

Building the Nation: Contributions from the mainstream Spanish sports press in 2006

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Abstract:

This paper deals with the creation of collective identities from the reception of sports contents of mass media. Maguire (1999) points out how sport mediated discourses increased, even more, the feeling of economic crisis in UK in 1993, when some sports failures on football and cricket happened. Maguire adds that sports discourses projected a feeling of nostalgia about glory days. But nowadays, the Spanish victory in the Basketball World Championship could be a good example to analyse how mass media used politically this success to reinforce the Spanish identity in the country, although Spain has several different identities.

ARTICLE

Sport Mass media contents have been very important to create a collective identity in some communities. For this reason, this article deals with the creation of collective identities from the reception of sports contents of the Spanish press. Firstly, Bairner (2001) states that sport is clearly linked to the construction and reproduction of national identities. Secondly, Maguire (1999) points out how sport mediated discourses increased, even further, the feeling of economic crisis in the UK in 1993, when some sports failures in football and cricket took place. Maguire adds that sports discourses project a feeling of nostalgia about glory days. Currently, the Spanish victory in the Basketball World Championship could be a good example to analyse how the mass media used this success politically to reinforce the Spanish identity in the country,

although Spain has several different nationalities and, some of them (Catalonia and the Basque Country) want their own national team.

Therefore, our objective will be to study if the Spanish press used the success of the Spanish basketball team in the Basketball World Championship Japan 2006 to reinforce the Spanish identity. Moreover, this research can be a good contribution to the studies that other authors (Crolley & Hand, 2002; Kennett & Ward, 2007) did in relation to the performance of Spanish national teams in international competitions, such as the football European and World Championships and the Olympic Games.

The paper is going to use reception analysis and some audience investigations carried out by the authors of the Cultural Studies as the essential theoretical bases. In this sense, the idea of “negotiated reception” by Stuart Hall is very important. Hall points out that each person “negotiates” the meaning of a text when he/she receives it. The interpretation of each person depends on the cultural background and the conditions which influence the person directly.

Hall’s model is part of the Incorporation-Resistance paradigm, but Abercrombie and Longhurst criticise it (Abercrombie & Longhurst; 1998). These scholars suggest that there are three types of audience depending on the historical conditions: simple audience, mass audience and diffuse audience. The main characteristic of the latter is the concept of “actuation”. These authors suggest that, nowadays, people act as an audience all day. Therefore, this diffuse audience appears in sports events, too. As Rinehart affirms, fans’ behaviour is important to create the atmosphere of a sports event, becoming an integral part of the whole spectacle (Rinehart, 1998).

Even, the Amsterdam Treaty emphasizes “the social significance of sport, in particular its role in forging identity and bringing people together” (Amsterdam Treaty; 1997, 136).

To analyse how the Spanish press treated the victory of the Spanish team in the last Basketball World Championship, we are going to use a qualitative approach involving the construction of semantic fields based on the issues of national identity, Spanish history or collectiveness. The content analysis of the news which appeared from the 1st till the 6th of September is going to show how media discourses with content related to the Spanish identity appeared in the press. We took this period of time because the 1st of September was the day when Spain and Argentina played the semi-finals of the Basketball World Championship and the 6th of September was the day that the dailies published the information about the reception the Spanish Royal Family gave to the successful Spanish national squad after Japan 2006.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Global perspectives in media reception

The first idea we must explain is the concept of *negotiated reception*, by Stuart Hall. Stuart Hall, the second director of Birmingham School, agrees with Althusser on several points. For instance, Hall believes society, understood as a whole of social relationships, is a complex structure where the connections between the different levels are not simple. As Althusser, Hall points out that this social structure is a *structure in domination*. The cultural author emphasizes the structure is the result of previous traditions. But, according to Hall, people are not forced to accept certain ideas.

Another important concept is the “difference”. Hall agrees with Althusser on accepting the existence of different social contradictions. These contradictions come from different origins; do not have the same historical effects on society throughout time and they drive the historical process forwards. So, Althusser and Hall disagree with

the Marxist authors on the conception of the state as the unified will of the governing class (Hall, 1998: 30). Hall differentiates between “unity” and “difference” and does not accept the Marxist idea of determination. A law does not exist that assures that ideology depends on the position of the groups between the economic relationships within the capitalist production system.

In relation to this, the idea of *ideology* becomes essential. Hall rejects reducing ideology to an ideological position that depends on status within the social relationships of production. Hall also criticizes the *false conscience* because it implies the existence of class ideology. According to Althusser, the function of ideology is to reproduce the social relationships of production, which are important for the material existence of any social formation. But Hall disagrees with him.

He agrees with Althusser in considering ideology as systems of representation by means of traditions, but the cultural author points out there are traditions outside the ideological discourse, contrary to Althusser’s idea. And then the concept of “identity” appears. According to Stuart Hall, there are identity ideologies; how people recognise themselves (Hall, 1998: 52). Paul Gilroy identifies three types of identity: identity as subjectivity, identity as equality and identity as solidarity (Gilroy, 1998: 70).

In the first case, Gilroy refers to the way people build their own, individual identity (Gilroy, 1998: 68). This type of identity is built over time. Work, language and culture are the three main factors in the social transformation. Identity as equality means identity as a group or community. How do people build the meanings of others? Nation, gender, classes or racial groups are some typical concepts related to identity as equality. Finally, identity as solidarity is about the differences which turn into bases that cause social action.

The three founders of the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, Richard Hoggart, Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams, maintained a nationalistic discourse about identity. In *The long revolution* (1961), Williams defends the idea of the political identity as a consequence of social conflict and cultural processes. *The uses of literacy* (1957), by Hoggart, follows the same perspective and plays down the role of immigration in the creation of identity. Thompson reformulates the concept of “class” from a completely different point of view regarding materialism. Thompson says a class appears when people build the identity of their interests by means of opposition to other identities. Despite maintaining differences among themselves, they share a nationalistic concept of identity.

On the contrary, Hall introduces new ideas into this old discourse. The ethnic element becomes essential. Hall rejects that nation-states maintain the cultural forms which surround identity. He defends the view that nationalistic identities are forced to face local, regional and supranational structures. It’s necessary to remove the idea of cultural difference understood through the concepts of hierarchy and hegemony (Gilroy, 1998: 82).

As a result, Stuart Hall makes some interesting points in his reception theory. This approach to textual analysis focuses on the scope for negotiation and opposition on the part of the audience. The audience does not passively accept a text; there is an element of participation or subjectivity. Listeners, readers and viewers negotiate the meaning of the text when they receive the content and this meaning depends on the cultural background of the person. Therefore, some readers accept a given reading of a text while others reject it. Hall developed his reception theory in his model for encoding and decoding media discourses. The main idea is that the producer encodes a text in a particular way and the reader, for instance, will decode it in a slightly different manner.

Hall further developed these ideas in his model for encoding and decoding media discourses. The meaning of a text lies somewhere between the producer and the reader. Even though the producer encodes the text in a particular way, the reader will decode it in a slightly different manner, what the cultural author calls the *margin of understanding* (Hall, 1973). Hall's reception theory is essential in approaching this investigation.

1.2. Sport and national identity: case studies

As we stated before, the European Amsterdam Treaty emphasizes “the social significance of sport, in particular its role in forging identity and bringing people together” (Amsterdam Treaty; 1997, 136). Therefore, we can consider that politicians believe in the social role of sport in building national identities. As Maguire (1999: 176) points out “sport represents different individuals, communities, regions and nations, and a key feature of the global sport process is that it is used by different groups –those which are more established, as well as emergent or outsider groups– to represent, maintain and challenge identities”. For this reason, the same author concludes that “sport and national identities have been intertwined” (Maguire, 1999: 177). Reinforcing this statement, on the one hand, Maguire (1999:178) highlights that “specific sports are seen to embody all the qualities of national character” and, on the other hand, Finn and Giulianotti (1999: 256) point out that “undoubtedly, sport is one of the key mediums within popular culture that can be used in an attempt to produce and reproduce a sense of national identity”.

Therefore, if we take a look in the bibliography about sport we find some scholars (Maguire, 1999; Marks, 1999; Finn & Giulianotti, 1999; Bairner, 2001; Saeed, 2003; Di Giano, 2006; Kennett & Ward, 2007) who have analysed different case studies

related to the topic Maguire highlighted. Joseph Maguire (1999) analyses, using different press articles, the relation between sport failures and politics in Britain in the early 1990s and how this cocktail was important in redefining the political discourse of the Conservative Party and in underpinning the successful British campaign to host the Euro 96 football championships. In this sense, media discourses are important in national identity formation, because, as Gellner (1983) argues, the formation of national identity requires strong institutional support from the national mass media and a national education system.

Maguire states that during the early 1990s a sense of “wilful nostalgia underpinned the identity politics in Britain” because “the failure of sections of English society to adjust to the loss of Empire and the concomitant failure to embrace the notion of European Integration; the nationalist assertiveness of the Celtic people who comprise the UK (outside England), and the changing social mores flowing from pluralisation trends that are also linked to globalization processes” were added to some sporting disasters in cricket and football (Maguire, 1999: 180).

Firstly, during late 1992 and early 1993 the English cricket team lost heavily against India and Sri Lanka. Both countries, which were part of the old British Empire, beat the former colonial power. Moreover, Sri Lanka beat England for the first time ever. Furthermore, the captain of the 1966 World Cup winning football team, Robert Frederick Chelsea, *Bobby Moore*, died the 24th of February 1993 and the English football team suffered a painful defeat in Oslo in the 1994 World Cup qualifying match. Finally, this sense of decline, crisis, despondency and malaise was compounded by defeats for the English football team against the USA and, in late 1993, against the Netherlands.

In spite of the cricket and rugby defeats, at the end of the twentieth century, when football was already a global sport, the defeats in football were even more painful because, as Finn and Giulianotti highlight, football “provides the pretext through which the imagined community of fellow nationals may be reached and unified, via the match’s mediation on television, radio or on print” (Finn & Giulianotti, 1999: 258). For this reason, faced with this situation, the English press reflected a sentiment of nostalgia for a golden age. For example, the *Independent*, in an article published on 12th of June 1993 questioned: “Where are our heroes now?” (Maguire, 1999: 195).

After analysing these situations, Maguire states that media representations of defeats in sport were “thus represented as something of greater significance than sport and both as reinforcing and reflecting a range of emotions said to be at play in the nation as a whole. This range of sporting disasters was paralleling the perceived decline in the nation at large”. In political terms, this wilful nostalgia could be seen in the speech of Prime Minister John Major in the annual Conservative Party conference. “Two dominant themes of the speech were an advocacy of ‘Back to Basics’ and an assertive Englishness” (Maguire, 1999: 198). In the sporting field, “Major sought to improve participation rates, identify talent and nurture elite athletes. These sentiments found expression in the government report *Sport: Raising The Game*, published within a year of the sporting disasters just outlined” (Maguire, 1999: 199). Moreover, as we stated before, these sentiments reinforced the successful campaign to host the European football championship in 1996.

Although the case study that Joseph Maguire analysed is interesting to introduce our analysis of the Spanish media discourse related to the Spanish victory in the last Basketball World Championship, we must not ignore other contributions to the study of sport and identity. Firstly, Crolley and Hand (2002) carried out comparative research of

the European press coverage of the 1996 European football championship and the 1998 FIFA World Cup. In this study, “analysis was undertaken as to how the Spanish press represented and reproduced national identity, or in some cases, the lack of coherent Spanish national identity in the context of rising nationalism in the regions (especially, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia)” (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 4-5). The conclusions of Crolley and Hand (2002) were that the Spanish press had a desire “for the adoption of a more Europeanised image by the national football team, a more sophisticated, technically advanced style of play that reflected progress and development in the nation as a whole. However, while the national team strived for ‘Europeanisation’, they typically had to resort to *furia* when all else failed, resulting in the reinforcement of a lack of self-belief when the nation stepped onto the international sporting stage” (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 5-6).

Taking into account the research of Crolley and Hard, Kennett and Ward (2007) provide an in-depth qualitative analysis of the Spanish press coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. According to them, “the main objective was to determine how the Spanish print media, as part of the media sport complex, exercised their role as Olympic ‘gatekeepers’ and effectively filtered their coverage by choosing the ‘lens’ through which the Spanish public would see the Games” (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 1). Their main conclusion was that the “Spanish press in the Olympics was predominantly partisan and the process of reducing the information and entertainment contents of the Games highlighted the overriding tendency to use a nationalist lens to interpret events” (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 20).

From a Catalan perspective, Santacana (2005) analyses how FC Barcelona consolidated its Catalan identity during Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975). The conflicts between the club and the Spanish sports organization (*Delegación Nacional de*

Deportes) –most of them reflected also in the mainstream newspapers of the regime and the Catalan press– during this period of Spanish history created the necessity for the club to be one of the main Catalan players in fighting for democracy and the reinstatement of the Catalan identity. The author points out different moments where the club took the initiative in condemning the way the Government ran the Spanish football league and in promoting Catalan culture.

Some contributions in the book *Football Culture*, edited by Gerry Finn and Richard Giulianotti, are also interesting to analyse the role of sport in building national identities. Firstly, let's talk about the work of Albarces and Rodríguez (1999). They have done an interesting study about the crisis of national representation in Argentinean football. In this sense, they state that “from its early days football in Argentina has provided a strong forum for the representation of nationality. A series of international successes and a catalogue of ‘heroes’ germinated an epic narrative, in which football contributed, in a significant way, to the ‘invention of the nation’” (Albarces & Rodríguez, 1999: 118). The two Argentinean researchers worked on the hypothesis that in the contemporary stages of globalization and meditation there is a split in the representation of the Argentinean nation through sport. In this sense, Argentinean football is unable to solve this problem by building a new national sport epic.

A historical background of Argentinean football is a good way to start. Firstly, they emphasise how the Juan Domingo Perón regime (1945-1955) was important in understanding how “sporting spectacles in Argentina became a new national ritual, with a deeply symbolic repertoire that had until then been practically unimaginable within the political realm” (Albarces & Rodríguez, 1999: 122). Secondly, the authors highlight the importance of Diego Armando Maradona. For them, “the image of Diego Maradona contained the three elements of myth identified by B. Baczko: an affective context, a

real phenomenon that can be converted into a set of discourses and actors who give a meaning to this process” (Albarces & Rodríguez, 1999: 126). Moreover, Maradona became the national hero after the defeat of England to Argentina – both countries were involved in the political conflict of the Falkland Islands – in the 1986 World Cup Championship, in which Maradona scored the his squad’s two goals.

But, all this mythology ended in 1994. In the USA World Championship, Argentina failed against Romania (3-2) in the round prior to the quarterfinals and Maradona was kicked out of the World Cup for taking drugs. Moreover, in the following years Maradona became an ineffective and non-systematic player always related with drugs and corruption; Argentina continued to export many footballers to Europe, but few were playing in the best teams and, finally, the explosion in access to cable television services, and with it the international sport scene, allowed Argentinean audiences to confirm that their domestic game was excluded from the new global arenas (Albarces & Rodríguez, 1999: 128). In conclusion, the two authors confirm the necessity for Argentina, a society which lives around football, to create a new global hero.

Although the scholars, in 1999, point out the new role of Ariel Ortega at the end of the 1990s as the footballer who could continue “the Maradona story”, nowadays, Ortega has not become the new hero and all the media focus their attention in FC Barcelona’s striker Leo Messi. Moreover, after the gold medal of the Argentinean basketball squad in the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, we can also question whether basketball could become a substitute for football in creating national heroes.

Secondly, Richard Giulianooti (1999) focuses his attention on Uruguayan football, the first historic football power in Latin America. He states that Uruguay is a nation built with “two Varelas”. Firstly, the president José Perdo Varela (1845-1879)

who contributed to the foundation of the general education system in the late nineteenth century, thus preparing new citizens for higher occupational positions (Giulianotti, 1999: 139). The second Varela, Obdulio, was the captain of the Uruguayan national team at the 1950 Brazil World football championship, where the Uruguayan national team beat Brazil in the Maracaná stadium in the final. But, the decline of Uruguayan football begins with the defeat to Hungary in the World Cup finals held in Switzerland in 1954.

Since then, Uruguayan football has not been a power in Latin America, compared with the success of the Brazilian and Argentinean squads. In this sense, Giulianotti (1999: 144) concludes that nowadays “paradoxically, while the objective picture of Uruguayan society has improved, and as the economy finds stability, the mood of its populace in the late 1990s has never been more pessimistic. Psychologically, there is a collective perception that Uruguay is a decaying nation, where no discussion of the future may begin without strong valediction of the remarkably successful past”.

Finally, Bea Vidacs has made an interesting contribution regarding Cameroon football. She highlights how football in that African country not only creates “non-traditional standards of behaviour, such as a new notion of time, or a turning upside down of patterns of respect, but also, and most importantly, it creates links among people who would not otherwise be linked” (Vidacs, 1999: 107). In a multiethnic country like Cameroon –that has an English speaking region and a French speaking one–, “Cameroonians themselves recognize that the national team brings unity and holds them together” (Vidacs, 1999: 109). She affirms that in Africa, sport goes “beyond nationalism in promoting even more overarching, pan-African identifications” (Vidacs, 1999: 112) and concludes: “What they contest is whether everyone supports the national team to the same extent and, by implication, whether everybody deserves to be part of the nation. At the same time, through the experience of football as a practice,

people gain a wider social network which cuts across ethnic links and brings them together in novel ways” (Vidacs, 1999: 116).

In relation to African sport, it is important to highlight the work of Chappell (2005) about Namibia. The study addresses the current socio-political situation in Namibia in relation to the organization of sport 15 years after its independence. In 2003 the country reached the final stages of the International Cricket Council World Cup in South Africa and the International Rugby Board World Cup in Australia, a remarkable achievement for a country with a population of only 1.9 million people (Chappell, 2005: 241). The British scholar concludes that “sport features in interesting and important ways as Namibia embarks on the process of nation-building. Success in international sport has literally placed Namibia on the map, and the achievements have been remarkable for a new country in the developing world with such a small population” (Chappell, 2005: 253).

However, after the studies about football, basketball has become another important research subject, above all, the North American National Basketball Association (NBA). Falcous and Maguire (2006) published some interesting research which examines the production and textual presence of the NBA on television in the United Kingdom. The two scholars say that “the nature of the UK television market prevented the NBA from simply distributing pre-packaged, and ‘brand consistent’ shows as it may do in other countries; and limited the ability of NBA executives to distribute a censored and sanitized portrayal of the league” (Falcous & Maguire, 2006: 75).

Moreover, Jackson and Andrews analyse how “the NBA, an explicitly American, yet increasingly global media(ed) institution, can be located within the local context of New Zealand” (Jackson & Andrews, 1999: 31). For them, the NBA, “rather than

causing the dissolution of local identities through the establishment of a homogeneous global culture, the NBA may actually play a role in energizing multiple popular and local cultures” (Jackson & Andrews, 1999: 40).

Bairner (2001) traces out another Anglo-Saxon contribution to the global analysis of nationalism and sport in his book *Sport, nationalism and globalization*. He presents different case studies of how sport has been influential in reinforcing the national identities of the United Kingdom, Ireland, United States and Canada. For example, in terms of basketball, he points out that because the country only has two main franchises in the NBA (Toronto and Vancouver) and neither of them have ever had any real success in the league, it is early to say if the practice of this sport will be influential for the construction of the Canadian national identity. At this point, we can also add some research by Wilson (1997), in which he analyses portrayals of African-American basketball players in the Toronto media. It was found that the media tended to stereotype these players as either “good” or “bad” blacks.

1.3. National identities in Spanish sport

When we analyse Spanish sport in international competitions we can highlight two important things for our study: the gold medal in Japan 2006 represents the main achievement for one of the two main Spanish sports (football and basketball) in Spain’s sporting history and, consequently, was a great opportunity for Spanish sporting and political organizations to engage everyone in the Spanish sporting project before the demands of some regions to have their own national teams, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Firstly, the senior football national team – football is the *king sport* in Spain – seldom had important performances in international events. It has not reached the final

of a World Championship since 1930 in Uruguay – it only came fourth in the 1950 Brazil World Cup. Spain has only ever won the 1964 European Championship and reached the final in 1984. Moreover, in the Olympics, the Spanish football team won the silver medal in Ambers 1920 and the gold medal in Barcelona 1992.

In basketball, before the gold medal in the Basketball World Championship 2006, Spain had five silver medals in the European Basketball Championships (1935, 1973, 1983, 1999 and 2003) and a silver medal in the Olympics (1984). For this reason, after the reactions of the media and the political authorities, we can consider that the victory of the Spanish national basketball team in Japan 2006 was seen as the consolidation of Spanish sport in one of the two main Spanish disciplines. Moreover, we have to consider that two years earlier, in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the Spanish basketball team was also seen as one of the major hopes to win a gold medal and, finally, it was defeated by the US in the quarterfinals. On that occasion, and taking into account that the team beat Argentina, Italy, Serbia and China in the preliminary stages, the Spanish press “declared that the roles had been reversed and that Spain was now the Dream Team” (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 14).

Secondly, many people in Spain had the perception that for the first time all Spaniards were engaged in the same sporting project, after a period where the Catalan Government had a strong policy for having its own national squads, above all, roller hockey. For example, Catalonia took part and won the Roller Hockey World Championship B hosted in Macao in 2004, but it could not participate to the World Championship A hosted in San José (USA) because of the opposition of the Spanish authorities.

Consequently, we can question whether the mainstream sports media had an important role in spreading this sensation of the Spanish national basketball team as a common Spanish project when it won the World Championship.

II. How did Spanish sport dailies treat the Spanish victory in Japan? Between epics and politics

Our qualitative content analysis was based on four Spanish sport dailies: *Marca* and *As*, from Madrid; *Sport* and *El Mundo Deportivo*, from Barcelona. For this reason, we can analyse whether the journalistic treatment of the Spanish basketball victory in Japan 2006 was different between the four dailies. In a country where the nationalistic debate is real and often appears in the media, we can question if this debate also appeared in the media coverage of the Basketball World Championship in Japan.

The first point to analyse could be how the four dailies referred to the Spanish team. This is an important point because depending on the terms used they could be a reflection of the implicit conception of the state that each paper has. On the one hand, the two Catalan dailies do not use the word “national” to refer to the team. They always use the name of the country (Spain) or the name of the inhabitants of that country (Spaniards). However, not only did they use the words *Spain* or *Spanish* to write about the team, but they also used the adjective associated with the region of Spain where the players come from to refer to them. For example, Pau Gasol was “the Catalan”, Rudy Fernández was “the Majorcan” or Berni Rodríguez was “the Andalusian”.

On the other hand, the Madrid dailies use the adjective “national”, as well as “Spain” or “Spaniards”. Therefore, we can understand that the nationalistic debate is real in the editorial lines of these dailies. We must point out that the Catalan dailies give

their support to the Catalan national teams when they play friendly matches although they also sell copies in all the state. So, they must be careful how they refer to the Spanish teams in order not to offend any of their targets.

Kennet and Ward (2007) also analysed the media coverage of Spanish dailies in the Atlanta 2004 Olympic Games. They point out that “the press reports began with an inclusive, optimistic discourse around the opening ceremony. This moved on to an exclusionary, pessimistic discourse in the first week of competition. As the sporting performances of the Spanish team improved during the second week, a further shift occurred to an inclusive, celebratory discourse that was tinged with uncertainty. The press coverage of the closing ceremony was marked by a return to a distant, exclusionary discourse that involved critical reflection and evaluation” (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 13). In Japan 2006, the media was always optimistic about the results of the Spanish team. Furthermore, this optimism increased in Spanish society when its team passed to the quarterfinals. Before the championship, Spain was one of the favourite teams, and this qualification was reinforced after beating Lithuania in the quarterfinals. The optimism of Spanish society was strengthened by the media in different ways:

2.1. Comparisons between players and heroes

The comparison between the best player of the Spanish team, Pau Gasol, with the Spanish medieval hero The *Cid* was a source that *As* and *Marca* used:

“Modest without crutches, generous with crutches, supportive of his team mates, committed to the team, *Cid Campeador*, *santboiano*, fan of RCD Espanyol of Barcelona, Spanish, MVP” (*As*, 4 September, 2006).

“A *Cid Campeador* for the final” (*Marca*, 2 September, 2006)

“Maybe we are going to win and the Cid will be the MVP” (*Marca*, 2 September, 2006)

The Cid Campeador (Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar) was a Spanish medieval hero who lived between the 1043 and 1099 in Castilla (a region of Spain which in the past was a whole kingdom). He fought against the Muslims who were in Valencia and, during the battle he was injured. Although he died later, the officials did not tell the troops and the troops fought against the Muslims thinking he was alive. Cid became a national hero thanks to the poem *El cantar del Mio Cid*, an anonymous medieval poem like *La Chanson de Roland*.

In *Sport* this source was only used once. The day of the final (4 September, 2006) an opinion article used the statement of the legend of the Three musketeers “One for all; all for one” in relation to the fraternity within the team.

El Mundo Deportivo uses the figure of Rambo to praise the Spanish team. This daily says: “Dear Master Rambo, we are in the face of the final battle. I cannot feel my legs because I am moved” (1 September 2006) *Marca* uses the figure of *samurais*: “In Japan, the land of the ‘samurais’, Pau Gasol is the most feared Spanish warrior” (*Marca*, 1 September 2006).

2.2. Comparison between epic moments in Japan 2006 and historical episodes

Another source that is used by the dailies is to compare the most important moments of the championship with different historical episodes. Firstly, the semi-final match between Spain and Argentina was reflected by the press as the Little Big Horn battle in 1876, where the Seventh Cavalry of George Armstrong Custer fought against the indians. In the Spanish press, Pau Gasol, the Spanish leader, was compared to

Custer, although the end of the story was changed. While in Little Big Horn Custer died, in the *new* story he survived:

“Argentina felt inferior to Spain. Argentina turned the match into a battle in which Spain could only escape with the leadership of Sergio and Garbajosa. And, with Pau Gasol injured, like General Custer in front of Chief Sitting Bull. There is only a difference, this time the cavalry won” (*As*, 2 September, 2006)

The Spanish sporting press also took some references from World War II to write about the Spanish epics in Japan. The comparison between the kamikazes and the Spanish players was evident in the final, but there also appeared some references to historic soldiers like field marshal Erwin Rommel:

“The slogan of the Afrika Korps, with its leader Rommel, the fox of the Libyan desert, the shout of ‘Heya Safari’, was the calm voice of support of Pepu: ‘We must be practical and brave’” (*As*, 2 September, 2006)

And, after beating Greece in the final, the press wrote:

“In the Empire of the Rising Sun, Spain raises in the Cedars Hill of the world cup: adorned red furies with the white band of the suicidal pilots of the Emperor, flying pumps against the American aircraft carriers in Okinawa. But no, they are not Kamikazes. The pump is Navarro. They are our heroes, they are our golden juniors , they are the champions of the World” (*As*, 4 September, 2006)

There is another period of Spanish history which appeared in the chronicles of the Spanish basketball team in Japan 2006: the Spanish empire of the XVI century and its Invincible Navy. During the XVI century, the king of Spain Philip the II, had the hugest empire in the world. But this empire had its main defeat in 1588, when the Spanish navy wanted to conquer Great Britain to punish the British for the continuous

attacks of buccaneers in Spain. In 1588 130 ships, with 8.253 sailors and 2.088 rowers, more than 19.295 soldiers started a trip to Great Britain from Lisbon. But, the English navy was better prepared to fight in the bad weather conditions and, finally, only 66 ships and 10.000 soldiers came back to Spain. Despite this defeat, this navy was called the Invincible Navy in Spain.

Even though the Spanish newspapers said that “this Spain is like the Spain of Philip the II” (*As*, 2 September, 2006), it was not the first time that journalists had used this comparison. When the Spanish tennis team won the Davis Cup for the first time, the press also called them the Invincible Navy. It is very curious that the Spanish press uses a story which ends in disaster to refer to Spanish sporting achievements. Not only does *As* use the comparison with the Invincible Navy; but *El Mundo Deportivo* also compares the Spanish Team to Phillip II’s powerful army: “The Invincible army won under pressure” (*El Mundo Deportivo*, 5th September 2006)

Finally, the press also wrote that the Spanish team is experiencing its particular “Golden Century” (*As*, 2 September, 2006). The Spanish Golden Century was between 1492 and 1681. It was a period when Spanish literature and culture were at their very peak and it was when Miguel de Cervantes and Lope de Vega, for example, wrote their books.

2.3. Resorting to fury

If we read the news items calmly, we can see quite a few references to the Spanish fury. What’s the Spanish fury? A possible definition is it’s a mythical argument. So, we will try to explain the mythical universe that surrounds the Spanish team.

There are historical and cultural aspects that influence western societies and the reception and the interpretation of mythical universes. Myth has always been an

essential element of our societies. The transition from myth to *logos* was the main difference between Socrates and the pre-Socratic authors and the primitive stage of the Greek world, before the appearance of philosophy. Since the first civilizations, human beings have had a lot of myths to explain all the facts of life (defeat in a battle, the origin of thunder and lightning, birth and death). This mythical attitude had two main characteristics: natural forces have a divine character and the facts depend on the will of the gods.

The appearance of philosophy supposes the transition to rational explanations of natural and anthropologic events. It was the beginning of the era of *logos*. Most historians consider that this fact is the most important in the history of humanity. But, according to Lluís Duch (2002: 22), “human beings have a *logomythical* constitution that means their presence in the world builds up communicatively by means of a lot of languages”. There are some abstract and imaginative processes which participate in “the social construction of reality”, according to Berger and Luckmann, but Duch points out that there is a symbolic construction of reality. Therefore, human beings have combined the mythical character and *logos*. *Logos*, or the rational explanation, is very important to societies, but myth, the symbol and the image still retain an important role in contemporary culture.

Historically, mythical figures have been recurrent systems and, at the same time, directly implicated and changed by the events of human history and different societies. The characteristics of the presence of myths in quotidian life are their recurrence and interpretation. According to Duch, myths are recurrent because they have a basic, constant structure which allows the human being to represent them in the world (Duch, 2000: 32-33). Paul Ricoeur points out that, myths refer to their interpretation. Myths are

an essential part of human life. “The mythical narratives, represented in different ways, helped us to contextualize” (Duch, 2000: 33).

But it’s hard to embrace a specific definition of myth. Inconsistency, fluency, and a strange component are the three characteristics of myth. Duch points out: “All myths try to establish immediacy in the relationship between the object and the subject, on the contrary to rational knowledge” (Duch, 1995: 46). The purpose is to show and legitimize. To sum up, a myth justifies the relationships and the institutions which regulate human life in a specific space and time (Duch, 1995: 51).

As headlined on 2nd September 2006: “The world of basketball revolves around this red fury started in the heart of Japan” (As, 2nd September 2006). Another example is: “The ‘red fury’ intimidated and blocked Greece” (*El Mundo Deportivo*, 5th September 2007). Spain has been associated with fury throughout time. This fact reveals a hidden meaning: Spain as a symbol of instability, irrationality or fearlessness. We can compare the case of Spain with France. France is the symbol of Illustration, the power of reason instead of myth. Colours and patriotic elements play an important role. The common colour of France is blue, whereas Spain’s is red. Red, on the contrary to the blue of France, symbolizes fury, an irrational character, the power of strength. As well as this, the bull represents the same, bravery, and the cock something different. It is interesting to examine how the Spanish dailies use this myth as a way to represent other meanings.

2.4. Discredit the rivals

Discrediting rivals was often used to reinforce Spanish optimism, above all, in two dailies edited in Madrid. Even more, when the US national team failed against Greece in the semi-finals the Spanish euphoria was completed. We must take into account that in the 2004 Olympic Games, “when Spain drew against the US in the

quarterfinals, the press declared that the roles had been reversed and that Spain was now the *Dream Team*. Spain's subsequent defeat by the US was received bitterly in the press as a Shattered dream" (Kennett & Ward, 2007: 14).

In Japan, the US suffered an incredible defeat and we can observe a sense of revenge in the Spanish press:

"The NBA is a satellite of our Golden Century boys, where we send our troops to teach the Yankees how they have to play with spirit, efficiency and intelligence" (*As*, 2 September, 2006)

"And every time that Greece tried to catch Spain, Larry Bird appeared. Sorry, Jorge Garbajosa. He is not from Boston, neither is French Linck (Indiana). He is from Torrejón de Ardoz (Madrid), a city which is going to establish a branch in Toronto" (*As*, 4 September, 2006)

But, not only was the US team was brought into discredit, but also the Argentinean squad had to read expressions like "wolves with fangs bared" (*As*, 2 September, 2006) or "to pester the pack of wolves, one by one, shot by shot" (*As*, 2 September, 2006). Moreover, the Greeks also had to read things like this:

"Baby Shaq could only wrap a towel on his head and ask for a good steak to get his blood pressure down" (*As*, 4 September, 2006)

Sport only used this source in the chronicle of the final against Greece. We can find three expressions: "fat Schortsianitis" (he was a pivot for Greece), Greece was "a caricature of a squad" and the Greeks were a *comparsa* (a group of musicians which play in the streets) (*Sport*, 4 September, 2006). Not only did this newspaper, often discredit the rival, but it also preferred to reinforce the professionalism the of the US squad and the NBA players (*Sport*, 3 September, 2006).

Finally, *El Mundo Deportivo* does not discredit Spanish rivals and maintains a very respectful position towards them. The use of “verbal assaults” is normal in the two dailies of Madrid, but not very often in the newspapers of Barcelona.

On the other hand, *Marca* discredits rivals: “The naturalness of Spain against the twelve lions” (*Marca*, 1 September 2006). “The beast is coming” is another example, referring to “Baby Shaq”, Schortsianitis, a Greek player (*Marca*, 3 September 2006).

III. Conclusions

This part aims to sum up the main points we have discussed throughout this paper. First of all, we are going to give a general approach to the main points analysed. The Catalan dailies do not refer to the Spanish team using the noun “nation” or the adjective “national”. *Sport* and *El Mundo Deportivo* normally use the word “nation” when referring to Catalonia. For this reason, Spain is the State, not the nation. On the contrary, *Marca* and *As*, from Madrid, can use different option, such as, “nation”, “national”, “Spain” or “Spanish”.

All the dailies maintain an optimistic discourse to write about the Spanish team. This discourse contrasts with the pessimistic discourse of the dailies when they refer to the Spanish football team. Dailies use basketball to hide the disaster of the Spanish football team in the last World Championship in Germany.

With reference to the terminology newspapers use to write the stories, *As* is the daily which uses more war words. For this reason, *As* is also a daily which often compares the team with different historical heroes. There is a good example in the comparison between Pau Gasol and the historical knight Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, *el Cid*.

The newspaper *Marca* also used this source and compares the basketball players to the *samurais*. On the other hand, *Sport* and *El Mundo Deportivo* don't utilize this resource.

Referring to some epic moments and historical episodes, *As* and *Marca* use this kind of source a lot. For instance, *As* takes into account the country where the Championship was being played, Japan. So that, the daily constantly compares the Spanish team with historical episodes related to the Second World War. Two examples: the kamikazes, the soldiers who died crashing into the American aircrafts, and the African Corps, by Erwin Rommel, the "Desert fox". But, the references are also previous to this date. The spirit of George Armstrong Custer, the leader of the Seventh Cavalry, is embodied by Pau Gasol with one difference in the narration of the story: Custer died like a hero, but Gasol won like a hero (against Argentina). And finally, *El Mundo Deportivo* and *As* wrote about another period of Spanish history: the Spanish empire of the XVI century and its Invincible Navy.

On the other hand, *As*, *Marca* and *El Mundo Deportivo* use the expression "fury" referring to the Spanish team. In this case, the source of this myth is very usual in the Spanish press. As we can see, *Sport* is the only daily which does not use the comparisons and the "fury". *Marca* and *As* are the dailies which most discredit rivals using derogatory expressions. On the contrary, the two Catalan dailies show more respect towards other teams.

Now, it is the moment to give an answer to the main objective of this paper. We would like to study how the Spanish sport newspapers used the Spanish basketball success in Japan 2006 to reinforce Spanish identity. It is clear that the dailies edited in Madrid tried to build a feeling of community around the Spanish team. For this reason, their writing style was more interpretative than the Catalan ones. *Sport* and *El Mundo Deportivo* used a descriptive approach.

Using an interpretative approach to write about the Spanish victory, *As* and *Marca* reinforce the capabilities of the audience to interpret the stories in the way the two dailies want. According to Hall, the interpretation of each person depends on the cultural background and the conditions which influence them. Appealing to Spanish history and its heroes, the two dailies can strengthen the feeling of partnership of their audience to the Spanish community.

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