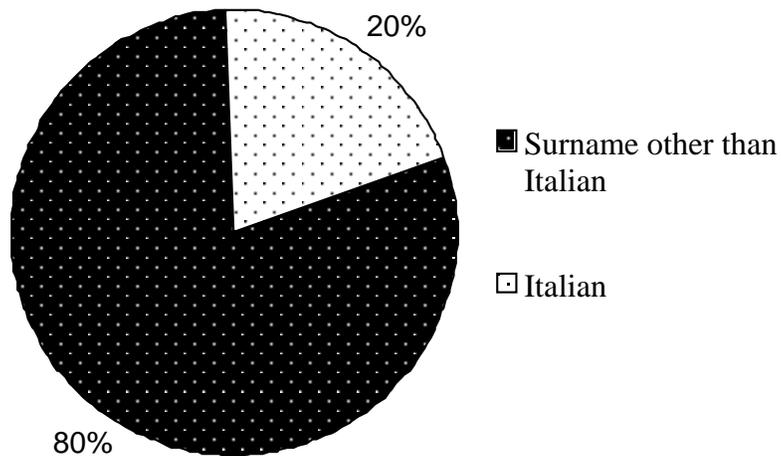
Source: ACWFC 2006

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**Figure 2: Percentage of Adelaide City Women's Soccer Club committee members with an Italian surname in 2006**

Source: ACWFC 2006



**Figure 3: Percentage of Adelaide City Women's Soccer Club technical staff with an Italian surname in 2006**

Source: ACWFC 2006

The nature of the means of analysis and the fact that there is not a real figure with which to compare these findings imply that these figures are only an approximate description of the club's composition. Nevertheless, they are useful in showing that ACWFC still has a clear Italian presence, but certainly not as dominant as it was in the early days of the club according to the interviewees who witnessed that phase. A player who spent most of her career at ACWFC, and whose father used to play for Adelaide Juventus, remembers that:

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When I joined the club, many of the players were Italian and all my coaches to date have been (Italian). All presentation nights were influenced by the Italian culture, food, sponsors etc. (...). I first struggled with not being Italian and felt like an outsider, but it didn't take long for me to build up an emotional tie with the club and players (...). There were more players of Italian background, (...) the coaching staff were all Italian (ACWFC interview, *Jessica Moore* 2006).

These figures show that the Italian background is not a dominant characteristic of the players, nor of the club's committee members, yet on the other hand there seems to be a more marked Italian presence among the technical staff. One club official, however, asserts that the club would never recruit any staff on the basis of his or her ethnic background (ACWFC interview, *Susan Wilkins* 2006).

Although ACWFC has made a point of not advertising itself as an Italian club, the perception of the club in the wider Adelaide sporting community may sometimes still be linked to its ethnic origins. A player who joined the club only recently admits:

I think the club is and wants to be associated with the Italian community. From my perspective, I believe that the Italian community is very strong in Adelaide and also very wealthy. The club is able to benefit financially from this association and, by default, maintain its strength and dominance as one of the best female soccer clubs. The strong community basis, I believe, also helps retain the best (Italian) players, because of this emotional association with the club, which subsequently improves performance on the field (ACWFC interview, *Emma Clarke* 2006).

The same player, however, recognises that the ethnic component of Adelaide City Women's Football Club is not as obvious as it used to be for the men's club about a decade ago:

(It) definitely has changed since I first started supporting the Adelaide City national men's team (before the competition changed), where the supporters used to call the club 'Juventus' and hold Italian flags (ACWFC interview, *Emma Clarke* 2006).

Both players who were interviewed perceive a certain 'Italian-ness' within the club, unrelated to the background of players, but rather to the club's sponsors and history. They suggest that the club has important links with the Italian community, and that the club's ethnic heritage is still very observable, for example due to several Italian staff and players who, at times, speak Italian to each other. They both recognise, however, that the ethnic character of the club is only visible in the senior teams, while the junior section is already distinctively multicultural. They also suggest that the Italian character that can be perceived in relation to ACWFC is not at all damaging or limiting for the club, since it does not appear to restrict its ability to recruit players, coaches or sponsors who are not linked with the Italian community (ACWFC interviews, *Jessica Moore* and *Emma Clarke* 2006). One of the club's coaches and a committee member explain that the only real links between ACWFC and the Italian community are through the club's name, colours and sponsors, but that people from the outside may still associate it with the men's ethnic club (ACWFC interviews *Susan Wilkins* and *Tony Perini* 2006).

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A board member, and club founder, summarises the influence of the sponsors in what may be perceived as the Italian character of the club, but points out how the club's board members followed a policy of multiculturalism that ultimately enabled the change of ethnic identification of Adelaide City Women's Football Club:

Whether it still has a sponsorship base that is Italian, to a large degree, and that gradually evolved to non-Italian sponsors as well, we made a conscious decision to advertise our club by word of mouth, and in other forms, through radio etc., not as a purely Italian club. We wanted our club to be a multicultural club, and there was a very deliberate policy of doing that...and, look, almost from day one it started to happen. We had players from overseas, we had Americans, we had Africans, we had Scandinavians, we had people from... you know, Australian girls from the local schools. And of course, there is still an element of Italians, by all means, but over the years, that representation of children with Italian background has become less and less. (...) I am happy about that, because it is representative of the country as opposed to (an) ethnic little enclave, you know...and I think that's really one of the reasons why Adelaide City men's is...dying (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006).

One of the main Italian sponsors of ACWFC, who has helped the club throughout its history and who participates in various community initiatives in Adelaide, says that sport clubs should really only exist for the children who play sports, and that there should not be any ethnic values preventing anyone from joining a particular club (ACWFC interview, *Frank Sabato* 2006). He feels that ethnicity is definitely a value to be preserved in Australian society, but that this should be the task of community and social clubs, not soccer clubs. He explains that:

There should be no association between ethnicity and sport, because sport is about bringing people together, not about divisions. Soccer clubs need not [to] have an ethnic focus, because it would divide people (ACWFC interview, *Frank Sabato* 2006).

### Conclusion

Ethnic soccer clubs represent the history of Australian soccer (Mosley 1997). Furthermore, a policy of true multiculturalism should allow for the use of ethnic names in sporting competitions, given the right of any national group to celebrate its own heritage and the senselessness of a dichotomy between 'Australian' and 'ethnic' in a society that should be proud of its diverse ethnic composition (Danforth 2001). Ethnic soccer clubs provided the opportunity for many immigrants, especially during the 1950s and the 1960s, to enjoy socialisation and recreation, and to maintain cultural links with other ethnic community members (Mosley & Murray 1994). Mosley and Murray (1994) underline the affection that many ethnic soccer clubs enjoyed from their members and supporters, noting how the survival of ethnic clubs is based on the continued support of different generations of migrants, as happened with the Italian community of Adelaide and their Adelaide City Football Club, formerly known as Juventus. Charles (1994) makes clear that, although its name changed in the late

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1970s, Adelaide City still represents the Italian people of Adelaide, who affectionately refer to it with its old ethnic name.

Ethnic names may have represented the need for social identification for a large part of Australian football followers, but they proved to be a serious obstacle to the economic development of the game in Australia (Danforth 2001). Their abolition was indeed the manifestation of the necessity to try new strategies to further develop the game, in particular concerning the promotion of soccer among the wider Australian public (Mosley 1997). The same policy of expansion attempted to create interest for women's soccer in the late 1990s (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006), by compelling every National League contending club to have a women's team. Adelaide City Women's Football Club was founded as the women's section of the Italian Adelaide City.

The conflicts that arose between the club administrators caused the separation between the women's and the men's sides, and initiated a process of de-ethnicization that resulted in a women's club markedly different from its 'ethnic parent', proud of its multicultural policy and international connections (ACWFC, various interviews, May 2006). The club followed a policy of multiculturalism, including the recruitment of international players, which contributed to the fading of its ethnic identification with the local Italian community. The club avoided promoting itself as an Italian club, as it avoided any particular promotion in the local Italian community, however it did not take any step to erase its Italian heritage or to discourage Italian people from taking part in the club's life. The Italian connection is still visible in the club's name and colours, which have remained the same as the Adelaide City men's, a club clearly linked to the Italians of Adelaide (Charles 1994). Furthermore, ACWFC has enjoyed, and still enjoys, the support of a number of businesses with clear Italian backgrounds and links with the Italian community. These sponsors, however, appear linked to the club by ties of friendship with the club board members and by the desire to participate in the growth of the local game rather than by any desire to obtain financial returns from the Italian community or to support the community itself (ACWFC interview, *Frank Sabato* 2006).

The Italian character that markedly identified the club formerly known as Adelaide Juventus is gradually fading in the Adelaide City Women's Football Club base of players, staff and committee members. This is especially observable in the junior squads, where the proportion of players and officials with an Italian surname does not appear to be dominant at all.

Adelaide City Women's Football Club, unlike other Adelaide-based women's soccer clubs (ACWFC interview, *Susan Wilkins* 2006) is deliberately changing its ethnic identity, as it perceives it as a limiting factor in the ability to attract players and sponsors from a wider social background (ACWFC interview, *Susan Wilkins* 2006). The club also intends to be a vehicle of growth of local women's soccer, and it recognises the "ethnic clubs system" as one of the reasons for the limited interest in soccer that has characterised the history of the game in Australia.

The view of the club on the issue of its ethnic identity is effectively summarised by the words of one of the founders, who contributed to the creation of the women's section of Adelaide City, the separation from the men's club, and the implementation of the club's policy of multiculturalism:

One of the things holding soccer back in this country is the fact that the ethnic minorities have tried to preserve the ethnicity of their sport, and Adelaide City men, even though they wouldn't say it loudly, have

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virtually made themselves exclusive, so that people, Australians, didn't go watch them because they felt unwelcome. They didn't feel part of it, as opposed to Adelaide United, which is a different concept altogether, the people's team, it embraces all South Australians, and that's what I wanted to do with our women's club. [...] (Adelaide City Women's Football Club) has an Italian heritage, and it will always have an Italian heritage, it's just that the nature of the club has changed; the make up of it has changed, in terms of people who play for it. And there has been a dilution of those who sponsor the club too, from being purely Italian to ... others (ACWFC interview, *Thomas Kowalsky* 2006).

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*Tony Perini*, coach (interviewed on 17 May 2006).

*Guido Terenzi*, founding member (interviewed on 19 May 2006).

*Jessica Moore*, player (interviewed on 31 May 2006).

*Emma Clarke*, player (interviewed on 27 June 2006).

*Frank Sabato*, sponsor (interviewed on 27 June 2006).

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**Appendix 1:**

*Ci davano solamente il campo, noi avevamo un comitato separato (...) trovavamo i nostri sponsors (...), le ragazze pagavano le loro registrazioni, i palloni venivano dal club, sì, dalla Juventus (...). Il comitato dell'Adelaide City mi ha detto che non era possibile più usare il campo che ci avevano dato all'inizio (...) non solo quello, mi hanno detto, guarda che non ci occorrono le ragazze più' (...) il presidente del club voleva che noi dessimo gli sponsors al major team (...), per quello che poi il nostro comitato ha pensato se potevamo sganciarci (...) perché l'unica cosa che il club faceva, l'Adelaide City club, era cercare di prenderci i nostri sponsors... (ACWFC interview, Guido Terenzi 2006)*