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Football, Identity and Mass Populism in Spanish Society

Jim O'Brien

Southampton Solent University, United Kingdom

Abstract

The study is divided into two parts: PART A examines the relationship between Football and Mass Populism in Spain and considers the first Case Study, the national team's victory over England in the Brazil World Cup, 1950 and it is forthcoming in the Proceedings of the Conference *Creativity, Imaginary, Language* held at the University of Craiova, Romania in May 2015.

PART B examines the implications of Case Studies 2 and 3, Spain's victories in the European Nations Cup of 1964 and the World Cup of 2010.

Keywords: football, identity, mass populism, world cup, iconography

JEL classification: Z10, O52, H10

1 Introduction

The following two case studies consider the relationship between Football and Mass Populism in Spanish Society through the lens of analysis of two iconic victories for the national team; the defeat of the Soviet Union in the final of the European Nations Cup in June 1964, and Spain's first World Cup success by overcoming the Netherlands in Johannesburg in July 2010.

Spain 2 Soviet Union 1, Madrid, 1964

'In this quarter of a century there has never been displayed a greater popular enthusiasm for the state born out of victory over communism and its fellow travellers...Spain is a nation every day more orderly, mature and unified, and which is steadfastly marching down the path of economic development. It is a national adventure.' (ABC, June 22nd 1964)

In the 1960s, Spain opened up sufficiently to attract mass tourism for the first time. Under the slogan 'Spain is Different' (Balfour pp17-28) the decade witnessed a shift from the harsh austerity of much of the 1950s towards affluence, consumerism and economic growth (Junco and Shubert pp277-288). The authoritarian impulse of the regime became more muted, the Press Law of 1966 being indicative of a more tolerant and relaxed *modus operandi*. Spanish football also became more visible and prominent on the European stage through the profile and successes of Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Valencia and others (Burns; La Roja pp 220-221, p241). It also became increasingly significant as a means of securing social cohesion at a time of demographic change, as clubs became focal points for inclusion in the shift towards a mass urban society. Television exposure to domestic and international audiences meant that the game had become a seminal component as a reflection and definer of Mass Populism. Spain's hosting of a still embryonic European Nations Cup finals in June 1964 afforded the regime an opportunity to maximise football's potential to engender cohesion and consent for the political reality of the unitary Francoist Spanish state, in which cultural divergence had been homogenised to reflect heritage and continuity.(Quiroga pp52-59)). Whilst club football had proved critical in maintaining local and regional rivalries and diffusing overt political protest, the regime had found the manipulation and exploitation of the national team to be more problematic since the success of 1950. The boycott of the Soviet

Union in the first Nations Cup of 1960, when the team was refused visas to allow travel to Moscow (Burns; La Roja p188) and the failure of La Seleccion to progress beyond the group stage of the Chile World Cup in 1962, in spite of the squad being reinforced by the star presence of 'naturalised' Spaniards such as Puskas, Di Stefano and Santamaria (Ibid pp191-193). These political and sporting failures, which tended to confirm Franco's isolation, brought about a policy change in the shape of a ban on foreigners from playing in the Spanish league, with the objective of distilling a purified francoist Spain in the sporting arena. The ban was not formally lifted until 1973, in the protracted hiatus enshrouding the transfer of Johann Cruyff from Ajax Amsterdam to FC Barcelona. This became a key platform in the centralising and control of Sports Policy within the state apparatus.

With its style of play rooted in the traditions and nostalgic values of La Furia Espanola, the re- vindication and re-invention of the 'New Spain', composed entirely of Spanish players, was unveiled in the 1964 tournament to represent an optimistic, youthful and vibrant unified Spanish nation. The success of the team in beating the Soviet Union 2-1 at the Bernabeu in Madrid (Archive 2), with Franco and his ministers in attendance before a patriotic crowd was slavishly exploited by a censored, sycophantic media for propaganda purposes (Ball, pp 220 and 242). The achievement was portrayed as the ideological victory of fascism over communism, and fused coherently with the cold war rhetoric of the period. The synergy between football, mass populism and public relations reached its zenith in the regime's capacity to project state nationalism through the seductive appeal and mass entertainment value of sporting success. The fact that many of the players representing Franco's 'New Spain', including the team's talisman, Luis Suarez, came from the historic communities of Galicia, Catalonia and the Basque Country, underscored both the contradictions and complexities around the suppressed notions of contested ethnicities and identities beneath the surface of Franco's homogeneity. Nevertheless the political kudos of the victory, coming at a time when the footballing hegemony of Real Madrid on the European stage was on the wane, merged well with the dominant imagery of Francoist Spain in the mid- 1960s; educationally and technologically developed, increasingly prosperous, with political dissent pushed to the margins.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as El Caudillo's hold on power became subject to explicit and implicit threats and challenges, the high-water mark of the 1964 propaganda coup started to fade quite rapidly, as football became one of the key barometers in the vanguard of cultural and social change, particularly in

Catalonia (Santacana pp 147 -166)) and the Basque Country (Quiroga pp204-215). Marcelino's winning goal had shown the limits of state power in manipulating football to construct images and representations of a peaceful, stable, consensual Spanish society. Just a few years later, the game was a dynamic force in defining the resurgent regionalism based on language, ethnicity and culture in the Basque Country and Catalonia following the constitutional settlement of 1978.

Spain 1 The Netherlands 0, World Cup Final, Johannesburg, 2010

'La Roja transformed the somewhat negative and destructive La Furia of old into something as vital as but more life giving than wine or even blood, transfused rather than spilled' (Burns, *La Roja; A Journey through Spanish Football*, p 309)

The synthesis between football, the state and Spanish society as elucidated by the narrative underpinning the goals of Zarra in 1950 and Marcelino in 1964 remains rooted in the historic folklore of the Spanish game. In the mature democratic Spain of 2010, these images of the past had been replaced by seminal changes in the lexicon of football and its relationship with the Spanish cultural and political landscape. Nevertheless the game, in spite of its evolution into a globally mediated mass spectacle of commodity and consumption, had retained its capacity to act as a fulcrum in which the state could seek to frame and fashion national cohesion and identity (Quiroga pp137- 155)). Since the transition to democracy in the late 1970s, club football had become the custodian of regional resurgence and identity, underpinned by the game's historic localism. In addition, through the blending of the growth of regionally based media coverage and the emergence of technologically driven market based consumption during the 1990s, the game remained a focal point of national unity through the parameters of La Liga (Burns, *A People's Passion*, pp241- 278). However, the national team remained divisive, being associated in the public psyche with the dourness of La Furia and evoking memories of the centralism of the Franco era. From 2004 onwards La Seleccion became gradually reframed and reconstructed in the shift from La Furia to La Roja, in order to elicit more positive support for the national team and cast off the associations with Francoism (Quiroga pp139-146). This process culminated in the unprecedented success of La Roja in winning the European Championship in 2008 and 2012, alongside the World Cup of 2010. This rebranding and cultural repositioning of the team, after decades of

failure and underachievement, reached its climax with Iniesta's decisive goal in the 2010 World Cup Final in Johannesburg (Archive 3).

The global platform for Spain's success impacted upon the interlocking themes of patriotism, nationhood, ethnicity and identity in contemporary Spanish society, tapping into the historic predilections of Mass Populism in the process. The World Cup victory took place at a time when the Spanish state was going through a period of crisis and uncertainty due to economic recession and meltdown, allied to the potential political fragmentation threatened by the rise of separatist movements, particularly in Catalonia. (Lluis pp 13-18)). The homecoming of the victorious squad was witnessed by huge Spanish flag waving crowds in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona and seemed to constitute a brief moment of national harmony and unity to distract from the political and cultural cleavages in Spanish society (Burns: *La Roja* pp 350/351). The struggling Zapatero government attempted to exploit the success of *La Roja* to manufacture the notion of a unified Spain, though the team's coach Del Bosque was careful to downplay any wider cultural or political kudos being derived from the victory (*ibid*). Indeed the symbols and images emanating from *La Roja* reflected many of the key ambivalences permeating the political and cultural associations of contemporary Spanish football.

The slick advertising and public relations campaign in advance of the tournament, financed by Adidas and promoted by the slogan 'Nace de Dentro' (Born from Within) both attempted to manufacture support, particularly from the younger generation and within the historic regions to foster a feeling of national identity for 'La Seleccion'. It reflected the key shift from the traditional state nationalism of Franco's Spain and signposted the significance of corporate nationalism in the framing of national identity within the compass of global sporting mega- spectacles. The tiki – taka style of *La Roja*, in which the technical excellence of Guardiola's FC Barcelona was fused with the approach adopted by the national side, marked a striking contrast from the traditions of *La Furia*. As a consequence, the hybrid synthesis of a globalisation of the Catalan identity at the core of the team's composition was manifested.

Long after scoring his goal, Iniesta was lauded everywhere in Spain that he played, suggesting that a complex interplay of symbols and values surrounded *La Roja*, from the concept of Dual Identity (Quiroga, pp165- 170) to the Mass Populism of Banal Nationalism (Billig, p 30 -55). The historic and contemporary rivalry between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, illustrated by hyperbolic media coverage of the enmity between Guardiola and Mourinho, was diffused by Del

Bosque in La Seleccin, the friendship between Real Madrid's Casillas and FC Barcelona's Xavi projecting a striking contrast to the Centre – Region tensions at the core of the Real Madrid– FC Barcelona axis, and suggesting the hybrid and fluid dichotomy of the contemporary idiom of the Spanish football lexicon. The juxtaposition of the global mediatisation of the potent influence of the game's historic folklore and rivalries, together with its political populism in the rising tide of alternative nationalist sentiments in Catalonia and the Basque Country resonates closely with the national and global projection of the social, cultural and political capital of the Spanish game. As a consequence, the contemporary mosaic of Spanish football embellishes a post-modern pastiche of hyperbole, local and global fandom, the commodification of galacticos, media saturation and excess, in which the game's local and regional heritage is frequently masked.

The three case studies in the two sections of this paper are snapshots in time and place. They emphasize the highly politicised nature of Spanish football's iconography and define Spain as a contested territorial space of cultural and political divergence in which the state has perennially attempted the game's position as national sport to express and engender Mass Populism in order to legitimise and buttress the power and prestige of central governmental cohesion and control. Within the context of the centralising grip of Franco's dictatorship, the control was ostensibly more direct and explicit, whereas within the domain of competitive party politics and a more open media at the crux of Spain's democracy, state influence has been more subtle and indirect, though still reflecting a reluctance to relinquish the tradition of the interlocking relationship between football, politics and government.

Archive Material

The footage in the links below is taken from contemporary archive sources of these matches.

1 July 2, 1950 Spain 1 England 0 (World Cup) mpg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cROIn48ptd4>

2 June 21, 1964 Spain 2 Soviet Union 1 (EC Final) avi-You Tube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?y=1cVERk1wIw0>

3 July 11, 2010 Spain 1 Netherlands 0 INIESTA GOAL 2010 World Cup HQ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?y=Qw/ADgt3dBE>

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