

‘Roma non dimentica i suoi figli’: love, sacrifice and emotional attachment to football heroes

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Italian football is renowned as much for the passion of its spectators as it is for the quality of its players, yet these spectators are understudied. Those studies that have been conducted have generally focused on the problems of violence and racism associated with some of the more extreme supporters, the so-called *ultras*. This paper aims to complement that research by analysing a different aspect of the passions of Italian spectators, namely the emotional ties they create with particular players upon whom they confer a special, hero-like status. Our interest lies not in questioning the legitimacy of this status, but rather in looking at what the history of these emotional attachments reveals of the football supporters themselves, and of their relationship to the football club they support. This paper focuses on the intense relationship supporters of Associazione Sportiva Roma have had with two key players: Agostino Di Bartolomei and Francesco Totti. Drawing on a large body of texts including graffiti, newspapers, talkback radio, popular accounts and internet fan forums, along with psychoanalysis and classical mythology, the authors trace the way each of these players was granted a specific heroic status that evolved and changed over time, and how the passions they provoked became part of the ever transforming culture and identity of Rome. In particular we explore how the tales and cultural texts devoted to football players can reveal something of the emotional worlds and experiences of a city’s inhabitants, and the way local memories and identities are remembered, retold and forgotten through passionate engagement with the football players who represent them on the broader national and international stage.

Keywords: football; A.S. Roma; heroes; celebrities; affect; emotions

Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?
A nation turns its lonely eyes to you. (‘Mrs Robinson’, Simon and Garfunkel)

Introduction

Every year on 30 May, graffiti appear on the walls of Rome. Outsiders might think that these graffiti hark back to the fateful day in 1984 when the Associazione Sportiva (AS) Roma – Rome’s most popular football club – suffered its greatest trauma, losing the *Coppa dei campioni* (European Champions’ Cup, now the UEFA Champions League) final at home to Liverpool in a penalty shoot-out.¹ Yet the graffiti is neither mournful or defeatist. Instead, it celebrates the captain of that Roma team, Agostino Di Bartolomei,

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who killed himself on the tenth anniversary of that game, 30 May 1994. 'Agostino di Bartolomei the one and only captain' asserts one, 'Roma does not forget its sons, Agostino is here with us' declares another (see <http://www.lamiaroma.it/cartellasalvaguai/SCRITTEPERAGOSTINO.htm>).²

Inhabitants of Rome have been writing their thoughts on public walls and monuments for thousands of years, and over the last century football has become a popular topic for such graffiti (Hastings 1984; Penn 2005). Graffiti inscriptions are typified by their affective tone (Brighenti 2010) and are a rich resource for any history of emotions. Indeed cultural theorist Ella Chmielewska argues that 'graffiti contains in its emotional gesture the imprint of the past' (Chmielewska 2009, 42).³ Yet the yearly tributes to Agostino Di Bartolomei reveal not so much the imprint of the past as one particular passionate *reading* of the past – a reading that depicts Di Bartolomei as a true hero of Roma. Other interpretations of this past are possible, however, and at times have been predominant within Rome. Most crucially perhaps, Di Bartolomei has not always been viewed as a hero, and he died feeling alienated and perhaps betrayed by the club he had served for much of his life.

This article traces the history of some of the divergent public narratives that have emerged concerning Agostino Di Bartolomei and compares them briefly with the narratives around another Roma captain, Francesco Totti. Drawing from graffiti, newspapers, talkback radio, popular accounts and internet fan forums, along with psychoanalysis and classical mythology, we explore how the tales and cultural texts devoted to football players can reveal something of the emotional worlds and experiences of a city's inhabitants. We are not concerned with finding the correct reading of these Roma players and their at times contentious history, but rather with how the passions they provoke could become an integral part of the ever transforming culture and identity of Rome.

In so doing we hope to create space for dialogue between the study of Italian history and Italian football. Although De Biasi and Lanfranchi (1997, 87) decried the general absence of football from scholarly histories of Italy more than a decade ago, this absence remains to be remedied in any significant fashion. The same is unfortunately true for histories of Rome. Yet football has become *the* dominant public passion in Italy and much of the recent history of Rome is intertwined with the history of Roma (Ricatti 2010). The emotional nature of the relationship between Roma and its supporters is a common motif of more popular reflections on Rome. The famous Roman actor Gigi Proietti (cited in Catapano 2008, 20) for example, has employed the metaphor of a romantic and intimate relationship between a man and a woman, in which Roma is a beautiful woman. The popular songwriter Antonello Venditti (2008, vii) has made the broader point that 'Rome is a great museum of Roma fandom'. Sports like football, then, should provide ideal material for investigating the emotional history of Italian cities like Rome. Somewhat surprisingly, however, few of the historical, sociological and cultural studies that have focused on Italian football have systematically engaged with the general passion for football. Instead they have generally concentrated on the history of Italian football teams (see in particular Foot 2006)⁴ or on the behaviour of the minority of extreme football supporters – the *ultras* – and associated issues of violence and racism (see for example: Zani and Kirchler 1991; Dal Lago and Di Biasi 1994; Roversi and Balestri 2001; Testa and Armstrong 2010).

One possible approach would be to draw from the emerging literature on the history of emotions, especially studies of the way emotions tie people and communities together

(e.g. Reddy 2001; Rosenwein 2002). Yet these pioneering studies tend to focus on the instrumental function of emotions, and speak little of less clearly rational factors such as the desires and fantasies which animate and lend absurd importance to what might seem like simple games of football between two groups of men.⁵ In this article our interest lies specifically with the passions provoked by Italian football that seem to exceed instrumentality, inspiring, among other things, incongruous love poems for a football club and graffiti declarations of timeless devotion to dead team captains. Another alternative is to explore the intense affective relationship that supporters have with key players through the framework of celebrity studies (for an overview see Holmes and Redmond 2006). Yet while the celebrity-player occupies an important space in contemporary media, simply to lump football players in with other celebrities – as many recent studies do with sports stars (e.g. Smart 2005; Cashmore 2006) – is to disregard the way in which most football players are still primarily judged on the deeds they perform (or fail to perform) on the pitch for their team.

In this article we want to make an argument for the use of another analytical term, that of 'hero'. Derived from the Greek ἦρωϛ, demi-god, via the Latin *heros*, defender or protector, 'hero' originally referred to mortals who seemed to live and perform deeds as if they were on a par with the gods (Barnhart 1995). Mike Featherstone has argued that although 'to speak of the heroic life is to risk sounding a little dated', the category of the heroic can shed light on key matters of cultural formation (1992, 159). Although we are wary of simply conflating our contemporary period with the classical world, what the culture of hero-worship points to is a group that hopes to be both protected and led to glory. The modern spectator sports that emerged from the mid-to-late nineteenth century created these very conditions – a group of supporters whose emotional lives came to depend to an extraordinary degree on the deeds of a handful of others. As Kelly Graham notes, it was the football crowds massed in stadium terraces that had the power to create heroes, to 'confer a specific social status on an individual and then celebrate it' (Graham 2004, 1). What Graham neglects, however, is the great demand this relationship placed on the players, and the darker passions that are aroused when these players fail. In Italy those massed on the terraces supporting their football team quickly became known as *tifosi*. Although this term now simply refers to supporters, it originally seems to have alluded to illness, more specifically to typhoid fever (Foot 2006, 302; Testa and Armstrong 2008). And as this paper shows, the feverish devotion that leads Roma supporters to portray, celebrate and imagine particular key players as heroes comes with its own burdens, for the same players who at one moment are loved and celebrated can also be the focus of significant antipathy. Exploring the expressions of the passionate relationship between supporters and those football players who represent them on the broader national and international stage therefore provides a window into the place of love, passion and emotional attachment in modern Italian society. It shows us something of the way the football hero becomes a site where identity is assigned and invented, and the past is retold, forgotten and remembered.

Agostino Di Bartolomei

For a time in the early 1980s Agostino Di Bartolomei was adored by Roma fans. Di Bartolomei was the local boy made good. Recruited by Roma as a 14-year-old, after

refusing to go and play for Milan and Lazio (Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 44–45), Di Bartolomei made his debut in 1976, and quickly became a dominant playmaker and goal-scorer. Within a few years he became the team's captain. It was a fairytale-like rise to prominence and the fans loved him not only for his play, but because he embodied their unfulfilled dreams to play for their beloved club and lead it towards glory (see for instance Tosatti, cited in Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 27). In the history of the team, the mythical moment in which he became a hero is a classic tale of sacrifice leading to victory. In 1979, in a match against Fiorentina, Di Bartolomei received a significant head injury but continued to play and scored an important goal for Roma. A journalist from Rome's popular sports newspaper, *Il Corriere dello sport*, lyrically described the moment in which Di Bartolomei, whose shyness and serious approach had previously come between him and the Roma *tifosi*, became one of their heroes:

Yesterday . . . the Olympic Stadium gave him standing ovations: not so much and only for the spectacular goal scored as for the courage he demonstrated on the field . . . Di Bartolomei stoically remained on the pitch, playing with a conspicuous bandage and a blood-soaked shirt. Maybe this demonstration of gladiator-like courage was necessary to unleash the spectators' enthusiasm for him. (cited in Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 95)

Jungian sociologist John Carroll has argued that sports like football provide a fertile ground for the creation of popular heroes and heroic narratives (Carroll 2001). Yet Carroll argues that the redemption which these narratives provide for football heroes is a matter for the individual hero, not the group of fans who helped create him. That 'the [sporting] hero may sacrifice himself for tribe, community, or nation is incidental', suggests Carroll (2001, 71). Yet it was precisely Di Bartolomei's willingness to sacrifice himself for the greater good of the group – that of Roma – that so endeared him to Roma's feverish supporters.⁶ The trope of Di Bartolomei's 'gladiator-like' courage is important as well, for it tied into the mythical discourse of many citizens of Rome, and in particular those who follow Roma, that they are somehow heirs of ancient Rome, and thus that football players they support battle on their behalf like gladiators (Ricatti 2010, 228–30). Furthermore, this tale of sacrifice and heroism recalls a very similar tale regarding another legendary captain of Roma, Giacomo Losi. Losi was dubbed the *Giacomino Core de Roma* (heart of Rome) after playing on in 1961 against Sampdoria in terrible pain with a torn groin and then scoring the winning goal (the interview in which Losi recalls this event is also available in a DVD attached to Bartolozzi 2010). The similarity of these two tales of courage and sacrifice reveals something of the way the emotional attachment to football players develops and is then remembered and narrated in heroic terms. It also needs to be noted that Giacomino did not become the heart of the team, but the heart of the city (*core de Roma*, not *er core de 'a Roma*). Here, as with the gladiator reference, one can notice the profound link between the team and the city, with Roma supporters conflating the two on a regular basis.

Di Bartolomei was not the only player viewed by followers of Roma as a hero emblematic of their fantastic history of the club and ancient empire. For instance, his teammate Paulo Roberto Falcão – a brilliant Brazilian midfielder – was also incorporated into the pantheon of heroes of Roma and ancient Rome, with supporters referring to him as both *l'ottavo re di Roma* (the eighth king of Rome), a nickname until then used to celebrate and remember Amadeo Amadei, the striker protagonist of the 1941 championship team (Cascioli 2007, 121), and also *il divino* (the divine, in reference to the divine

status of Roman emperors; Tasselli 1989, 24). In a way, Roma supporters were harking back to distant glory in the face of recent failures. Despite maintaining an almost constant presence in Italy's top football competition – *Serie A* – since its creation in 1927, Roma had only won the Italian Championship (*Scudetto*) once, in the 1941–1942 season. Starved of success, fans latched onto the hope that the combination of such players as Di Bartolomei, Conti, Pruzzo and Falcão would bring them the glory they craved. And success seemed close, as this group took Roma to within a controversial disallowed goal of the 1980–1981 championship. Two years later, in the 1982–1983 season, Di Bartolomei captained Roma to just their second Italian Championship and first for more than 40 years.

Having tasted success at long last, Roma fans now wanted further glory. Then as now, the greatest footballing club glory lay in the *Coppa dei Campioni* competition between the top European clubs. Indeed 1984 seemed destined to be the year that Roma would finally triumph on the international stage, for the final of the European Cup was none other than Roma's home ground, their own city's *Stadio Olimpico* (Olympic Stadium). Rome made the final in dramatic fashion, and although their opponent in the final was the formidable Liverpool, Roma's fan-base came to the game full of belief that triumph awaited them (for an in-depth analysis of such belief see Klugman 2008). The game went to penalties. Under immense pressure as team captain, Di Bartolomei stepped forward and converted Roma's first shot, but Falcão allegedly refused to take a penalty, Roma faltered, missing two of their next three attempts, and Liverpool won 4–2. An anonymous Roma player, perhaps Di Bartolomei, remarked soon after the match that 'the player who kicked [the penalty] should be praised, even if he missed it. He took a great responsibility, unlike others' (Ferrajolo 1984a, 3). The reference was to Falcão's apparent refusal, and while it is unclear whether he did in fact refuse to kick the penalty (Ferrajolo 1984a, 3), the continuing discussion about this episode and the many urban myths that developed around it (Foot 2006, 158) show that a football hero cannot be seen to neglect his responsibility on the field, even if injured as Falcão was. Indeed as we have seen, the injured player who steps up for the team is a topos of the narrative about Roma players' heroism, a topos that still defines the heroic status of Losi and Di Bartolomei.

While Falcão became at least for a time a scapegoat for the haunting defeat, Di Bartolomei had stepped up when Roma had demanded.⁷ But when a new manager with a vision of a speedier style of play was brought in for the next season, the ageing Di Bartolomei suddenly found himself considered surplus to the needs of Roma and he was transferred to AC Milan. Enraged supporters protested the decision, and during the final of the Italian Cup they showed all their love and admiration with banners such as 'they took Roma from you, but not your *curva* [your supporters]'; and 'ours is not a farewell forever . . . Goodbye champion' (both cited in Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 186). The most passionate supporters of the team, the members of the *Commando Ultrà Curva Sud*, even wrote him a letter (reproduced in Catapano 2008, 101–02) proclaiming not only their inability to imagine him in another uniform, but also that the way he had brought the dream of a local boy playing for Roma meant they now felt as if he was a part of them:

. . . you have embodied the dream of all the boys of Rome: to play for their city. And not only have you played for Roma, but you have also suffered, cried and rejoiced perhaps like no one else . . . to us you are not like the others, you are not just a football player, you are part of us, it's as if somebody entered our hearts and tore away a little piece of it . . . all that is left is crying and a great great love for you.

Di Bartolomei, however, felt betrayed by the administration of the club he had grown up supporting and then played for, and expressed his bitterness even before the separation became official (Argentieri 1984, 8; Ferrajolo 1984b, 7; Foot 2006, 156–58). Although many supporters had vowed that Di Bartolomei's transfer would not affect their devotion towards him, he too soon fell from the position of hero. First, many Roma followers criticised his celebration after a goal against Roma in Milan, and this certainly upset Di Bartolomei (see Torromeo 1985, 6). Then, when he came to play Roma later that season, he had an altercation with two Roma players, Cicco Graziani and Bruno Conti. Graziani punched him, sending him to the ground (Torromeo 1985, 6). Conti declared after the match that Di Bartolomei had probably forgotten that it was Conti, not Di Bartolomei, who was now captain of Roma (Pagliari 1985, 7). Moreover, Conti went on to state that they had never been friends, and then cast aspersions on Di Bartolomei's willingness to give his all to Roma when he had played for them, claiming that Di Bartolomei had always been 'calm, clean, without ever leaving the field sweating' (Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 156). Here it was precisely the heroic status of Di Bartolomei, his willingness to give everything for Roma, that was challenged by his former teammate and now captain.

Football clubs outlast their players, and Di Bartolomei was no longer the hero Roma supporters celebrated. Although probably still attached to him, supporters had to find new heroes. Di Bartolomei was also alienated from Roma's owners and managers. Once he retired as a player, they ignored his desire to come and have a management position within the club (Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 198), denying him the recognition they had previously bestowed (and continue to bestow) on many other players, including Bruno Conti. In 1994, Di Bartolomei killed himself on the tenth anniversary of that fateful European Cup Final game that had promised so much but delivered only pain. A few years earlier, when retiring from professional football, he had declared that the defeat in the final of the Champions League was 'an open wound that we'll carry with us all our lives' (cited in Bianconi and Salerno 2010, 186).

Yet if Di Bartolomei's suicide was somehow related to the lingering, unreconciled ignominy of his departure from Roma, the date and truly tragic means of his death – a self-inflicted shot to the heart – somehow redeemed him in the eyes of Roma supporters. It is as if the two wounds, the metaphorical and the corporeal, were somehow related, with Di Bartolomei in the end offering up the ultimate sacrifice and macabrely proving himself to be a true Roma hero. And now the behaviour of Roma supporters suggests that they too feel they have something to prove – that this time their love will not die. It began with the first match after his suicide, on the day of his funeral, where they bade him farewell with a banner at the stadium: 'No words... only a place deep in our hearts Ciao Ago!' Since then, he has been remembered in graffiti that appear on the walls of Rome on the anniversary of his death: '30-5-06 Di Bartolomei is here'; 'Roma does not forget, Agostino is here'; 'Great man great captain thank you Agostino', and 'Ago lives' (see <http://www.lamiaroma.it/cartellasalvaguai/SCRITTEPERAGOSTINO.htm>). Even the club administration has belatedly attempted to return Di Bartolomei to the Roma fold by having his son symbolically kick off the celebratory match held on the 80th anniversary of the team in 2007.

In Sigmund Freud's rich mythical theorising of human relations, the first hero modelled himself on the primal father – that figure who first led the group but was then killed by his sons who sought to share his power amongst themselves, only for the sons

then to worship their dead father as a god (see Freud 1955a, 1955b). Freud's analysis points to the often ambivalent relationship between the group and the hero and the guilt that can exist regarding the hero's treatment. We see this ambivalence in the oscillating relationship of Roma supporters with Agostino Di Bartolomei. He was celebrated and consumed in a metaphorical sense, then had his privileges withdrawn, fell from grace to be replaced with the fresh promise of youth, and maybe was even forgotten to a certain extent. But the manner of his death not only facilitated a reconciliation of sorts; it also appears to have provoked some kind of guilt in the supporters whose love for Di Bartolomei was ultimately fickle. Di Bartolomei's death has therefore led to what some might consider an overcompensation whereby he has been elevated to an even higher place and lives on in stories of praise and worship, stronger than ever. And so, every year as May comes to an end, Roma fans declare their love of this great, fallen hero, and declare that his memory will remain forever in their hearts.

The celebration and trials of Francesco Totti

The at times tumultuous relationship of Roma supporters with Francesco Totti, arguably Roma's greatest player and hero, provides a revealing comparison with their relationship with Di Bartolomei. While an in-depth exploration of Totti's career and legacy is beyond the scope of this article, we want to consider both similarities and differences between the passions expressed for Di Bartolomei and what they reveal of the way affective Roman football identities are shaped by the processes of remembering and forgetting the past.

Another local boy made good, Totti was a fanatical supporter of Roma as a child and first played for Roma in Serie A as a 16-year-old. His accomplishments are considerable – including captaining the club with distinction from the age of 22, playing more than 600 matches for Roma, and leading the team to only its third *Scudetto*. Totti has scored more goals for Roma than any other player, he has been the most prolific Italian striker of his generation, and soon he is likely to become the third highest scorer in the history of Serie A. Moreover, Totti has embraced the role of the hero, explicitly linking himself with Roma's mythical fantasies of Roman empire, for instance by having a gladiator tattooed onto his arm, and by appearing as a gladiator in advertising and products for companies like Nike and Pepsi (for an analysis of Totti's importance for Roma supporters see Ricatti 2010).

Nevertheless, as a now ageing hero, Totti faces the issue of how to end his career in a manner befitting his status. This is a considerable challenge, for, to remain a hero, the hero needs to continue to bring glory to his club. There is very little sentiment for struggling players in any of the football codes regardless of their past achievements, as many other football heroes have painfully discovered. It is unlikely that Totti will fail in one single match in the same manner that Falcão allegedly did – where the vagaries of football memories mean that one incident overshadows a brilliant career – or that Roma will seek to transfer him as they did with Di Bartolomei. But in the last two seasons it became clear that when Totti's form dipped or the team struggled, some of those fans who crave success turned on him sooner than might reasonably have been expected. A sense of what might be in store became evident both in the 2009–2010 season and the 2010–2011 season when Roma went through difficult periods and talkback radio and on-line forums

began to murmur with discontent about Totti's role.⁸ One supporter for instance argued that:

... unfortunately his age and physical weaknesses are clear. These days we should discuss Totti's role in the side. I say he cannot be a full-time striker any longer, he does not attack the space, does not draw the opposition away, does not create depth, often steps on Menez's toes, jamming the field by moving back.

The fervour for Roma is evident in the 1888 people who read this online thread, and the 199 people who commented in it.⁹ Yet, despite the criticism, most supporters continued to chant his glory at the stadium and on local radio, with songs and banners such as 'one captain, there is only one captain'. Furthermore, these complaints about an ageing champion and the need to leave space for much younger players such as Jeremy Menez have always been quickly silenced when Totti and Roma have begun to win and challenge for the *Scudetto* once again.

At the end of 2010, Totti's mother Fiorella attempted to intervene in the changing narratives about her son, calling into a popular radio programme that has always defended Totti (*Te la do io Tokio*). After sending 'a hug to all supporters who love him [Totti], from a mum', she defended her son strenuously:

Francesco [Totti] does not deserve these horrible things... there will be trouble for those who do anything to my children... those who do not love them... I know who [Totti] is, we know what he has done, money means nothing to him.¹⁰

Here the mother draws on one of the topical narratives in the construction of Totti as Roma hero: the fact he has allegedly sacrificed very significant sums of money by refusing to sign with richer and more powerful teams, in order to remain faithful to Roma (see Ricatti 2010). The question Totti faces, however, is whether he will be able to let go of his marvellous career – to sacrifice it as it were – before others, even those who have loved him more than any other player, seek to end it for him.

More recently, the issue of sacrifice and Totti's status as a Roma hero has taken a further turn. In the middle of 2011 an American group became the majority owner of AS Roma. It replaced the coach Vincenzo Montella, another heroic player of the 2001 championship, with a coach from Spain (Luis Enrique) and began the project of seemingly rebuilding the team and the company from its foundations. Most significantly, many of the most prominent stars were sold, and replaced with young and promising players. Within this 'revolution', Totti's myth became cumbersome for the management as well as for the player, while at the same time becoming even more important for fans.

In his first interview, Walter Sabatini, the new manager responsible for buying and selling players, declared in very poetic terms that Totti was still the core of the Roma project, as he is 'a sort of divinity... like the immortal sunlight on the roofs of Rome, which shines forever, overflowing into the city'.¹¹ However, it soon became clear that precisely Totti's 'divine' status constituted in some way an obstacle to the creation of a new Roma: in symbolic terms, as the hero who does not want to be sacrificed for the promise of youth, but also in financial terms, as a player who earns well above the salary ceiling that the new owners are trying to establish as part of their so-called financial fair-play model. Soon after Sabatini's lyrical celebration of Totti, the new top manager of Roma, Franco Baldini, declared that if Totti wanted to play for another 4–5 years he had to get rid of his laziness, focus only on football, and not carry other things on his shoulders.¹² The reference to laziness was, as we have seen for Di Bartolomei, a clear attempt to

undermine one of the essential characteristics of a football hero, namely his willingness to give everything for the team. Furthermore, in wanting Totti to resume a role of 'just' being a footballer, Baldini was also attempting to diminish his symbolic status as the key hero of the current team and seemingly advising him not to interfere with decisions taken by the management.

The new coach Enrique also appeared to want to marginalise Totti. Enrique selected the younger, as yet unproven, Stefano Okaka in place of Totti in the first official match of the 2011 season, a Europa Cup game in which they were heavy favourites against Slovan Bratislava. Roma lost, and while Enrique played Totti in the return match, he substituted him for Okaka late in the game, much to the disappointment of the home crowd who loudly whistled their disapproval. Roma were winning this game, but Slovan scored a goal soon after Totti's substitution and Roma was eliminated from competition.

Totti had already expressed his discontent by refusing to give interviews, and now he became visibly upset at his substitution, pointedly neglecting to greet his coach or sit on the bench, instead storming straight to the changing rooms. We can speculate as to whether his unusual silence was that of a tragic character struck mute in his own myth, or rather a deafening silence expressing the rage and bewilderment of a wounded yet still powerful and respected hero. External commentators and readers of leading Italian newspapers such as *la Repubblica* and *Corriere della sera* viewed it differently, critiquing Totti's reluctance to move gracefully from the centre stage as the selfish act of a former star,¹³ but Roma supporters read his resistance as yet another testament to his heroism, lavishing him with more support than ever. Discussions of the declining levels of his play have largely been forgotten. Instead, in talkback calls to radio programmes such as *Te la do io Tokio*, Totti is spoken of in glowing terms as an enduring symbol of the past greatness of Roma and Rome, and fans have rallied behind his resistance to the new 'foreign' regime, condemning the attempted 'detottizzazione' of the team in often vitriolic terms.¹⁴ The 'other' who offends Totti is offending the whole community, the whole city. Totti is once again, as many times before (see Ricatti 2010, 233–34), the symbol of the city's parochialism, in response to phenomena of globalisation that cannot be controlled and are considered as frightening. Perhaps more importantly, the new management has failed fully to recognise the heroic status of Totti, and the fact that the hero must either be found clearly wanting on the pitch, or be 'killed' by a new, younger and more powerful hero. While the new regime wants Totti to relinquish (sacrifice) his key role in the team willingly, they have perhaps been surprised by the way supporters will rally around a hero if they feel he is being unjustly attacked.

Conclusion

This article has traced the emotional relationship that AS Roma supporters have had with two key figures: Agostino Di Bartolomei and Francesco Totti. Both were objects of devotion, and assigned the status of heroes in ways that forged imaginary links with the glorious past of Rome. Yet both Di Bartolomei and Totti have also experienced the more difficult aspects of being considered heroes – that is, the demands placed on them to continually bring glory, and to sacrifice themselves for the greater good when necessary. Our focus on the creation and career of football heroes has thus shed light on the nuanced interplay of memory and identity with desires and demands in the absurdly important

world of Italian football. Further research is required to provide a more chronological framework in order to understand how such hero-worship may have evolved and changed over time, as well as into questions of gender, class and region. More work is also required to tease out further just how the suicide of a forgotten hero can lead to even more fervent worship than was given to him when he played for the club. Francesco Totti is not likely ever to be forgotten, but his heroic status may well be further challenged by coaches, emerging champions, or by his own supporters if they perceive him to be failing. Yet even if his career with Roma ends against his will, it is likely that, once retired, Totti will also be worshipped with a renewed fervour that exceeds the devotion that he has generated as a player. For while even the greatest of football players are never quite perfect, especially at the sunset of their career, once retired they can again be remembered for their glorious deeds and celebrated as if they lived life on a par with gods.

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Notes

1. AS Roma is commonly known simply as *la Roma*. For clarity, in this article we use the English word Rome when referring to the city, and the Italian word Roma when referring to the team.
2. In keeping with the editorial style of *Modern Italy* we have not included the original Italian version of the quotations used in this text. Instead, we have made the original phrases accessible, with English translations, on the following website: <http://drfric.wordpress.com/>
3. Terms such as passions, affects and emotions have their own specific histories and can be used to distinguish quite different things. However, their meanings are also contested and given the exploratory nature of this paper we use these terms somewhat interchangeably in order to evoke something of the manifold elements of fans' feelings. For more on these terms see Gorton (2007).
4. While this ground-breaking work contains an important chapter on fans, it is by and large a history of Italian football rather than a history of Italian football fandom. Moreover, the chapter on football fans follows the existing literature on Italian fandom by focusing largely on extreme fandom and racism, while the subsequent chapter analyses violence by fans and players.
5. For critical reviews of the history of emotions see Ruberg (2009); and Burke (2005); and for sports history and emotions see Klugman (2006).
6. Carroll might not be so surprised by this, however, as his more recent work explores the importance of sport, particularly sports such as football, for groups of players and supporters. See Carroll (2008, 45–68).
7. The designation of some football players as scapegoats deserves further analysis. For a starting point see Klugman (2009). For a broader history of the practice of scapegoating see Douglas (1995).
8. See for example the many discussions in the forum of the Roman radio Radio Sport, including 'Perché Totti non gioca bene' (Why Totti does not play well, 18 January 2011), <http://www.grupporomaradio.it/forum/>

- viewtopic.php?f=7&t=7888&sid=bbaeab86bf6c812fe285537569124baf; and 'qui è necessario parlare seriamente di Totti' (here it is necessary to talk seriously about Totti, 29 November 2010), <http://www.grupporomaradio.it/forum/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=7512>.
9. See <http://www.grupporomaradio.it/forum/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=7512>
 10. The interview can be downloaded at the following link: <http://www.marione.net/downloads.php?action=file&id=532>
 11. See http://www.iltempo.it/sport/2011/06/10/1264007-sabatini_totti_luce_della_nuova_roma_luis_enrique.shtml
 12. See his interview with Emanuela Audisio, http://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/serie-a/roma/2011/07/18/news/baldini_audisio-19270086/
 13. For the opinions of the journalists and the comments of the readers see for instance Fabrizio Bocca on *la Repubblica's* website (<http://bocca.blogautore.repubblica.it/2011/08/24/udinese-addio-champions-lillusione-di-unestate-niente-processi-per-di-natale-e-guidolin/comment-page-3/> and http://roma.repubblica.it/sport/2011/08/29/news/il_destino_giallorosso_tra_silenzi_e_offese-20990131/index.html?ref=search); and Tommaso Pellizzari on *Corriere della sera's* website: http://www.corriere.it/sport/11_agosto_26/totti-contro-luis-enrique_38ad152a-cff6-11e0-8b29-ded5cf627aec.shtml. Repubblica.it also asked if readers were on the side of Totti or Enrique: 21,249 people answered, 54% in favour of Enrique, 41% in favour of Totti, and 5% answered 'I don't know' (see <http://temi.repubblica.it/repubblicaroma-sondaggio/?cmd=vedirisultati&pollId=2737>).
 14. See for instance the listeners' phone calls during the radio programme *Te la do io Tokio* broadcast between 22 and 29 August 2011 (downloaded as podcast). See also the result to a question similar to the one asked by *Repubblica* but this time asked by a website about Roma: 'La Roma deve continuare a puntare su Totti?' (Should Roma continue to 'bet' on Totti?). This website is mostly visited by fervent supporters of Roma, and is related to the radio programme, *Te la do io Tokio*, that has often expressed opinions in support of Totti. With 10,439 votes, the result in this case was in clear support of Totti, as 89.92% answered yes (at 31 August 2011, see [http://www.marione.net/not.php?Not=6605&Titolo=Notizie On Air: Sondaggio: la Roma deve continuare a puntare su Totti?](http://www.marione.net/not.php?Not=6605&Titolo=Notizie%20On%20Air%3A%20Sondaggio%3A%20la%20Roma%20deve%20continuare%20a%20puntare%20su%20Totti%3F)).

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