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Better and Lesser Catalans?

The Dispute over Catalanness: Relations between the Teams and Supporters of FC Barcelona and RCD Espanyol Barcelona

Abstract

The paper analyses the relationships between the teams and supporters of FC Barcelona and RCD Espanyol Barcelona, in which the dispute concerning Catalanness has been and remains the foremost issue. FC Barcelona is widely considered an ambassador of Catalonia, a symbol of Catalanness and the epitome of Catalanism as embodied through football. Espanyol, its local rival, has to face allegations of being a non-Catalan club, or an outgrowth of Real Madrid in Barcelona. While Barça is the club in which one “does politics” and with which one creates Catalonia (*fer Catalunya*), it is emphasized that Espanyol and its supporters are not involved in politics and the Catalan national effort. A perennial feud continues between the boards and fans of both clubs; historical, identity-related and ethnic arguments are invoked to demonstrate the Catalanness of one side (FC Barcelona) and its incompleteness or even utter absence in the other (RCD Espanyol). The analysis conducted in the paper shows that FC Barcelona’s exclusive Catalanness and right to represent Catalonia is a historical and social fact, but it has been challenged recently by Espanyol through the Catalanization the club undertook in mid-1990s and a series of public campaigns to undermine the hegemony of Barça in the city and the region. Espanyol is the active side in the contest to overcome FC Barcelona’s monopoly on representing Catalonia, while Barcelona itself focuses on retaining its previous status. The study demonstrates that both clubs are in fact polysemous, which means that Espanyol has supporters who feel first and

foremost Catalans and espouse Catalan independence, while avowed opponents of the same idea can be found among the supporters of the Blaugrana, although the club is primarily Spanish and not only Catalan.

Keywords: Catalonia, Catalanness, Catalanism, FC Barcelona, RCD Espanyol Barcelona, *més que un club*, *Meravellosa Minoria*, Los Culés, Los Pericos, history, nationalism, identity

Introduction

It is widely believed that most Catalans support FC Barcelona, which the Catalan poet and writer Manuel Vazquéz Montalbán described as the “unarmed army of Catalanness” (*el ejército desarmado de Catalunya*), and a medium through which a link with the history of the Catalan people is established (Vazquéz Montalbán, 2005: 71, 169). Barça tends to be perceived as the football embodiment of Catalanism, and the club with the exclusive right to represent Catalonia. On the other hand, RCD Espanyol, a club from Barcelona and Catalonia, constantly faces allegations of being un-Catalan, a branch of Real Madrid in Catalonia or a “mini-Bernabéu” (Fidalgo, 2008: 29). A Catalan in a jersey of the club is considered a lesser or incomplete Catalan, especially when compared with immigrants who live in Catalonia and identify with FC Barcelona, which is their key to integration with Catalonia and the Catalan community (Mitra, 2014: 712). The role of FC Barcelona in integrating immigrants living in Catalonia is so considerable that some refer to the team as the “integrating machine” (*una màquina integradora*) (Balcells, 2008: 384). The rivalry between both teams is not limited to sport, as they compete primarily in the domain of identity; each act resonates with the past of Catalonia, while nationalism is a key factor as well. It is in fact a territorial and spatial dispute in which both sides resort to arguments drawing on history, identity and ethnicity. In this case, Catalanness is understood as the values, customs, habits, symbols, etc. which are constitutive for Catalonia as a region, a historical country, an autonomous community, and a culture. Thus construed, Catalanness is manifested chiefly in the use of

the Catalan language within the club, in parading Catalan symbols and having supporters who are native to Catalonia.

This study attempts to answer why being a supporter of FC Barcelona is widely associated with upholding Catalanness – the club itself is called the Pride of Catalonia for a reason – whereas supporting Espanyol apparently involves an element of *quintocolumnismo*, in other words being a Trojan horse of Castile in the very heart of Catalonia, or even outright treason (supporters of Espanyol are *botiflers* – traitors – adherents of Spain and the Bourbons and enemies of Catalan independence). In Catalonia, the fans of Los Pericos happen to be called Francoists, fascists, or lost *Culés* (Lucas, 2007: 53). In contrast, FC Barcelona has been singularly invested with Catalanness, resulting in a perfect symbiosis between the club, the city, and the region.¹ The Francoist period (1939-1975) is a major factor, as during that time Barça became the epitome of anti-Francoism (González, 2012: 47). In consequence, it has become a default presumption that Barça is inherently Catalan and constitutes a quintessence of Catalanness, whereas Espanyol has had to constantly strive to be perceived as a Catalan club (Salvador Duch, 2005: 175) and shake off the label of a non-Catalan or insufficiently Catalan team, which owes to the name, the royal crown in the emblem, and accusations of being a club of immigrants, or non-Catalans. It may therefore be concluded that Espanyol has not gained much from the Catalanization they undertook in the mid-1990s, when the name was changed from the Spanish (Español) to the Catalan variant (Espanyol), the descriptor “of Barcelona” was added, and Catalan became the language of the club, all to emphasize that it is a Catalan club associated with Barcelona, the capital of the region (Relaño, 2018).

Bearing all that in mind, it would be interesting to discover which specific events and facts in Catalonia’s past caused such notions to emerge. How much truth is there, and how much falsehood? What

¹ One of the displays at the FC Barcelona Museum is tellingly titled: “the FC Barcelona-Catalonia binomial” (*el binomio Barça-Cataluña*). A better example of the “union” of Barça and Catalonia can hardly be found.

are the attitudes of the supporters of Los Culés and Los Pericos towards each other and their clubs? Finally, one should examine how the Catalan bid for independence and the dramatic events of 2017-2019 affected the perceptions of both clubs in Catalonia.

The literature on the subject has been increasingly discussing the issues surrounding the relations and dependencies between ethnicity, nationalism and football. In Spain, the analysis focuses chiefly on those football clubs that by definition manifest a bond with a specific autonomous community, region or city. For instance, FC Barcelona stands for Catalonia, Barcelona, Catalanness, and Catalan nationalism (Shaw, 1987; Sobrequés, Callicó, 1991; Soldevila, Giraldes, 2014; Ruiz, 2010; García Luque, Finestres, 2014); Athletic Bilbao epitomizes the Basque Country, Bilbao, Biscayness, Basqueness, and Basque nationalism (Vaczi, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Sanz Hoya, 2012, 2013; Bertelegni, 2006, 2011, 2017; MacClancy, 2003; Aranes Usandizaga, Landa Montenegro, 2000; Gutiérrez Chico, 2017, 2018); while Real Madrid is symbolic of Castile, the capital metropole, Spanishness, and Spanish nationalism (Escandell Bonet, González Calleja, Villacorta Baños, 2002a, 2002b; Torras, 2013; Arias, 2013; Ball, 2010, 2014). Similar analyses have been carried out with respect to Spain's national team, as embodied in the neologism "La Roja" (Screti, 2009; de la Madrid, 2013; Quiroga Fernández de Soto, 2014; Ball, 2010, 2014; Burns, 2013), whose source lies in the ethnic and identity-related dilemmas of the inhabitants of the nation, especially those originating from Catalonia and the Basque Country. For many of them their national identity, being Spanish, does not mean identifying with the role of being a supporter of the national team (Villena Fiengo, 2003: 29). This is because they consider themselves Catalans and Basques in the first place, while attaching little significance to being Spanish. Importantly enough, most of the pertinent publications have been written by sociologists, cultural studies experts, anthropologists and journalists, whereas texts written by historians – using their particular methodology and approach to studying the past – are definitely less numerous.

The approach I suggest here has not yet been the object of scholarly reflection. In this sense, it is a pioneering undertaking and addresses

a peculiar historiographical gap. In the course of my analysis I decided not to expand on the texts by discussing the aforementioned association between ethnicity and nationalism with football in a broader perspective. This is for several reasons: First, this paper is concerned with a specific issue (the Catalanness dispute) as well as specific teams and their supporters (FC Barcelona and Espanyol Barcelona). Second, I adopted the assumption that drawing on the examples referred to previously would merely reiterate the well-known themes, which is something I wanted to avoid. The comparative method was applied to two teams from Catalonia, and I did not wish to disrupt it with comparisons to clubs from other autonomous communities of Spain or any other country. I am interested in exploring a specific case history which is “taking place” in Catalonia. I presume that an interested reader will naturally arrive at certain associations, without the need to point out potential areas for comparison.

The methodological premises of my text are integral components of the original concept I have formulated, which sets out to analyse the dispute of Catalanness – as I understand it – using the example of the relations between the management of the clubs and the supporters of the two Catalan teams. Thus, I distinguished nine thematic areas which serve to demonstrate the facets of the eponymous dispute: the origins, appellations and stadiums of both clubs (as three separate areas); the immigrant issue; the *cantera* philosophy; derby matches; political involvement; location marketing and promotion of Barcelona; and media presence. Given that I am a “non-classic” historian, I found sources in everything that can fulfil such a role: aside from exploiting the scientific studies, press material, museum artefacts² and on-line resources, I found it very helpful to take advantage of personal experience: participant observations and numerous stays in Catalonia, including visits to FC Barcelona and Espanyol stadiums, analysis of

² While FC Barcelona has its official Museum situated next to Camp Nou, Espanyol can boast no more than a historical space (*Espai històric*), where the club’s trophies and memorabilia are displayed.

the chants and banners of the supporters, and conversations with employees of both clubs.

The origins

The causes of the tense relations between both teams and their supporters should be sought out in the events associated with the founding of both clubs. FC Barcelona was established in 1899 by the Swiss Hans Gamper. In the early years it was composed mostly of foreign players, but there are researchers who question attributing the entire merit of creating the club to Gamper, and the role of foreigners (Arrechea, 2018: 1-11). Espanyol was founded in 1900 by Angel Rodríguez Ruiz and his Catalan friends, and was affiliated with the University of Barcelona. Espanyol's fans emphasized these facts during a 2016 match against Barcelona at Cornellà-El Prat, where they displayed a banner showing the dates when both clubs were established and the names of their founders. Next to FC Barcelona, there was the coat of arms of Switzerland and an inscription reading "the Swiss" (*Suissos*), while Espanyol was accompanied by the emblem of the club and the sign "Catalans" (*Catalans*) (La afición perica recuerda los orígenes suizos del Barça, 2016). Thus, the nationality of Barça's founder served the supporters of Espanyol in undermining the Catalanness of FC Barcelona. However, Gamper's Catalanness can hardly be denied, despite his Swiss origins. He should instead be called a "Catalan Swiss" or "Swiss Catalan" who identified himself with Catalonia (given that he wrote and spoke in Catalan, just as his children, who were brought up in Catalan culture) (Ibáñez Escofet, 1991: 66; Tomás, Porta, 2017: 191; Santacana, Torres, 2005: 27). The origins of the clubs involve a number of stereotypes which grew around them. Initially, Barça was presented as a club of foreigners; in contrast, Espanyol was very much indigenous, but over time the dividing line between the clubs came to be determined by the attitude of Espanyol, as manifested in the adoption of a name that evoked Spanishness, which was a provocation to many (Shaw, 1987: 22). Until 1995 the club functioned as Español, while the granting of the royal title in 1912 added the crown to its

emblem (Burns, 2016: 109-110) and later resulted in refusal to support Catalonia's autonomy statute in 1918 (Artells, 2005: 113).

As time went by, Espanyol came to be perceived as a Spanish club, supported by immigrants who came to Catalonia from other regions of Spain during the Francoist period to "dilute" Catalan nationalism. On the other hand, the founding of FC Barcelona coincided with the birth of Catalanism as a political movement, which apparently influenced the character of the club. FC Barcelona also took several steps to establish a lasting association with Catalonia: It incorporated the Catalan flag into its emblem (1910), adopted the Catalan language (1916), endorsed the autonomy statute of Catalonia (1918), participated in the Catalan holiday of La Diada (1919), and drafted club statutes in Catalan (1922) (Soldevila, Giraldes, 2014: 39, 54; Quiroga Fernández de Soto, 2014: 48; Usall, 2017: 188). Marked differences thus emerged at the very outset and have continued to shape the identity dispute between the clubs up to the present day.

The bynames

The dispute is also reflected in the bynames and monikers used to describe the clubs and their supporters. In the case of FC Barcelona, besides the popular designation *Los Culés* (Cat. *Els Culers*), deriving from the behinds of the fans sticking out from the last row of stands of the stadium in Industria Street – called the Spittoon (L' Escopidora) – the club is also referred to as the *Blaugrana* (The Blue-Carmines from the colour of the jerseys). However, two names in particular convey the link between the club and Catalonia: *més que un club* ("something more than a club") and the Pride of Catalonia, a self-evident description of what Barça stands for in Catalonia and how it represents it. Espanyol is known as *Los Pericos* (Parakeets) or *Los Blanquiazules* (The White-Blues), and sometimes an "ordinary club" (*un simple club*) (Colomé, 1999: 169), by way of contrasting with *més que un club*; the latter implies an added value that goes beyond sport, while the former denotes being plain and average, suggesting that no added value is attached to the club. It can be said that

fans of FC Barcelona attempt to “de-Catalanize” Espanyol by labeling it a “team of Chinese”, referring to the Chinese owner and club president Chan Yansheng, who assumed the role in 2016 (*El Espanyol traslada a La Liga todos los insultos recibidos en el Camp Nou*, 2017), thus calling the Catalanness of Espanyol into question. The fact that the sobriquet was coined is readily associated with Espanyol’s increasing popularity in China, where supporters watch its games at the best airing times, and boast their countryman, Wu Lei, as a star striker (Romero, 2019). The popularity of Espanyol in that country is a cause for concern for the fans of Barça, considering that China is a major promotional market for the Blaugrana as well. For this reason, they often bring up the fact that Espanyol is governed by a Chinese person, to undercut the Catalanness of the club from Cornellà-El Prat.

The stadiums

The stadiums are also a space where the rivalry between the clubs is ripe. In Barça’s case one can speak of topophilia (Lenartowicz, Mosz, 2018: 154), as their three stadiums – L’Escopidora (Camp del carrer Indústria) (1909-1922), Les Corts (1922-1957), and Camp Nou (1957-present) evoke nothing but positive connotations among its supporters. The first is associated with the origin of the most popular sobriquet of the club, the second witnessed the booing of the Spanish anthem before a game against Jupiter in 1925 during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) (Relaño, 2015: 41), which gave rise to a custom practiced by Barça’s fans in the democratic period such as during the finals of the Copa del Rey in 2009, 2012 and 2015 (Kubiaczyk, 2020: 316-365), while the third, referred to as the temple of freedom – *el templo de libertad*, (Coll, 2017) – is a venue where one revisits the past of Catalonia. For example, at 17 minutes and 14 seconds into each game with Real Madrid the fans shout “Independence!” (*Independència!*) and display the *esteladas* – the flags of independence – drawing in the capitulation of Barcelona in 1714 and subsequent introduction of the Bourbon *Nueva Planta* decrees, which put an end to Catalan institutions and privileges. Also, this is where

supporters comment on and challenge the current political situation in Catalonia and its relationships with Spain, such as by means of banners demanding release of *presos polítics*, “political prisoners”, as the people of Catalonia call the politicians behind the Catalan independence process who were detained after the referendum of October 2017 and then sentenced by the Supreme Court of Spain in 2019, or those comparing democratic Spain with Spain under Franco’s dictatorship. Camp Nou is a singular venue, manifesting the intergenerational rebellion of the Catalans; just as people gathered at the stadium defied the regime of Francisco Franco in his era, in the democratic state one speaks against the policies of the government in Madrid, which denies Catalonia its greater autonomy or, lately, independence.

The three more important stadiums where Espanyol has hosted matches, Estadi de Sarrià (1923-1997), Estadi Olímpic (1997-2009) and Cornellà-El Prat (2009-present) bring sad events to the minds of its supporters, not the least because of Barça, which is why they display a kind of topophobia (Lenartowicz, Mosz, 2018: 154). The cradle of Espanyol was the centrally located Estadi di Sarrià, which was demolished due to club’s financial difficulties in 1997, virtually causing trauma to some persons associated with the club (*El Espanyol recuerda con nostalgia los 20 años del adiós de Sarrià*, 2017). Subsequently, Espanyol played at the Olympic Stadium, but because it was not its home stadium, the supporters of Los Pericos felt it to be a kind of football exile, exacerbated by its location on Montjuïc Hill, its dimensions and appearance (the running track kept the supporters far from the players), and the largely empty stands (Veloy, 2012: 117). Espanyol’s current stadium is in the Llobregat area, which is outside Barcelona proper. Emphasizing its Barcelonian provenance is thus somewhat hampered, while the fans of Barça readily exploit the fact by calling their rival “Espanyol from Cornellà” (a phrase used by among others Barça’s Gerard Piqué), contributing to its semantic de-Catalanization. Clearly, there is a flaw of a kind attached to each of Espanyol’s stadiums. To deride their next-door rival, the supporters of Barça describe Espanyol’s wandering from stadium to stadium in one of their chants:

Tell me Perico, what does one feel,
 having their home in Cornellà,
 I swear to you, though years have passed,
 we'll never forget you,
 we destroyed your Sarrià,
 you were in the mountains,
 and we threw you out of our city,
 you were relegated from the league,
 to be a champion,
 we're going to pray that you disappear.³

While Camp Nou is in the city centre and along with the adjacent club museum it appeals to thousands of fans and tourists, outdrawing even the Prado Museum in Madrid, Espanyol's current stadium is outside the city and the club does not have its own museum, only a museum-like *Espai històric* (historical space) displaying the main trophies of the club. Camp Nou being central and Cornellà-El Prat more remote clearly makes it easier to associate FC Barcelona with Catalanness and symbolically underline its links with the city and the region. For the supporters, Barça's stadiums connote positive emotions, safety, and a metaphor of home, while the stadiums of Espanyol remind its fans of distressing and negative events.

The question of immigrants

As previously noted, it is widely thought that immigrants coming to Catalonia choose to support FC Barcelona, which has a magnetic force of attraction, rather than Espanyol. In his book Joan Laporta – president of Barça in 2003-2010 – draws attention to the new Catalans who, although originating from various parts of the world, have living and working in Catalonia and supporting FC Barcelona (Laporta, 2010: 133) in common, thus embodying – through football – the idea of Jordi Pujol, president of the Generalitat in 1980-2003. According to

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gy8wzjyPNK8> (translation by the author).

Sergio Fidalgo, one of Espanyol's major failures was neglecting to encourage immigrants to become supporters of Los Pericos (Fidalgo, 2008: 97-99). On the other hand, Espanyol is known as the club of immigrants who came to Catalonia several decades ago as part of the Francoist policy aimed at vitiating the identity of the Catalan community and their descendants as embracing a dual identity of both Catalan and Spanish. In this context, the former mayor of Barcelona, Xavier Trias, stated that it would be a shame for any Catalan to have an Espanyol supporter as a son-in-law (*Trias irrita al Espanyol por su rechazo a un hipotético «yerno perico»*, 2011).

Nonetheless, the immigrant issue obscures the true image of supporters of either club. It must be noted that Barça's fans from outside Catalonia often combine the symbols of the club with symbols of Spain (the Spanish flag and the bull); in their eyes, Barça is not as Catalan as it is Spanish, and they support it primarily for sport-related aspects over other reasons, especially its association with Catalonia and Catalanism. Besides, not all native Catalans who support FC Barcelona are nationalists seeking Catalonian independence. As for Espanyol, it is also supported by native-born Catalans, as it is not a club of immigrants only. A number of supporters of Los Pericos are avowed nationalists who display the esteladas flag of independence and would love to see an autonomous Catalonia. Both clubs are highly polysemous in this respect, and one should not pigeonhole or align them with a rigid paradigm of identity and politics. Interestingly enough, the Catalanness dispute between the clubs is evinced in the Catalan competence exams which many immigrants and foreign nationals take in Catalonia. The exams include questions which glorify Barça and disparage Espanyol, such as this, used in a grammar test where examinees had to provide the correct form: "Barça is the top team in the league, while Espanyol is in last place." In another example, in a story the supporter of the Blaugrana is presented in positive terms, while the Espanyol fan is a *zoquete*, meaning clown or fool (Mateo, 2017). These examples demonstrate how the dispute has gone well beyond the space of the stadium, reaching domains which have nothing to do with football.

The cantera philosophy

As regards transfer policies and investing in young footballers who are largely Catalan by birth, the two clubs take slightly different approaches. FC Barcelona is known for its famous La Masia academy, which turns out top international players. Foreigners have, however, always played leading roles in the club, including its greatest legend, the Dutch Johann Cruyff. This Dutch influence on the club is very frequently evinced; recently, the troubled Barça hired Ronald Koeman, a former player from the Netherlands, to address a crisis. Foreigners have long been instrumental in the successes of the club, such as Ronaldinho Gáúcho from Brazil, Samuel Eto'o from Cameroon, or Argentinian Leo Messi (some even speak of *Messidependencia*, or dependency on Messi), himself an alum of La Masia. The club is not much concerned about the fact that international stars help it win titles. Regardless of who scores, the crucial thing that Barça wins, and Catalonia along with it. Barça often agrees to transfers of Catalan players from its academy to other clubs, which has been criticized by Messi (*Se ha perdido un poco la apuesta por la cantera*, 2018: 6). Espanyol, however, clearly gives priority in its transfer policy to Catalans, to people “from home” (*de casa*), those who were born in Catalonia, and to Spaniards. Considering the percentage of Catalans playing in both clubs, the comparison is in favour of Espanyol. Much the same applies to Spanish or foreign graduates from the academies of both teams. It is therefore easy to concur that “Espanyol wins the derby of transfer policy” (Domènech, Paniagua, 2017) and that “one cannot understand Espanyol without Sant Adrià⁴” (Martínez, 2017). Espanyol’s legends are the homegrown Dani Jarque and Raúl Tamudo, as opposed to Barça’s foreign nationals. However, Espanyol’s native-oriented transfer policy in no way contributes to boosting the team’s Catalanness.

⁴ Sant Adrià del Besòs is the football academy of Espanyol Barcelona.

The derby matches

Derby matches are critical to the rivalry between Barça and Espanyol, as they go far beyond competition in sports, precisely because of the dispute between the teams and their supporters over Catalanness. Espanyol often sees the Catalan derby as the most important game of the year, and they are always motivated to play their best and beat Barça, preferably in a way which would prevent it from winning the championship of Spain, as in 2007 when a goal scored by Raul Tamudo denied Barça the title and paved the way to victory for Real Madrid (Besa, 2007). Barça, however, considers it of little significance, reserving its enthusiasm for competition with Real Madrid, materializing in the mythical El Clásico. The match against Espanyol is only important insofar as it may seal Espanyol's relegation to the second division, as happened in 2020 (Giraldo, 2020).

I do not agree with the above assessment. The stakes in games between Espanyol and FC Barcelona are greater than the actual football score: It is a contest for Catalanness, for ascendancy in the space of the city itself and throughout the entire region. Naturally, Espanyol is at a disadvantage in the rivalry, as they realize that Barça is the embodiment of Catalonia and the symbolic national team of the region. Recently, attempts have been made to de-Barcelonize Espanyol in view of its location outside the city, in the metropolitan area, which the board and supporters of Barça exploit to label the matches accordingly, *un derbi metropolitano*, as former president of Barça Joan Laporta put it (Laporta: “*El derbi con el Espanyol es metropolitano*”, 2009). The attitude happened to be visually manifested by means of a banner which once greeted the players and fans of Espanyol at Camp Nou: *Bienvenidos a Barcelona (Welcome to Barcelona)*, a paraphrase of another slogan often on display at the stadium when Barça plays its Champions League matches: “Welcome to the Catalan Republic”. Here, the aim is to show those playing against Barça, their fans and, by means of media broadcast, the entire world, that the match is being played in Catalonia, not in Spain (Lopez, 2016). In the local Catalan rivalry and realities of the derby, the players and supporters

of Espanyol play the role of foreigners from outside Barcelona. Importantly enough, a number of supporters believe that the real derby takes place when FC Barcelona plays against Girona CF because, as the widespread view has it, the majority of its fans are in favour of Catalan independence.

Attitudes towards politics

While FC Barcelona is considered a politicized club, not afraid of speaking out during important events in Catalonia, Espanyol is described as a politically neutral club which avoids political comments and debates, primarily espousing the values of sport. Although both clubs were established during the advent of Catalanism, it was Barça which became its football ambassador, not Espanyol. There is no doubt that Barça's support for the statute of Catalan autonomy in 1918 – from which Espanyol refrained – was a major factor. Based on the difficult and painful events that Catalonia experienced under the dictatorial rule of generals Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) and Francisco Franco (1939-1975), Barça built its identity by way of association with Catalonia. In the Francoist era, Camp Nou became a place where people manifested their defiance against the regime, as the flag of the club replaced the prohibited Catalan *senyera*. On the other hand, the regime used Espanyol in its efforts to suppress the aspirations of Catalonia for independence. Thus, Barça became a synonym of Catalonia, its football embodiment, whereas Espanyol became a team of “suspect Catalans”. In Jordi Pujol's eyes, Barça was the Catalan “national team”, although his view of Espanyol was highly respectful. For instance, Pujol writes in his *Diaries* that when Los Pericos won the Copa del Rey in 2000, he – as president of the Generalitat – received the entire team at the Palau de Generalitat, where Barça usually celebrates its successes. Earlier, he had accompanied Espanyol's president Daniel Sanchez Llibre to Valencia where the finals took place, and during the conversation reminisced back to 1940, when he was ten and Español won the Generalísimo Cup; he was able to recite the entire line-up from memory (Pujol, 2009: 335-337).

Today, the difference in the approach to politics is best reflected by the stances of the clubs with regards to the Catalan referendum of October 1st, 2017, and their responses after the Supreme Court of Spain convicted Catalan politicians in 2019. In 2017, as Barça was encouraging participation in the referendum in Catalonia, Espanyol adopted the position that as a sports club it was best to “remain on the margin of political and social developments in Catalonia” (*El Espanyol se declara al margen de la situación política en Cataluña*, 2017). A match between FC Barcelona and UD Las Palmas, taking place on the day of the referendum at the empty Camp Nou, provoked much controversy. Many associated with the club, including Gerard Piqué, felt Barça should not have played it as in the streets if Catalonia police were clashing with Catalans who wanted to vote. Joan Laporta, former president of the club, found the game tantamount to “casting a blank vote,” and in fact supported the government in Madrid (*Laporta: “Jugar a puerta cerrada es inhibirse, es votar en blanco”*, 2017), while the Spanish daily *Marca* claimed that Barça had “betrayed its ideals,” giving priority to winning at the expense of the symbolic and political significance of the club (Rojo, 2017). In 2019, when Barça expressed its solidarity and support for the families of the convicted politicians and called for them to be released, Espanyol – while sympathizing with the suffering of many that may have resulted – underlined at the same time that it respected the judgment (Marín, 2019). The statement caused a backlash, with Espanyol being labelled as non-Catalan and fascist club (Fidalgo, 2019). Unlike Espanyol, Barça spoke out in 2020 when the Supreme Court suspended the president of the Generalitat Quim Torra from his duties. The club issued a communique condemning the act and appealed for the political conflict in Catalonia to be resolved through dialogue rather than a judicial battle (*Comunicat del FC Barcelona*, 2020).

Still, it must be noted that both clubs are highly polysemous and elude any straightforward paradigms of interpretation.

Location marketing and promotion of the city

The rivalry over Catalanness between FC Barcelona and Espanyol Barcelona may also be analysed from the standpoint of national branding and location marketing. The concept of national branding presumes “approaching a country as a market entity, which makes it possible to build its brand in a manner analogous to creating brands, companies, and products in business”, while location marketing involves a market-oriented approach to promoting and selling locations (Gawroński, 2012: 50-51). Considered in the light of these premises, none other than FC Barcelona is identified with the national brand of Catalonia and is seen as the club which promotes its capital Barcelona, in which the municipal authority (Ajuntament de Barcelona) and the self-government of Catalonia (Generalitat) are both involved. The board and the supporters of Barça are proud of this, while their Espanyol counterparts do not hide their frustration. Speaking of the support FC Barcelona has received from the Generalitat, some claim that “wrongs” (*agravios*) are done to Espanyol, who is the injured party here (Mateo 2017). Espanyol supporters tend to refer to Barça as a “monster” hampering Espanyol’s development and efforts to promote its own Catalanness (*Le derby qui penche. Une ville, un derby. FC Barcelone vs Espanyol Barcelone*, 2013: 6). In 2013, the Ajuntament consented for Nike to dress a monument of Christopher Columbus in a gigantic FC Barcelona jersey (Baquero, 2013; Hernández, 2013; Romero, 2013), to the tremendous annoyance of those associated with Espanyol, who protested through a media campaign depicting Barcelona as the city and space of their club as well (Molero, 2013; *El Espanyol replica al „Colón azulgrana” con un video*, 2013). The statue of Columbus – a symbol of Barcelona – “wearing” a Barça shirt was seen by the numerous tourists who flock to the Catalan capital throughout the year. FC Barcelona could also always count on the support of the Catalan Generalitat, which in turn relies on the club to promote Barcelona and Catalonia. For example, in 2017 the Generalitat endorsed a promotional video created by FC Barcelona and the Catalan Tourist Board (Rocabert Maltas, 2017), whose slogan was “If

you feel FC Barcelona, you feel Catalonia”. This immediately sparked an outcry from Espanyol – its board and fans – as well as other Catalan teams which felt passed over (Costafreda, 2017; <https://twitter.com/villacampa8/status/819273443745165317>, 2017). Ultimately, the Generalitat apologized to all persons who may have been offended by the explicit association of Barça with Catalonia.

FC Barcelona appears to occupy and fill the entire Catalan social space, which has engendered the axiom “Catalonia is one football club”. The support for Barça is unlikely to cease, considering that in 2020 the Generalitat, the municipal authorities, and FC Barcelona signed an agreement on promoting Catalonia internationally through the Blaugrana, so as to attract new investors to Catalonia (*El Barcelona promocionará Catalunya en el extranjero*, 2020). Such practices are not at all to Espanyol’s liking, which in 2014 launched the counter-measure campaign “Marvellous Minority” (*Meravellosa Minoria*), aimed at raising the profile of Espanyol in the Catalan public space. The general idea behind the campaign was to show their pride in being a minority in Barcelona and Catalonia, with the supporters of Espanyol cast as a rebellious minority which had had enough of living in the shadow of the big sibling. In one video clip, a man repeatedly tries to blow out a candle on a birthday cake in Espanyol’s colours, but fails each time. The message: Despite their rival’s efforts, Espanyol would not disappear and would strive to end the hegemony of Barça in the city and the region (*El Espanyol calienta el derbi ante el Barcelona con un enigmático video*, 2017). The campaign was ingeniously conceived and splendidly produced, and Espanyol enjoyed considerable gains in terms of overall publicity as a result, but it did not manage to undermine the hegemonic position of Barça, neither in the city nor in Catalonia. Espanyol also embarked on an international competition with Barça as it entered the Chinese market through its owner and president, Chan Yansheng, to promote itself and its Catalanness, a soft-power move to which the club resorted to advertise its provenance and character outside the country.

Presence in the media

The board and the supporters of Los Pericos often allege that FC Barcelona has dominated the Catalan media, to the exclusion of Espanyol. Joan Collet, its former president, went as far as describing the treatment his club received from Barça and the Catalan media as “apartheid” (Collet, consejero del Espanyol, dice que „lo que se hace con el Espanyol en Cataluña es un apartheid”, 2010), and a kind of “national – FC-Barcelonist machinery” (*la maquinaria nacionalbarcelonista*) (Paniagua, 2016). According to Antonio Robles, the tendency of the Catalan politicians and media to identify FC Barcelona with Catalonia evinces a “totalitarian sports mentality” (Robles, 2007). Los Pericos supporters are exasperated with how everything in Catalonia prepares one to become a fan of Barça. The education of young people plays an key role in that respect, as they learn the anthem of FC Barcelona at school, which naturally fosters identification of the club with Barcelona and Catalonia (*El Espanyol denuncia que en las escuelas públicas se adoctrina a los niños en el barcelonismo*, 2011). The role of the media is no less significant, and there is a symbolic precedent, as the first live broadcast of the Catalan TV3 station in 1983 was a FC Barcelona game. Today the club has its own channel, Barça TV, while the Catalan media devote copious attention to it in any case. Espanyol is decidedly less covered, but that is not to say it is absent; my experience as a viewer and reader suggests that Espanyol does exist in the media space of the city and region. One should mention *La Grada*, a daily newspaper also published on-line, the internet site *La Voz Perica*, and the social media of the club (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Besides, Espanyol receives a fair amount of attention in the nationwide and Catalan sports dailies (e.g. *L’Esportiu de Catalunya*, published exclusively in Catalan, which has a strategy of marking the pages dedicated to Espanyol with its colours). The club can also count on journalists and activists who, being supporters of Los Pericos, become involved in promoting the club by publishing books about Espanyol, its history, identity, and the feud with Barça (Sergio Fidalgo, Enric González, Manel Lucas, Héctor Oliva). Espanyol’s visibility in

the Catalan media would most likely increase if the club were to create its own television channel and a proper museum. However, Espanyol can hardly equal FC Barcelona in terms of the mediatic impact on the Catalan community, as Barça's leading position in the local media is incontestable. The Catalan daily *Mundo Deportivo* is widely considered the best-informed outlet as far as the goings-on within the club is concerned. The popularity of Barça, the notoriety of its players, and the identification of the club with Catalonia and Catalanness have ensured it the perennial interest of the Catalan media, and that is sure to continue. The recent dismissal of the club's president, Josep Maria Bartomeu in November 2020 is eloquent proof of that.

Conclusions

As it has been demonstrated, the historical dispute between FC Barcelona and Espanyol Barcelona over their Catalanness continues and has not abated; it has only become more intense, chiefly due to the active stance taken by Espanyol. Barça limits itself to maintaining the status quo, symbolically affirming its dominance and taking the counteroffensive. Sergio Fidalgo alluded to the famous comic with the notion of an "Asterix effect" (*efecto Astérix*), whereby FC Barcelona are the Romans while Espanyol are the Gauls, abiding in their village and awaiting a Roman attack. Drawing on a popular Spanish cartoon, Fidalgo refers to the "Calimero syndrome" (*síndrome de Calimero*) to portray Espanyol as the victim disliked by everyone and whose failures are due to the actions of others (Fidalgo, 2008: 38). Although Espanyol has done much in recent years to come out of Barça's shadow, there is a long way to go before FC Barcelona is dethroned. In spite of the brilliant piece of marketing that was the "Marvellous Minority" campaign, despite the process of Catalanization and giving preference to Catalans, or increased presence in the Catalan media, Espanyol still finds it difficult to have its Catalanness recognized as self-evident, and is continuously needing to prove and defend itself. Moreover, repeated references to Barça actually reinforce its Catalanness as well as the mediatic and social impact in the city and throughout Catalonia. It can

thus be said that Espanyol's victim mentality works to the benefit of the Pride of Catalonia.

FC Barcelona remains a symbol of Catalanness and Catalanism, which certainly owes to its being rooted in Catalan history and the attitude of the club towards political developments in Catalonia. To say Barça means to say Catalonia. In the 2019-2020 season Espanyol was relegated to Segunda División, which no doubt benefited FC Barcelona, now able to reassert its dominance in the Catalan Autonomous Community. However, it may be argued that Barça's poorer current performance on the pitch, a tapping scandal crisis, the confusion surrounding Messi's intention to leave the club, the financial troubles, and the dismissal of the club's president, Josep Maria Bartomeu, made up – in a somewhat perverse sense – for the absence of Espanyol from La Liga games. May 2021 saw Espanyol return in good style to Spain's premier division. This means that in the upcoming season of La Liga we will once again witness derby matches with FC Barcelona and, most likely, further episodes in the dispute over Catalanness.

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