

Global Winners versus Local Losers: Globalization Identity and Tradition in Spanish Club Football

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Abstract : Contemporary global representation and consumption of La Liga across a plethora of media platform outlets has resulted in significant implications for the historical, political and cultural developments which shaped the development of Spanish club football. This has established and reinforced a hierarchy of a small number of teams belonging to or aspiring to belong to a cluster of global elite clubs seeking to imitate the blueprint of the English Premier League in respect of corporate branding and marketing in order to secure a global fan base through success and exposure in La Liga itself and through the Champions League. The synthesis between globalization, global sport and the status of high profile clubs has created radical change within the folkloric iconography of Spanish football. The main focus of this paper is to critically evaluate the consequences of globalization on the rich tapestry at the core of the game's distinctive history in Spain. The seminal debate underpinning the study considers whether the divergent aspects of globalization have acted as a malevolent force, eroding tradition, causing financial meltdown and reducing much of the fabric of club football to the status of by standers, or have promoted a renaissance of these traditions, securing their legacies through new fans and audiences. The study draws on extensive sources on the history, politics and culture of Spanish football, in both English and Spanish. It also uses primary and archive material derived from interviews and fieldwork undertaken with scholars, media professionals and club representatives in Spain. The paper has four main themes. Firstly, it contextualizes the key historical, political and cultural forces which shaped the landscape of Spanish football from the late nineteenth century. The seminal notions of region, locality and cultural divergence are pivotal to this discourse. The study then considers the relationship between football, ethnicity and identity as a barometer of continuity and change, suggesting that tradition is being reinvented and re-framed to reflect the shifting demographic and societal patterns within the Spanish state. Following on from this, consideration is given to the paradoxical function of 'El Clasico' and the dominant duopoly of the FC Barcelona - Real Madrid axis in both eroding tradition in the global nexus of football's commodification and in protecting historic political rivalries. To most global consumers of La Liga, the mega- spectacle and hyperbole of 'El Clasico' is the essence of Spanish football, with cultural misrepresentation and distortion catapulting the event to the global media audience. Finally, the paper examines La Liga as a sporting phenomenon in which elite clubs, cult managers and galacticos serve as commodities on the altar of mass consumption in football's global entertainment matrix. These processes accentuate a homogenous mosaic of cultural conformity which obscures local, regional and national identities and paradoxically fuses the global with the local to maintain the distinctive hue of La Liga, as witnessed by the extraordinary successes of Atletico Madrid and FC Eibar in recent seasons.

Keywords : Spanish football, globalization, cultural identity, tradition, folklore

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