



# Summary

## History, Politics and the Media. Exploring football in Spain 2

In this book, the author continues the inquiry into Spanish football which began with his earlier *Historia, nacionalizm i tożsamość. Rzecz o piłce nożnej w Hiszpanii* (2020). In a sense, the volumes constitute a diptych dedicated to football. This present publication focuses on showing how, in the country on the Ebro, history, politics and the media intertwine through football, which has thus transformed into an effective instrument of the official discourse of power. Here, the central element is the making of a nation (Spanish, Catalan and Basque) with football as a foundation, the wellspring of the so-called distinguishing factors (*hechos diferenciales*) that serve to legitimize the entire process.

This methodological approach enables one to capture the complexity of the power discourse centred around football, a tapestry of continually interlacing threads of history, politics and the media. Seen as such a constellation, the discourse reveals much more than any study confined to only one of those components. As already demonstrated in the previous book, the phenomenon of football in Spain cannot be fully comprehended without the historical context, since specific events from the past play an essential role in the landscape of the contemporary Spanish football. However, the same events rise to particular significance when, with politics and the media involved, they begin to exert an impact on both internal (centre – periphery) and external (Spain – other countries) relations.

The research objective and the methodological premises thus defined are reflected in the structure of the book, which next to the introduction comprises five chapters, concluding remarks and a bibliography. In the first chapter, the author discusses the attempts made by the Royal Spanish Football Association to boost national unity by having Spanish national team matches and the Copa del Rey finals played at La Cartu-

ja Stadium in Seville. It is demonstrated that choosing Andalusia and La Cartuja stadium as the capital of Spanish football was a deliberate social engineering scheme informed by a specific political objective. The authorities of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia found the idea conceived by the Royal Spanish Football Association to be an excellent opportunity to promote their region. For his part, the author posits that this political-identity project of consolidating Spanish national unity using Andalusia as an expedient would not have been possible were it not for the fact that the Andalusian distinguishing factor is construed as part of what is Spanish, whereby Andalusian-ness is an emanation of and a complement to Spanishness, rather than its opposite.

In the second chapter, the ultimately abandoned designs for the Spanish national team to play at Bilbao's San Mamés Stadium during Euro 2020 supply a context in which the author analyzes the establishment and development of the Basque Country's autonomous football team, with which a fair proportion of the Basques identify. Also, he examines the identity dilemma and resentment that the Spanish football team engenders among many citizens of that Community. That nationality and ethnicity-oriented perspective serves to elucidate the submission of the application to UEFA and FIFA in which the Basque Football Association requested to become part of their structures, as well as discuss UEFA's repeal of Bilbao's status as one of the Euro 2020 host cities and venue relocation to Seville. The reader may find out that the sentiments of some Basques towards Spain and to what is Spanish, as well as the consequent attitude towards the matches of La Roja, become comprehensible only when one considers the region's past, especially the ideological foundation of Basque nationalism and the activities of the terrorist organization ETA. The author demonstrates that the resentment towards Spain and the confrontational nature of *el hecho diferencial vasco* are far greater than in Catalonia, which is strikingly evident in the fact that the Spanish national team has not played a match in the Basque Country for 55 years.

Chapter Three attempts to answer whether the recent events in Catalonia and within FC Barcelona itself offer sufficient grounds to state that the essential meaning of the catchphrase *més que un club*, which defines the club's identity, is no longer valid. The media of Madrid and Catalonia are shown to play an important role in this process. In this case, it is indispensable to assess Josep Maria Bartomeu's presidency (2014–2020) and the policies he pursued, which caused FC Barcelona to transform into FC Messi, i.e. become entirely dependent on the Argentine Lionel Messi, who held informal power over the club. Bearing in mind that Joan Laporta was re-elected president of FC Barcelona in March 2021, the author discusses the steps he has taken to re-Catalonize Barça and, above all, to restore its due sporting dimension. Here, the analysis is conducted in the light of the Catalan distinguishing factor

which, just as its Basque equivalent, is confrontational in nature and manifests in underscoring cultural and civilizational superiority of the Catalans over the Castilians/Spanish. The author also demonstrates why it is Barça rather than Catalonia's autonomous football team which epitomizes Catalonia as a region and a nation, both domestically and externally.

The fourth chapter takes a critical look at the two qualifying matches for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar between Spain and Kosovo, played on 31 March 2021 in Seville and on 8 September that year in Pristina. This analysis aims to expose the media strategies and censorship practices employed by the Spanish public television during the broadcast of the games. Another issue explored here is the extent to which the treatment of those two matches by the Royal Spanish Football Association and the Spanish Public Television stemmed from grave concern for the integrity of Spain. In consequence, the author shows that the Spanish Public Television—an instrument of power—resorted to censorship in the name of upholding the idea of Spanish unity, indirectly aiming to deal a blow to Catalan separatism. In fact, the matches against the Kosovo national team became such a serious threat to Spanish politicians and media that they shifted from a purely sporting event into a political rally. The censoring measures on the part of Spain's public broadcaster are set against the exposure potential of the social media, especially Twitter and the newspapers, which immediately and vehemently responded to such practices.

Finally, Chapter Five outlines the political, identity-related and media corollaries following the return of the Spanish football team to Catalonia after the hiatus of 18 years, largely as a result of nationalist pressure and the Catalan independence process. The author discusses how the Spain vs Albania game on 26 March 2022 at the RCDE Stadium ignited the internal dispute between the supporters of FC Barcelona and Espanyol Barcelona over Catalanness and the predominance of their respective teams in Barcelona and Catalonia, also drawing attention to the associated tensions between Catalans who feel exclusively Catalan and those who feel Spanish as well. Here, the aspects to be explored include the behaviours and the gestures of the fans during games as well as specific strategies of media coverage, which on the one hand highlights the rapprochement between Catalonia and Spain as part of the discourse of Spanish unity (centralist), while at the same time overlooking, Catalonizing or disparaging the same, in line with the *modus operandi* of the Catalan nationalist (peripheral) discourse.

In the conclusion, the author emphasizes that knowledge of the historical and cultural background in Spain is vital to the understanding of the football phenomenon in that country since, as Gabriel García Márquez once stated, "football is an instrument of seizing power". Spanish football is a perfect epitome of the words of the Nobel laureate in literature.