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# Football, Politics and the Nation in Spanish Football.

## Football in the context of Spanish society

"Given the quality that has marched through the ranks of Spanish football during the past 80 years, it seems odd that such underachievement should still be the hallmark of the nation's football, now institutionalised to the extent that Spain are now "the dark horses of any tournament they qualify for…" (Ball, P – El Morbo, the story of Spanish Football, Ch 8)

In describing Spain's repeated failure in international tournaments, Ball pinpoints one of the classic paradoxes which, until recently, has been at the root of the game's history and identity since "La Seleccion " first appeared in the Antwerp Olympics of 1920.For, notwithstanding the success of the national team in winning the European Nations Cup in 1964, within a very specific and highly politicised context, the efforts of the Spanish side have rarely come close to matching the élan, elegance and football success of Spanish club football. The dual images of "La Furia" and "El Fatalismo", continually reconstructed and mediated across generations of the game's folklore, seemed to remain deeply embedded foundations around seminal traditions of culture, language locality, region and politics. The juxtaposition of these focal points of unity and divergence around football and its complex relationship with the constructions of differing notions of Spanish Nationhood came to characterise the sport's development since its formative period in the 1870s, and gave it a centrality in repeated debates, conflicts and tensions concerning the nature of Spanish national and regional identities. The supremacy of club football suggested a set of deeper historical and political divisions within the complex vortex of nationalism, regionalism and localism in the Spanish state. Within this vortex, the failures of "La Seleccion" mirrored wider tensions on the fragile cultural, historical and political unity of Spain itself.

The success of the national side in winning the European Championship of 2008 challenges some of these old orthodoxies in a number of ways and leads to a reappraisal of the traditional role of football as a reflector of political, historical and mediated traditions and realities. In football terms, the team of 2008 were largely able to shake off the twin burdens of "La Furia" and "El Fatalismo" which had so shackled their predecessors, enabling a style of play embracing panache, technique and fluidity. Moreover, as the victory came exactly thirty years after the formal establishment of a democratic Spain, it seemed to suggest a cohesion, maturity and stability in which the old debates and tensions stemming from the Francoist past and beyond had been marginalised to the folklore of football's lexicon, replaced by a new synergy indicative of a comfortable acceptance of a dual or plurinational Spain, with football acting as a coherent force and symbol of unity, enabling fans to cheer and support "La Seleccion" in Barcelona and Bilbao, though perhaps with less fervour, as well as in Madrid and Valencia.

The key purpose of this paper is to analyse the critical role played by football within the development of a democratically stable Spain. In doing so, it will draw upon the historical antecedents of the pivotal role of the game in defining and shaping political, cultural and mediated identities. Although this is more muted and subtle in a contemporary context, the axiomatic link between football, politics and the nation is still a crucial one. The paper will have four central themes; Firstly, it will seek to briefly contextualise the key role played by football from its formative roots in the late nineteenth century to its seminal function in legitimising and promoting the Franco Dictatorship within the vortex of a unitary Spanish nation and state. Secondly, it will consider the game's role in the difficult and complex transition to democracy between 1975 – 1982, articulating its critical function in fusing opposition and consent; region and nation. The study will then consider the critical changes in media coverage of football from the early 1980s, assessing the shifting cultural and political mosaic of the game within its developing mediated representations in the context of a democratic and rapidly evolving Spanish society within the framework of competitive party politics. Finally, the paper will investigate the role of football as a barometer of cultural continuity and change within the shifting political sands of definers and reconstructions of national identity, examining the implications of commodification and globalisation for the traditional mores of the game's political and cultural traditions. The study will conclude with a consideration of political, cultural and media developments in Zapatero's Spain, with particular emphasis on "the Second Transition" and how the rejection of the consensual "Pact of Forgetting" which had acted as a cohesive force in Spanish Politics in the post Franco era has both provoked an intense debate and impacted on the relationship between football, politics and culture. The central tenet of the paper will be to confirm football's distinctive and multifaceted role in the Spanish political and media landscape.

## Football , Politics and Nation in Spain – Some historical perspectives

" Everyone should put the interests of the nation above other more trivial interests and remember that it is not about going to Antwerp as tourists, but about going as ambassadors, to show the world that there is more to Spain than bulls" ( Caro, Madrid Sport, 1920)

The fusion between socio – economic, cultural and demographic factors in Spain during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century created the conditions and contexts in which football could embryonically develop. From the initial impulse creating Recreativo Huelva from the rural outpost of Andalusia in the 1870s to the first real heartlands and power centres of the game centred around Bilbao, Barcelona and Madrid between 1898 and 1903, the gradual growth of football was synonymous with both establishing its rituals, customs and folklores, whilst exploiting wider socio- economic changes to consolidate and enhance its development. Three principal interlocking changes provided the catalyst for the growth of football: Industrialisation, Urbanisation and Population movements. This meant that before 1918, the fundamental roots of Spanish football were entrenched along the lines of region, location, class and language, so that "as football was emerging in Spain, alternative nationalisms to the Castilian/Spanish centralist model emerged as a strong political challenge to the view of Spain as a single nation, especially

in such areas as Catalonia, The Basque Country and Galicia" (Crolley and Hand, Football and European Identity, Ch 6). In football's lexicon, the fractious fragility of the political and cultural composition of nineteenth century Spain served as a barometer for the simmering tensions between nation and region, with no definitive sense of nationhood arising out of internal conflict and civil war.

In this sense, the appearance and success of Spain's first national team in the Antwerp Olympics of 1920 was a watershed in the game's history. It signalled the first pulling together of entrenched localism and regionalism under the national flag to promote a hesitant unity. The success of "La Seleccion" in winning the silver medal established a set of folkloric values around the nature of "Spanishness" itself; toughness, bravery, heroism and an indefatigable spirit of working and fighting to the last minute, so that "the concept of furia became… a constant theme in Spanish Football and a defining element of Spanish football identity" (Ibid, Ch 6). La Furia Espanola thus became a set of core values by which a fledging notion of national unity was constructed and media around football itself. The seismic political developments of the 1920s and 1930s, when Spain lurched from Monarchy to Dictatorship, from Republic to Civil War impacted on all aspects of society, meaning that the game became even more indelibly more political and politicised, so that illusions of unity became polarised around enmity and rivalry, most markedly as the rising tensions between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona came to embellish wider conflict based on history, ideology and social class between Centre and Region, Castille and Catalonia.. This culminated in the assassination of FC Barcelona President Josep Sunyol by Falangists near Madrid in August 1936, so that, "His murder and its subsequent cover- up through and beyond the Franco years has become one of the defining motifs of Catalanism. It also the most irrefutable evidence that football and politics are darkly intertwined in Spain" (Ball – El Morbo, Ch 4).

Consequently, the historical and political paradoxes and contradictions stemming from the roots and development of football reveal the complexities of the cultural and societal origins of the game, most potently expressed in the ways in which football became a defining agent and symbol of regional diversity and separatist aspiration in Catalonia and The Basque Country in particular, where FC Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao came to represent opposition and dissent, powerful sporting and cultural roots set against the comparatively weak tradition of the national team in locating any axis of unity and cohesion in Spanish society

Set against this backdrop, the Civil War and its aftermath was arguably the defining political and cultural arena for twentieth century Spain. Football itself went through many transformations during the long decades of autocracy, in essence corresponding to the distinctive phases of the regime itself. Collectively, they reveal a high degree of political posturing and symbolism, motivated by securing status and legitimacy for Franco and the dictatorship itself, particularly in the construction of a single, indivisible and unitary Spain. Consequently" state intervention in the running of football was profound" (Crolley, "Football and Fandom in Spain"). Moreover, Franco drew heavily on the popularity of football as a mass spectator sport to cement the concept of Spanish Nationhood, seeking to exploit and manipulate the game to define an incumbent sense of national identity. This aim was projected in two main ways; through the profile, celebration and status of "La Seleccion" and via the spectacular successes of Di Stefano's Real Madrid in the late 1950s, coming to secure status, profile and exposure in an

international arena for Franco's Spain itself, in which football was defined as " a unifying force bringing the whole nation together under one flag" ( Crolley and Hand, Football and European Identity, Ch 7). This approach culminated in the only success achieved by the national team in winning the European Nations Cup in 1964. The defeat of the Soviet Union in Madrid, with Franco and his ministers in attendance, provide a perfect climax in which the symmetry of the football – politics – media axis in which " the tone adopted by the media was vigorously patriotic and exaggeratedly triumphal" ( Riordan and Krugar – European Cultures in Sport – Pt 7). The victory held the added spice and potency of ideological victory over the arch enemy of communism.

Whilst the guiding principles of Francoism highlight a rigid model of state control over the political, cultural and media representations of football based on using the mass appeal of the game to construct a homogenous notion of Spanish identity whilst suppressing many of its roots as an expression of local and regional difference, Franco recognised the value of football in acting as a safety valve allowing social rivalries to be harmlessly released, with in Montalban's phrase, FC Barcelona and Real Madrid reaffirming their roles as " necessary enemies" in an interlocking synthesis of historical and cultural rivalry, each interdependent with the other to confirm their respective identities and legitimise them.

Football thus played a seminal role in consolidating the homogenisation of cultural and political identity in Franco's Spain. Yet because the cultural symbolism of the game is so deeply rooted in the pre Franco past the regime was never more than partially successful in restraining its capacity as an enduring force of continuity for alternative histories and identities. This has impacted critically on football's continuing ability to define and express divergent cultural and national identities within the contemporary Spanish state, suggesting that the "two features that have historically distinguished Spanish football as a cultural phenomenon.. close links between club and fan, and the close link between football and the state" would continue to shape increasingly mediated identities in the post Franco era" (Crolley, Football and Fandom in Spain)

## **Football , Franoism and The Politics of Transition; Spain 1975 - 1982**

"Vasquez Montalban pointed out (that) the Spanish League was the key factor in the Spain of the autonomies post 1978" (El Pais, June 8, 1998)

The Franco regime mercilessly exploited and manipulated football as a symbol of the legitimacy of a centralised, unified Spain, so that "under Franco, the notion of a single Spanish identity and the promotion of its image were encouraged via football; the sport's role as a vehicle for frustrated nationalisms was contained." (Crolley and Hand, "Football, Europe and the Press" Ch 8) The rigid administrative and political control of the gamel enabled Franco to utilise it as a social drug and mass spectacle, particularly when its boom period of the 1950s was accompanied by the gradual growth of television and press coverage of the game, so that it began to serve the dual purposes of normalcy and distraction as a mass spectacle. In this sense, the highly politicised press rivalries around football, most clearly expressed in the tacit support and bias of Marca for Real

Madrid and by implication for the regime itself, the development of television confirmed and reinforced this hegemony. By the 1960s, the symmetry of prime time Saturday night viewing had been perfected, with the mass national audience being fed a mixture of Real Madrid matches and bullfighting in the iconic figure of El Cordobes, himself a Real Madrid fan. Thus order, cohesion and national identity were constructed and embellished through media exposure.

Yet paradoxically football was also a central site of oppositional politics during the regime, no more so than in the archetypal rivalry between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid. This rivalry was deeply enmeshed in earlier tensions surrounding political, linguistic, cultural and historical differences stemming from the origins of both clubs in the late nineteenth/ early twentieth centuries, and was complimented by other centre – region differences within the lexicon of Spanish football.. Football became the site of entrenched alliances and rivalries, within a complex interplay of cultural and political forces, with FC Barcelona coming to represent the aspirations and ideals of suppressed Catalan nationalism, whilst their cross –city rivals Espanol drew on earlier working class roots to support the Franco regime, allied to a core nucleus of support from the police and the army. In a similar vein, the intense rivalry between Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad, though united in opposition to the centralising forces of Madrid, came to embellish a wider debate about the nature of "Basqueness" itself, so that "no one club represented "Basqueness", unlike in Catalonia, where "FC Barcelona was an established Catalan institution well before the Civil War" (Crolley and Hand, Ch 8). Nonetheless, in an historical sense "Athletic's growth ran alongside the rise of Basque nationalism and the PNV, characterising the close symmetry between football and political identity." (Goldblatt, "The Ball is Round" Ch 5) In Franco's Spain, football was utilised as a carefully wrought set of traditional rivalries to maintain a balanced cohesion between conformity and dissent, with the result that the folklore of FC Barcelona was imbued with an iconography of heroes and martyrs together with incidents of suppression, injustice and corruption at the hands of the "Madridistas". In the dying embers of the regime, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this balance between the safely valve of the diversionary mass spectacle of football started to implode, as the game became more openly critical of the regime itself, with the latent tensions rising to the surface. Central amongst these was the "Battle of the Bottles" Cup Final in 1968, which brought the simmering tensions between Madrid and Catalonia into the public domain with Bernabeu's implicit attack on the nature of Catalanism and the subsequent Gureceta Affair of 1970. In the former, the traditional sense of injustice underscoring the enmity between Madrid and Barcelona was catapulted into a burgeoning media glare, exploiting the relative opening up of the Press Law of 1966 to bring into the public domain a high profile and passionate debate about the nature of Catalanism. Similarly , the fallout from the Gureceta affair not only tapped into a history of alleged injustices against FC Barcelona from corrupt officials in the pocket of Francoism, it " became one of the first public manifestations of discontent with the Franco regime" ( Ball, White Storm, Ch 8). The pitch invasion at the end of a bitterly disputed contest between the arch rivals suggested a wider political protest against the regime in which " Barca seemed to assume once again its political mandate on behalf of an oppressed Catalonia" ( Burns " Barca ; A Peoples' Passion, Ch 8). By the time of Franco's death, football had already moved away from the permitted ritualism of flag waving and singing to become a focal point of dissent embracing both demands for

regime change and the reassertion of regionalism, particularly in the historical communities of the Basque Country and Catalonia. It seemed to signpost both a deeper malaise within Francoism itself and increasing political and regional tensions due to the resurgence of ETA activities, climaxing in the assassination of Carrero Blanco in 1973, "striking a death blow to the image of invulnerability the regime had enjoyed for so long" (Ball– Morbo, Ch1) adding to the more confident and growing demands for Basque and Catalan autonomy.

During the transition period itself, the game secured a pivotal and highly political role, particularly in the period between 1975 – 1978, before the framing of the 1978 Constitution, when it symbolised both a dissenting break from the suppression of the past and the unity of a continued adherence to traditional landscapes of football rivalry. La Liga provided the single most cohesive element of stable national identity whilst the complex social and political enmities and divisions, for so long frozen out by a one party centralised autocracy, rose to the surface of competitive politics to shape the future direction of Spain, with the result that the elections of June 1977 consisted of " a myriad of parties and alliances" ( Lawlor and Rigby, " Contemporary Spain", Part 1 ) Moreover, in the period 1978 – 1982, football was critical in the realisation of the constitutional settlement and consensus surrounding the birth and renaissance of the " Two Spains", becoming instrumental in the process of " collective amnesia ". The "Pact of Forgetting" permitted the peaceful dualism of the legitimisation of the Spanish nation state alongside the Spain of seventeen autonomous communities, drawing on the historical communities of the late nineteenth century (The Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia). This decentralisation of political and cultural power utilised the traditional mores and values of football to construct a modern, democratic Spain out of the ashes of its recent authoritarian past, so that a fusion of the national identity of the structures and organisation of the game was interwoven with its local and regional identities to facilitate and hasten the complexities of the transition itself. In Catalonia and The Basque Country especially, football and all its folkloric symbolism was in the vanguard of change in the promotion of the Spain of the Regions. This process was not without challenges, contradictions and paradoxes. It also raised crucial questions as to the developing linkages between football, politics and culture after the highly structured and manufactured centralism of the Franco era.

The early weeks and months following Franco's death created a vacuum of considerable uncertainty. Football witnessed one of the first public cultural and political displays of a tentative and gradual break with the past and a signpost for the new regionalism. The growing renaissance of Catalan identity had found increasing confidence and expression in the last years of Franco. FC Barcelona was the most potent agent and symbol of this evolving process, from the gradual reintroduction of the Catalan language in the club's publications, to the signing of Johan Cruyff in 1973 following a protracted transfer saga in which the club came into direct conflict with the central governance of the game over the vexed issue of the signing of foreign players. The subsequent success of the team emerging from the shadows and winning the league, gave growing status and confidence to the shrewd Presidency of Montal, the most glittering of victories coming in February 1974 with the 5-0 eclipse of Real in the Bernabeu. Thus "in the 1970s the success of FC Barcelona was synonymous with the nationalist project, it successes on the football field seeming to mirror the progress of the statute of autonomy" (Payne, J "Catalonia – History

and Culture" Ch 8).By the time FC Barcelona played Real Madrid at the Camp Nou in late December 1975, football was the crucial barometer to test the fragile nation's nerves, with strident echoes of the past interwoven with fledgling aspirations for the future. The match witnessed "the first huge presence of Catalan flags in a public place since the end of the Civil War" (Satacana Torres, "El Barca y El Franquismo", Ch 7), Barcelona's victory heralding the start of a process in which "the interlocking relationship between politics and FC Barcelona during this period extended into the…sensitive areas affecting the consolidation of the new democratic Spain" (Burns, Ch 11). Football, which had so long been at the core of Franco's notion of an indivisible Spain, became critical to the transition because not only did it symbolise and represent deeply embedded notions of regional, political and linguistic diversity, but also constituted a cohesive continuity based on the interplay of sporting rivalry within a national structure and vortex. It this sense, it became instrumental in the creation of the consensus building of a new democratic Spain. Thus in Catalonia, the display of regional identity so soon after Franco's death was followed by other developments; the radio broadcasts of FC Barcelona's matches in Catalan from September 1976 assisted the station as "it depended on the club to increase both its audience and its public presence" (Santacana Torres, Ch 7) whilst the return of the Catalan President Taradellas from exile in October 1977 gave testimony to the public reassertion of Catalanism in the post Franco period.

The role of football and more specifically of FC Barcelona at the centre of the democratisation process embracing regional autonomy was mirrored by developments elsewhere. Under Franco, football was the only legal manifestation of Basque political and cultural sentiments, a seminal contrast with ETA's violent expressions of demands for Basque separatism which came to mark Franco's later years and beyond. In football terms "it was this search for purity of Basqueness which lay behind the policy of Basque clubs to employ Basque only players" (Crolley and Hand, Ch 8). So it was that in the search for the "new Spain" Real Sociedad played Athletic Bilbao in San Sebastian in December 1976. Before the match the opposing captains carried the Basque flag onto the field, their entrance accompanied by the playing of one of ETA's anthems, "a politically seminal act which all Basques remember" (Ball, El Morbo, Ch 1). The combined pressures for change, articulated through the rituals and folklores of football, challenged the traditional hegemony of Madrid, and in a very real sense paved the way for the mobilisation of political and public opinion in support of the Constitution of June 1978. Moreover, other developments within the organisation and structure of the game itself highlighted the break with a past of rigid centralised control.

Football had been highly politicised in Spain from its formative days. In a traditional sense "the clubs maintain a strong if archaic tradition of economic and political democracy dating back to the 1890s" (Wagg S, "Giving the Game Away" Ch 5). Within this landscape, the power of the club hierarchy held considerable sway in the local and regional arena. Although largely subsumed and manipulated during the Franco era, football came to represent a catalyst for political, cultural and economic change through developments within its own structures, both in the last years of Franco and in the early period of the transition. The demands for universal suffrage in the election of club officials, which had been so carefully controlled under Franco, coupled with the vibrancy of football in expressing cultural separatism became potent metaphors for wider political and cultural change. The growth of free trade unions also found expression in challenges

to the oligarchic orthodoxy which had tied players to their employers since the late 1920s – a power struggle emerged during the transition, manifesting itself both in the formation of the AFE to represent the players' interests in 1978 and in a series of players strikes between 1978 and 1981.These tensions were evidence of wider social and political upheavals during the transition – for football itself, they demonstrated the tentative beginning of a new order, in which players, the regions and the media were going to play a seminal role in the shift to democracy at multiple levels of Spanish society.
By 1978, the Constitutional Settlement under the Suarez government paved the way for the seventeen autonomous communities under a federal unitary Spain. As sport, and in particular football was both central to the Franco regime and its ultimate decline, so it was pivotal to the formation of the constitution itself, suggesting that "Sport as a cultural matter has been integrated into a decentralised political system" (Riordan and Kruger "European Cultures in Sport" Ch 7). The collective amnesia which allowed the rapid transition to democracy was aided by the cultural power and political heritage of football in assimilating continuity and change. Consequently, football drew upon the old allegiances and rivalries of the historical communities and fused them with the modernity of the sporting rivalry of Spain's national competitive leagues. This political decentralisation and the return to locality fractured the oppression and largely manufactured unity of the Franco period when "the government attempted to trivialise and generalise popular culture by turning it into a tourist attraction "(Payne, Ch 9). So successful was football in bridging, or at least papering over the cracks in ostensibly contradictory forces that just seven years after the death of El Caudillo, Spain stood on the threshold of what Gonzales called " the historic reorientation with Europe" - in this context, Tejero's assault on the Cortes in 1981 seems like a macabre last dance of the Franco hegemony; indeed it appears that the seeds of rebellion were sown when the colonel and his associates witnessed the spectacle of the Basque flag being unfurled live on national television in the celebrated encounter between Real Sociedad and Athletic Bilbao some five years before – football, politics and identity cuts deeply in the Spanish psyche. Just as it secured a central role in legitimising the politics of transition, the interplay between football and its mediated representations has been a central facet of Spanish society from the early 1980s.

## The Representation and Mediatisation of Spanish Football ; From State Control to the Global Marketplace.

"Spain is not a nation. National Unity was a reality historically imposed by the Absolute Monarchy and has been maintained all along by the political regimes of contemporary Spain" (Solis, Negotiating Spain and Catalonia, Ch 1)

The hosting of the World Cup in 1982 allowed an emergent Spain to demonstrate to an increasingly global television audience that it had quickly emerged from decades of isolation as part of a process which dovetailed democracy, socialism, modernism and Europeanism under the Gonzales government; to culminate in EC membership in 1986.Once again football came to represent the paradoxes and contradictions, the traditions and changes around the emerging democracy. Whilst Gonzales himself, "an

unashamed supporter of Betis Seville" ( Ball, White Storm" Ch 1) exploited the political populism around the game in order to maximise its cultural kudos, much as his successor Aznar was to do with his high profile support of Real Madrid, the role of football, certainly in the early period of the Gonzales administration was ambivalent. Just as Spain itself was entering a new era, the representation of the game was in the process of undergoing seminal changes, underscored by political, economic, technological and cultural developments, which impacted on football itself as a definer and reflector of cultural and political identities. These changes were most marked in the television representations of football, although significant developments took place in both Radio and the Press from the early 1980s, which allied to the more contemporary growth of the Internet, have radically altered the mediated forms in which the representations of football have been constructed.

In the Franco Regime, all aspects of media output were centrally and rigidly controlled, being used "to inculcate ideas and values which would ensure acceptance of the new regime" (Riordan and Kruger – European Cultures in Sport, Ch 7). Television was a central feature of the state apparatus, confirming and securing through TVE and subsequently TVE2 a unitary, monolingual state and society with Madrid at its heart. Football, after the boom of the 1950s, was ideally suited to serve as a vehicle to promote and give publicity to the regime's status and success, so that the dominant images of Franco's Spain were Real Madrid and "La Seleccion", thus creating an iconography that was carefully manufactured to foster notions of cohesion, unity and nationhood, in which "state intervention in the running of football was profound" (Crolley, Football and Fandom in Spain). The 1978 Constitution established media freedom; shortly afterwards the first break with Francoism started to emerge with the development of Regional Television in the early 1980s, most potently in the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia "which gave football a more regional focus and voice" (Santacana, Barcelona, March 2010).Their rationale was shaped by regionalism, language and culture within a public service ethos. Football was central to this renaissance, tapping into traditional mores of locality and rivalry, to both foster a sense of separateness and fuel demands for further autonomy, as in The Basque Country and Catalonia, where football " was very significant as a symbol of the democratic process itself, because of their distinctive histories and politics" ( Santacana, Barcelona, March 2010) breathing new passion into traditional centre – region hostilities, with football securing an emblematic and ritualistic role, anchored in " safe identity, one which can be seen to exist without risking national and regional sensitivities" ( Crolley and Hand, Football and European Identity, Ch 6).

. By the mid 1980s, technological change paved the way for the deregulation of football, so that the rise of pay per view meant that market forces driven by consumerism and the commercial impulse witnessed high octane battles between competing organisations seeking to exploit the increasing dominance of football as the televised sport. These developments held crucial implications for the game itself – the vast sums of revenue pouring into football led to spiralling costs, deepening debts, the growth of player power and the new influx of stars and galacticos into the Spanish game. The synergy between media representation and its political exploitation became firmly attached to political ideology in the late 1990s and early 2000s, so that under the Aznar administration, the adherence to the market and private enterprise in the form of satellite transmission, football defined " a deeper transformation of some aspects of the public sphere" ( Wagg,

Ch 3), in which the mass spectacle of the game moved inexorably towards the entertainment domain of fragmented audiences as part of a wider commercial conflict between competing service providers, in direct opposition to the role of football as a unifying force under a public service ethos. The election of Zapatero in 2004 rather strikingly reasserted the principles, if not the economics of public service broadcasting via terrestrial output in the contracting of La Liga to Channel 6 from 2006 onwards, in sharp ideological contrast to the Aznar regime, demonstrating the continuing volatility of the relationship between football, media and the state and its enduring role in redefining and reshaping national and regional cultures.. The deal with "La Sexta" is a hybrid mix of public service, political populism , state interventionism and commercial enterprise, so that whilst contemporary televised football in Spain has increased exposure, diversity and consumer choice, politics and cultural tradition still play a significant role. Mediated constructions of the game would seem to constitute a post-modern vortex in which the traditional roots of locality and national identity framed and fostered by football have been subsumed by globalisation, consumerism and commodification of the sport, which in turn makes multiple mediated identities ever more complex. This subtle interplay of tradition and post modernity can also be perceived if the contemporary press and its representation of football is analysed.

The tradition of a specialised sporting press, giving increasing coverage to football as the game itself developed, has been embedded in the Spanish media landscape since the late nineteenth century. Moreover, a pronounced sense of local and regional identity has been a central element in the representation of football. Consequently, the rivalry between "Marca" and "El Mundo Deportivo" maintains and promotes the football, cultural and political rivalry between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, and serves as a benchmark for respective identities. Even under Franco this rivalry in the football press was latent, if not openly expressed. Since the 1980s as television coverage has expanded to the levels of excess, the football press has changed in response to both this and to wider political and societal developments. The fact that Spain still has four national newspapers devoted to sport ( with Marca being the best seller amongst them) alongside a range of choices within the autonomous communities, give Spain a distinctive character in its consumption of mediated sport at the core of its media centred identities. Within this context football has becoming increasingly dominant, particularly around the polarised coverage of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona as the two super clubs, with the consequence that other sports, once at the centre of mediated representation ,are now marginalised at the periphery, or grouped together in minimal coverage of "Polideportivo" ( other sports). Furthermore, the excess of coverage has meant that editorialising and speculation have increased significantly. Allied to the tendency of the mainstream press to devote more column space to football, the contemporary press has witnessed an increase in the stories around football accentuating and reinforcing the link between football, entertainment and celebrity suggesting that Marca "exists on daily diet of rumour, gossip and sensationalism" (Santacana, Barcelona, March 2010. Yet in spite of these changes and this "dumbing down" of content at the expense of more analytical commentary the football press still plays a pivotal role in its continued legitimisation of the traditional roots of the political and regional rivalry around the game, particularly in respect of the vexed question of Spanish national identity surrounding "La Seleccion", with the press habitually resorting to negative stereotyping in reinforcing the disunity and lack of

success traditionally surrounding the performance of the national team in international competition..

Within the changing dynamics of television and press representations of football, grouped together around themes of commercialisation, globalisation and commodification to both expanding and fragmenting audiences, radio is the medium of cohesion and continuity, " the unique feature of the Spanish media in its coverage of football due to its passion and intensity" ( Carrera, Santiago de Compostela, March 2010) From its inception in the 1920s and its crackling pioneering broadcasts to its expansion of coverage of football in the 1950s, radio has embraced political, economic and technological change to retain its role as a constant feature able to represent the regional and national dynamics of the Spanish cultural lexicon – it is the link with the traditional and modernist past and the post modernity of the present, so that since 1996, for example, Radio Barcelona " continues to provide an immediacy of access for football within the Catalan tradition" ( Santacana, Barcelona, March 2010.)

This juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, technology and post-modernity finds expression in the launch of club websites, the growth of the internet and the development of club television channels for Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, which have diversified representations of the Spanish Game since 2000. The fact that FC Barcelona's website operates in five languages enables it to tap into the local and the global in respect of members, audiences and consumers, creating hybrid forms of Catalanism on a global basis. Since the late 1990s, moreover, Spanish football has embraced an increasingly high profile, so that the celebrated rivalries at the heart of the game's historical, political and cultural identity are now played out to huge global audiences because" football is globalised in terms of media exposure as well as its growing attachment to transnational commercialisation and sponsorship by the multinationals" (Crolley and Hand, Ch 9). The location of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona within the higher strata of the G14 has enabled both clubs to "exploit their historical and political heritage" (Crolley, Football and Fandom in Spain), so that the traditional enmity between Castile and Catalonia is transformed into "El Derby" or more recently "El Classico" through the globalised mediated representation, of which Sky Television is but one manifestation. In the post-modern idiom transforming stars into celebrities and marketing them as commodities, the global branding and marketing of football creates " a common culture based on consumption" ( Cashmore, Celebrity Culture, Ch 12). The recurrent use of the galacticos at Real Madrid as a football equivalent to the Harlem Globetrotters fuses global branding and football success with the club's traditional sense of superiority so that "(Real Madrid) saw Beckham as the ideal icon to develop new marketing and sponsorship" (Haynes and Boyle – Football in the New Media Age, Ch 4) Consequently" the pervasive excess of consumerism link identity and social status to the market for commodities" (Cashmore, Ch 12).The global mediatisation of the Spanish game has reaffirmed the hegemony of club football, whilst high octane publicity based around sensationalism, speculation and hyperbole projects a landscape in which " post modern football seems to blow up every single furore" ( Ball, White Storm, Ch 1). In the mature democracy of contemporary Spain, the game seems somehow reduced to a set of competing media constructions, manipulating football's history in order to define imagined rivalries played out on a global media stage.

From the manipulated and distorted lens of public service control during the Franco period, legal, technological and economic developments have merged to catapult the game into a new media landscape in which television became the principal source of revenue. Thus "in the late 1980s, the role of the LNP (Professional Players League) in the negotiations with television must be highlighted" (Andreff and Szmanski, Ch 10). So it was that during the late 1980s and early 1990s a series of often protracted alliances and rivalries dominated the increasingly fierce battle to secure the contractual rights of live television football coverage. The shift of power towards players, television and the market signposted a key development in democratic Spain in which the traditional orthodoxies of the links between politics, media and football were being continually challenged, adding yet more complexity to the debate about the relationship between football and Spanish cultural identities.

**Football, Cultural Identity and Democracy: A Spanish Labyrinth**

By 1996, Spain had seemed to move successfully beyond the uncertain years of transition to become a stable, mature democracy based on competitive party politics at the core of the European integration process. Similarly, as football had been a metaphor for both unity and division in the post Franco period, defining the Spain of the autonomies and providing an organic link between past and present, it became a contemporary barometer for wider ethnic and cultural tensions, once again fuelling the complexity of the debate around the nature of "Spanishness". The rise of right wing supporters groups, or Ultras, during the 1980s, drew on the earlier insularity of the Franco era, and played on nascent xenophobic sentiments rooted in Spanish folklore since medieval times in respect of fear of the outsider, in particular of the moor to the south.. Furthermore, this is fused with more traditional football centred rivalries such as that between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, so that the Boixos Nois, " became a focus for anti- Madrid sentiment and a challenge to the notorious Ultra Sur thugs" ( Ball, White Storm, Ch 10). Attitudes towards race, ethnicity and cultural identity shifted steadily during the Gonzales years, with football continuing to exercise considerable political influence during the increasingly global framework in which its traditions and rituals were constructed from the 1990s onwards. A consideration of the ongoing cultural debate which has defined and in some ways polarised football's position as a reflector of competing and complimentary identities since the Gonzales period sheds light on the continued juxtaposition between football, politics and culture as a seminal feature of democratic Spain, commencing with the hosting of the World Cup in 1982.

"The 1982 World Cup in Spain, top heavy with twenty- four teams and ill organised by its hosts, ill augured from the farcical moment of the draw, beset by heat and by displeasing incidents, nonetheless ended in a dramatic crescendo " ( Glanville, The Story of the World Cup, Ch 12).

Spain's abject failure to progress beyond the second round of the tournament did little to promote the Gonzales image of modernisation and success, reinforcing the sense of "pessimism and failure as part of a Spanish national imagined identity" (Crolley, Companion to Hispanic Studies, Ch 28). In this context the traditional paradox between the success of club sides and the underachievement of "La Seleccion", now in the glare of the international media spotlight underscored the notion that in spite of the Gonzales

vision to interlock the autonomous communities within the dynamic of a unified Spain at the heart of Europe, the World Cup failure of 1982, coupled with the subsequent underachievement of the national team, apart from reaching the final of the European Nations Cup in 1984 reaffirmed all the historical complexities surrounding national identity as " the selection represents a country of different nations which do not live side by side comfortably" ( Crolley and Hand, Ch 8).Democracy and closer ties with Europe did not mask the protracted debate about "Spanishness" in the Post Franco era.

In a contrasting sense, however, "From the 1970s onwards, football has been allowed to become an open symbol of national or local pride within the autonomous communities" (Ibid, Ch 8). This tension between region and nation, so long suppressed within Franco's Single Spain, flourished openly within the political and public domains a newly democratic Spain, particularly through impassioned media and cultural debates which both tapped into regional and national stereotypes and secured consent for the coexistence of the Many Spains of linguistic, historical and cultural diversity. Football was at the crux of this mosaic of political and sporting rivalry, a force of cohesion, diversion and moderation, a counterbalance to the more extreme manifestations of separatism, most ostensibly expressed in the sporadic violence of the ETA campaign for a Basque homeland.

The democratic Spain of the autonomies was mirrored in the shift of football's power base back to its traditional centres in the Basque Country and Catalonia. The resurgence of the game seemed to suggest a new confidence in the assertion of regional identity and aspiration, with Real Sociedad and Athletic Bilbao winning four league titles in the period 1981 – 84. The spectacle of "La Gabarra" and a flotilla of other boats celebrating Athletic Bilbao's double winning side in May 1984 united all sectors of Basque society under the flag of football success and gave publicity, profile and legitimacy to separatist ambitions, drawing on the city's industrial and sporting heritage in a potent demonstration of cultural symbolism. That this was swiftly followed by the success of Venable's Barcelona challenged the hegemony of Madrid, serving as a potent metaphor for liberation from the shackles of centralism. In these ways, football drew on its past history and folklore, and its capacity to reflect political and cultural unity and dissent, to assist in the forging of a modern, democratic Spain in which political and cultural power was increasingly ceded to the regions.

Of course this placed the question of national identity under close scrutiny, and showed Spanish society to be in a state of flux and evolution after the repressive orthodoxy and innate conservatism of the Franco years. In the second half of the 1980s Madrid reasserted itself as the nation's political and cultural heart, in which socialism, youth culture and football were juxtaposed to encapsulate a new vitality and sense of change. In football this was clearly expressed by the swaggering confidence of the Butrageno Generation at Real Madrid, bringing success back to the Bernabeu. In this context, "La Quinta" as they were dubbed by the Madrid media," restored the sense of "Madridista" and repositioned it at the centre of things, with a heady mixture of popular culture and sport" ( Ball, White Storm, Ch 10). The élan and style of their approach also served to reject the traditional dourness of La Furia as the quintessential embodiment of the Spanish game, becoming a metaphor for the energy and dynamism of the New Spain, with Madrid at the centre. The oscillating development of football in the 1980s, the shift of power away from the centre and back epitomised a deeper synthesis between region,

nation and democracy, a process in which Spain " developed rapidly from being a being a politically ostracised outsider in Europe under Franco to being a key European Player" ( Crolley and Hand, Ch 9).

Rather paradoxically, therefore, Spanish club football in the 1980s reverted back to that sense of locality and region which had shaped its foundations so that "despite political change, old historical rivalries are maintained with football clubs being key social institutions" (Crolley, Ch 28). The deeply embedded roots of club culture embracing the organic link between Socio (member), Penya (association) and the democratic election of club officials from the presidency downwards resurfaced to become a distinctive feature of the Spanish football landscape. Indeed, the gradual reintroduction of democratic processes at FC Barcelona in the 1970s foreshadowed demands for further democratic changes in Catalan society. The period also witnessed changes in the iconography and structure of the game, with potential implications for its traditional mores of cultural identity. Even during the Franco period the influx of foreigners had been a periodically contentious arena. In the newly democratic Spain football began to open up from the restrictions and insularity of the past. This was partially a response to market, media and political forces with the consequence that by the early 1990s Spanish football reflected a fusion of regional power, the Central and South American Diaspora and a struggling sense of national identity. By the 1994 World Cup in the United States, the realities of this dichotomy were defined by the inability of the national team to defeat their old adversaries Italy, the unlucky curse of "El fatalismo" failing to deflect criticism that " the team smacks of an amalgamation of the Catalans and the PNV" ( Solis, Negotiating Spain and Catalonia, Ch 2). Whilst this might be indicative of the traditional strength of Basque and Catalan football, it also seemed to underline the fragility of Spanish nationhood in attempting to bind its legitimacy to the faltering profile of the national team. The shifting mosaic of the Spanish League was accentuated by the impact of the Bosman Ruling of 1995, which challenged its traditional mores and gave rise to a more fluid cultural scenario.

As a backdrop to these developments, the players' strikes of the transitional period were followed by other important developments in the 1980s, in which football gradually evolved from a stable if rigidly controlled past into a more organic structure, with finance, the market and a burgeoning media playing decisive roles in shifting the game into the domains of business and entertainment. Nonetheless "the main feature of this period was the government's support, through the restructuring plan, which has been the key for the survival and stability of many clubs" (Andreff and Szymanski, Handbook on the Economics of Sport, Ch 10). The continued presence of the state as a primary actor in the administration and organisation of football provided cohesion and stability at a time of fragmentation and change. In the emerging contexts of the 1980s, the financial problems of clubs became an increasing concern, so that the regulatory premises of the Sports Law of 1990 was a government backed initiative to deal with the mounting debt problems of Spanish club football. Moreover, these problems were a barometer of wider economic and political problems in Spanish society itself.

The subsequent expansion of Spanish football in the 1990s via new internal and external outlets forced it more into the interlocking landscapes of business and entertainment, suggesting that "the spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonisation of social life" ( Debord– The Commodity as

Spectacle). This held implications for the traditional symbiosis between politics and culture at the core of the Spanish game. Although these rivalries were still potent, they began to lose some of their previous intensity. For those born in the 1980s, with no direct experience of living under Franco, more and more accustomed to the Spain of the autonomous regions, the old rivalries had started to fade, so that" in Galicia, it is a generational question; this generation is different from the 1960s one. The rivalry between Celta and Deportivo is more superficial, less profound" (Almansa, Santiago de Compostela, March 2010). In this sense, though folkloric mores of locality are still latent, the rivalry is muted and culturally fluid, consistent with Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" Whilst football retains its function as a cultural and political definer in Spain, the juxtaposition of galacticos, globalisation and commodification have subtly changed its distinctive cultural hue. The contemporary dominance of two super clubs, in which "El Classico" between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona is played out to a global audience of consumers, not only highlights the lack of competition at the top of Spanish club football; it also underscores the notion that political and cultural rivalry have been subsumed by symbolism, ritual and the mediated mega – spectacle. Even in the Basque Country, in some ways the "Yorkshire Cricket" of Spanish football with Athletic Bilbao's continued adherence to "La Cantera" of a Basque only policy, the current development of a new stadium adjacent to "San Mames, the first football ground in Spain, dating from 1913, and dubbed "The Cathedral" by aficionados. This is indicative of the shift from modernity to post-modernity, in which a standardised, homogenised construction, driven by the commercial impulse, will replace this most iconic and English- style stadium by 2012 – as Athletic Bilbao lose their traditional home, a potent enduring symbol of cultural and political distinctiveness is also lost. Thus "the cultural flux around questions of identity has been reframed and repositioned since the 1980s" (Santacana, Barcelona, March 2010), most significantly in respect of the role of "La Seleccion" in defining and reflecting the Spanish nation and state.

The overdue success of the national team in the European Championship of 2008 suggested to some observers that more than thirty years after the death of Franco, the divided sensibility between region and nation had been sufficiently resolved to enable the divergent cultures of a mature, consensual plurinational Spain to rally around the Spanish flag and celebrate the team's success. The fact that the composition of the winning side drew only two players from Real Madrid reflected the balanced representation of La Seleccion from within Spain's regions. Furthermore it bore testimony to deeper external and internal forces within the game's cultural mores, so that although "within an increasingly global cultural framework it is possible to identify some continuities" (Wagg, Giving the Game Away, Ch 3) the dual impacts of globalisation and commodification have given the traditional roots of political and cultural identity surrounding football a post modern edge. Consequently, whilst the interdependence between football, mediated culture and politics found a new resonance in the governments of both Aznar and Zapatero, to reinforce the notion that "club football is at the heart of Spaniards' passion for the game" (Crolley and Hand, Ch 7).

These seminal changes strike at the core of football's folkloric traditions in Spanish society with implications for fans, clubs and the structure of the league itself. The dominance of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona thus interacts as a source of a quasi – national reference point as well as defining political affiliation and regional identity,

grafted onto the global marketplace of consumer culture. .These blurred manifestations of football's contemporary cultural identity combining the local, regional, national and global within an interwoven dichotomy of localism, globalism and glocalism are set against the fragile equilibrium between region and nation which lay at the root of the political and historical constructions of Spain as "a state formed by a group of nations" (Richards, Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies, Ch 3) to which football gave some coherence and stability.

Yet there are paradoxes to this relentless march of media wars and consumer cultures In spite of the globalisation of Spanish football culture and identity, locality and region still retain a significant place within football's cultures and sub- cultures. Patterns of alliance and rivalry are still rooted in the games historical vortex, so that whilst Catalonia and the Basque Country might still share a mutual antipathy towards Madrid long after the ghost of Franco has been exorcised, Catalanism and Basqueness have moved in differing directions within the democratic Spain of the autonomies. This is partially rooted in historical forces as "Barca is a broad church that accommodates a range of definers as to what it is to be Catalan" (Burns, Ch 1) so that FC Barcelona has, from its foundation, encompassed a mixture of migrants, foreigners and different strains of Catalanism within its orbit – whereas Basqueness, as projected by Athletic Bilbao, retains a keen sense of separateness. Both clubs were founder members of Spain's first national league in 1928; neither has ever suffered the indignity of relegation and both have been symbols and agents of regional autonomy from their inception through to a modern, democratic Spain. In many ways they are kindred spirits within Spanish football folklore, their histories punctuated by heroes, rebels and villains. Yet whilst FC Barcelona has utilised its Catalan heritage to promote autonomy within the framework of a democratic Spain, becoming ever more global, high profile and successful in the process, Athletic Bilbao has stuck rigidly to its Basque only policy, drawing on its tiny population to try and compete with the power blocs of Madrid and Barcelona, as well as emerging clubs from within a highly internationalised league. In this context, the heady days of the early 1980s seem a long way off and Athletic Bilbao seem to be a link with an anachronistic and turbulent past, with tradition threatening to be eclipsed by football's post modern impulses.

If a fusion of the seminal developments in the representation of football allied to the recurrent debate concerning the game's capacity to serve as a filter for the oscillating tensions of national, regional and cultural identity in contemporary Spanish society have firmly located it as a key dynamic in the construction of post Franco Spain, the political settlement and consensus which emerged after 1975 provided the stability and cohesion enabling these developments to take place. By the late 1990s, however, there were signs that this consensus was starting to break down, with significant implications for football and its pivotal role within the carefully wrought balancing act which had bound Spanish society since the days of the transition in the late 1970s.

## A Second Transition? Football, Politics and " The Pact of Forgetting"

As has been noted, the post Francoist settlement and consensus was based upon the fractured enemies of the past working together to secure a swift transition to democracy. Within this process, football and the changing dynamics of its mediated representations played a significant role, symbolising stability, normalcy and continuity within the vortex

of competitive party politics, regional diversity and economic growth. It also maintained coherence between nation and region within the evolving mosaic of a plurinational Spain of the autonomous communities, so that " Negotiated by individuals representing the Franco regime and its democratic opposition…Spain's post- transition settlement is the ultimate elite political production" ( Encarnacion, Spanish Politics; Democracy after Dictatorship, Ch 1)

Yet in spite of the seemingly miraculous transformation from autocracy to democracy, the vexed issues surrounding identity were never quite resolved, notwithstanding the success of Spain's transition, in which the "Pact of Forgetting", allied to football's capacity to channel political and cultural rivalries in the consumption of mass spectacle and distraction. Since the mid 1990s, the debate around Spain's past has gradually resurfaced, starting with the Pinochet Affair, in which " The 1996 arrest of the Chilean strongman…on charges of crimes against humanity is generally considered the catalyst behind the return of the past in Spain " ( Encarnacion, Ch 8) and culminating in the social revolution which has come to characterise and define Zapatero's Government since 2004, challenging and confronting many of the orthodoxies which fashioned the post Franco consensus, particularly in respect of the legacy and memory of the Civil War. This has given rise to a highly politicised mediated debate in which some of the old tensions between the victors and the vanquished have re-emerged In this context, the 2007 decision of the Cortes to ban further ritualistic marches each November to " La Vallee de Los Caidos" ( the Valley of the Fallen) commemorating the death of Franco, stoked the fires of an already impassioned debate, the monument itself a potent symbol of contrasting attitudes towards Spain's tortured past, " grey, grim and intimidating, it is designed to inspire awe, respect and obedience" ( Tremlett, Ghosts of Spain, Ch 2). The opening up of the past by Zapatero has led to claims that Spain is currently undergoing "a Second Transition, testing the democratic maturity and stability of the nation's ability to come to terms with its recent past, dividing public and political opinion and bringing to the fore old schisms between left and right, between centre and region. At the core of the debate is the Law of Historical Memory, passed in October 2007, whereby "Nearly three decades since the Spaniards sought to bury the memory of past political excesses with the so called Pact of Forgetting, one of the pillars of the democratic transition, in a sort of poetic justice the past has come back to haunt them by becoming one of the most contentious issues in Spanish politics" (Encarnacion, Ch 8).

The contemporary role of football in the complexity of its mediated guises is indicative of the paradoxical tensions at the root of the debate around the question of Spain's past and emergent identities. On the one hand, the folkloric continuity of the Spanish state firmly embedded in the European landscape, builds upon the success of the National Team in the European Championship of 2008 to foster aspirational notions for the upcoming World Cup in South Africa, reflecting the stability of a modern society united under the national flag, a fusion of autonomous regions within a unitary state.

On the other hand, the recent resurgence of "national "teams in The Basque Country, Galicia and Catalonia, the latter under the high profile leadership of Johan Cruyff, although not officially sanctioned by either UEFA or FIFA, nevertheless embraced a groundswell of support from players and supporters alike in the regions themselves, so that their occasional matches against each other or friendly games against sympathetic nations are invariably well attended, with for instance a 50,000 crowd at the Camp Nou

when the two stateless nations of Catalonia and The Basque Country played each other in November 2006. The political and media endorsement of these teams in the regions underscores the notion that identity is still a seminal concern, with football embellishing the contemporary debate about "Basqueness", "Catalanism" and "Spanishness" .The recent signs in a resurgence of the fortunes of Athletic Bilbao in reaching the Copa Del Rey final last year, coupled with its current healthy league position, secures it position as the custodian of "Basqueness", not only harking back to the club's last golden period in the 1980s, but also reflecting the wider political and cultural tensions in Spanish society. Football serves as a key metaphor; for proponents of an even more autonomous or federal Spain, the "national" teams of the regions, particularly in the traditional bastions of separatism in the Basque Country and Catalonia, act as a pressure group on the global governance of the game to legitimise their recognition as independent states – such a move on the part of UEFA or FIFA would be a catalyst for potentially seismic political change. Within more mainstream political and public opinion, the emergence of "national" teams from the regions is demonstrative of peaceful coexistence, in which players and supporters exhibit shared loyalty to both the region and the nation.
In sum total, the multifaceted nature of football's contemporary mediated identities constitutes a post-modern blurring in which local and global, glocal and grobal sit side by side, suggesting that a sense of Spain the nation is even more difficult to define – through the export of La Liga since the 1990s on satellite television to global audiences, Basqueness, Catalanism and Madridista, and the entrenched rivalries and alliances between them are filtered as mass spectacles and mega events around the world, so the Spanishness becomes a multilayered synthesis of folklore, ritual and tradition transmuted via global media outlets. In the contemporary idiom, this fusion of Spanish football's globalisation and all its manifestations with the insularity of the debate on Spain's past, most celebrated in the contentious and controversial stance of Judge Baltasar Garzon suggests both the continuation of the tradition dating back to the late nineteenth century and the impulse of post modernity in which football is a seminal definer of locality, identity and politics around which the multiple arenas of nation and region are clustered.

## Some conclusions

"On the flag is a two headed axe, the neo fascist symbol of Spain's far right" (Ball, White Storm, Ch 1)

This image of Real Madrid's Ultras in 2002 reveals much about the contemporary link between past and present which underscores football's political and cultural role since the death of Franco in 1975.Whilst the game has undergone many changes in the last thirty years so that in some respects it seems barely recognisable from its past rituals and customs, rooted in locality, social class and divergent cultures, it has provided the key source of continuity and cohesion underpinning enormous cultural, economic, political and social change. The recurrent interplay between politics and football, and football and politics, coupled with the subtle dualism of nation versus region, club versus country has helped to maintain a most distinctive brand of "Spanishness" in spite of all the trends towards globalisation which shaped and defined the game from the 1990s onwards. Tradition, modernity and post modernity are mediated to manufacture the contemporary

supremacy of football within the Spanish sporting and entertainment axis.
Within the recent 2008 – 09 season the fates, fortunes and traditions of the competing clubs are interwoven and intertwined. Recreativo de Huelva are celebrated within the folklore of Spanish football as its first club dating back to the late 1870s from the small mining town in Andalusia – their history is not a chequered one and they have spent the last few years as a team moving up and down the top two divisions after decades in the football wilderness. FC Barcelona also has deep football and cultural roots within the Spanish football lexicon. Both clubs grew out of the formative period of the Spanish game when locality was so critical in defining a sense of identity around football. However, their subsequent development could hardly have been more contrasting. As Recreativo stayed largely in the backwaters of the game, FC Barcelona grew to become the focal point of Catalan identity as well as a power within the Spanish, international and global game. The paradoxical coexistence, however temporary, of both clubs in the same national league illustrates that contemporary Spanish football still embraces all the historical, political and mediated forces of the perplexing dynamic of Spain itself. Until recently the memory of Spain's autocratic past had gradually faded and media change continued to push football into new arenas, a complex interplay of competing and complimentary cultural identities which seek to draw upon the game's cultural power and iconography will become ever more central in both celebrating and diluting Spain's football cultures and identities. The dawning of the second transition in the Zapatero years illustrates that the aged old question of identity remains unresolved and continues to reverberate within Spanish politics. The contrast between the football allegiances of the incumbent Prime Minister and his predecessor pointedly demonstrates this. Whereas Aznar was able to openly display his support for Real Madrid in a high profile manner, Zapatero's allegiance to FC Barcelona is more circumspect, both being acutely aware of how football maintains its political power and iconography in the subtle and complex interdependence between nation and region which rests at the heart of a linguistically diverse and plurinational Spain.

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