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Visca el Barça! Ideology, Nationalism, and the FIFA World Cup

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Historically, Catalonia was an independent monarchy that, at its peak, controlled modern-day Valencia, Sardinia, Andorra, the Balearic Islands, and Roussillon in southern France. Today, these regions make up what are known as the *Països Catalans*, or Catalan-speaking territories, and the language is used to varying degrees within each region. In 1714 Catalonia came under Spanish rule and lost all of its former autonomy to the Kingdom of Castile. However, the Catalan identity has remained intact even after almost 300 years of Spanish rule, a fact that is constantly reflected in regional legislation that challenges the central government and the concept of a unified Spanish nation. Recently, the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (Government of Catalonia) has been engaged in political debates with the Spanish government. That Spain is struggling in return makes the argument for independence more salient in the eyes of Catalan nationalists. In 2010 the Spanish Constitutional Court made alterations to the *Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya* (Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia), originally ratified in 2006. During the four years of debates the Spanish Constitutional Court released its modifications to the statute, after having eliminated several sections deemed unconstitutional. Among those sections removed were specific rights relating to Catalan language requirements in the public sector, economic relations with the Spanish central government, and the definition of Catalonia as a “nation.” This was perceived as an affront on Catalonia’s autonomy and an insult to the dignity of its people.

The Catalan nation has long been at odds with the central government, particularly after decades of repression under Generalissimo Francisco Franco’s dictatorship. During this time, the largest soccer team in Catalonia, *Fútbol Club Barcelona*, served as a symbolic rallying point for Catalan nationalists, a trend which still continues today. While Catalonia has a national soccer team, it is not recognized by the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), and it is hence unable to compete against other countries in the FIFA World Cup tournament that takes place every four years. Since the Catalan national team is prevented from competing in the largest international football tournament, FC Barcelona, or *Barça*, has become the symbolic national team for many Catalans. When viewed in this light, *Barça*’s victories are Catalonia’s victories.

For this reason, Spain’s 2010 FIFA World Cup victory in South Africa, seen by most of the international media as unifying a divided country, provides the perfect framework for analyzing current trends in Catalan nationalist ideology. The Spanish team had been favored to win the World Cup, despite a disappointing loss in their first game of the tournament. However, as the country progressed to the final stages

of the competition, the country drew more and more international media attention. As Catalonia was struggling for greater economic independence from a country whose economy was in a slump, the World Cup victory overshadowed the political discontent in region. While Spain was celebrating unity behind the national soccer team *La Roja*, over one million Catalans were marching in the streets of Barcelona in protest of modifications to their statute—an event that the Catalan press was not going to overlook.

Through an analysis of language ideology and front-page newspaper stories from the Spanish and Catalan press on the days before and after the World Cup final, this article examines the politicization of the Spanish national team's victory. In order to better understand the media discourse surrounding the World Cup in July 2010, it is necessary to discuss the history of Catalan nationalism and the role that FC Barcelona has played. This will be followed by an analysis of Catalan language ideology and the ideology of the press in Catalonia and Spain. This research draws upon the existing literature on Catalan nationalism, FC Barcelona, and the region's relationship with the central government in order to present a new case study of media discourse and soccer nationalism. Therefore, the final section presents an analysis of newspaper headlines to support the argument that FC Barcelona is implicated in ongoing political debates and conflicts with the central government as Catalonia struggles to renegotiate its position in the country and gain greater autonomy.

Soccer and the Nation

In 1939, after the Spanish Civil War, Generalissimo Franco took control of the country and instituted a dictatorship that forcefully discouraged all regional identities and enforced a unified Spanish Catholic nation. Franco, well aware of nationalist sentiments in Catalonia and the Basque countries, made every effort to control and erase their regional identities. Regional languages were forbidden in the public sphere, and the use of Catalan was prohibited in the government, schools, media, and businesses. Moreover, newborn children had to be given Spanish Catholic names; Catalan forms of Catholic names were illegal under Spanish law. Even sports teams in Catalonia and the Basque region were forced to change their names to the Spanish equivalents to fall in line with the regime. In fact, Franco was so restrictive of regional language use that the only safe place to speak Catalan was in the privacy of one's home—or in the company of tens of thousands of soccer fans in the FC Barcelona stadium *Les Corts*.

Under Franco, “sport became a part of the state's machinery” (Goig 2008:59), and he tried to use teams as an outlet for regional separatist frustrations. Franco understood the cathartic potential of a healthy sports rivalry and hoped that such competition between regions would prevent Catalan and Basque nationalists from mobilizing against him. While the name of FC Barcelona was changed to the Castilian *Club de Fútbol de Barcelona*, and the Catalan flag was removed from their team logo, the club was allowed to continue playing competitive matches in Spain. Unfortunately for Franco, this plan backfired, effectively strengthening nationalist emotions and

creating a symbolic rallying point for Catalan nationalists (Shobe 2008). In fact, Barça became associated with anti-Franco attitudes and became greatly influential in the local area.

The greatest demonstration of Catalan nationalism came in matches, known today in Catalan as *El Clàssic*, against *Real Madrid*. Since Real Madrid was Generalissimo Franco's team, the club was connected to the right-wing central government, an association that has persisted to this day (Ball 2003). During Franco's reign, matches against Real Madrid evoked strong emotions from fans and loyal players, partially due to the fact that the games were not always fair. The teams' second meeting of 1943 resulted in Madrid's 11–1 over Barça, although this victory was not entirely their own. Before the match, Franco's head of security spoke with the Barcelona players in the locker room, and casually reminded them that they were only allowed to play because of "the generosity of the regime" (Ball 2003:26). Such intimidation and manipulation on behalf of the State reveals how much was at stake in games between Barça and Madrid, since Madrid's victories not only pleased Franco but also symbolized Spain's domination over the nation of Catalonia.

But what is meant by "the nation of Catalonia," and how is it defined? Benedict Anderson (1991) states that the nation is an imagined political community that is both sovereign and limited since members of the community will never know the majority of their comrades even though the nation has clear boundaries that position it in contrast to other nations. Communities do not exist naturally, but they are real because people create and ascribe value to them. Thus, nations only exist because the group, however defined, has chosen to distinguish itself from others through its unity in beliefs, practices, or a common struggle. In the case of Catalonia, the Catalan nation has linguistic boundaries; speakers of Catalan are assumed to be members of the community while those who do not have knowledge of the language are excluded.

The Catalan nation is usually invoked in political struggles with the central government due to a strong desire of many Catalans to distinguish themselves from Spain culturally and economically. While Catalonia has the status as an autonomous region under the Spanish government, there are many Catalans who desire complete independence from the country. In April 2011 mock elections were held in Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, in which citizens were able to vote in favor of Catalan independence. While nearly 90 percent of voters supported independence from Spain, only 21 percent of the total population took part in the vote (Tremlett 2011). This demonstrates the strong nationalist sentiments in the region, even though not all Catalans and citizens of the region support complete independence from Spain. Thus, while the Catalan nation is united by language and culture, political unity varies within the community.

For Catalans during the Franco dictatorship, the FC Barcelona stadium Les Corts (and *Camp Nou* after 1957) was the location of "a powerful nationalist performance" (Goig 2008:60), where Catalans could wave their flags and sing songs together in their native tongue. It was a unifying place, providing both physical evidence of the solidarity of the Catalan nation and an outlet for opposition to the State. In this sense,

Catalans, as members of their imagined community, were united under a “broad canopy of oppositional culture and ideology” (Johnston 1991:3). As a nation defined by the Catalan language and united in opposition to the Spanish dictatorship, Catalonia was provided with the means to voice opposition towards the government via its support of Barça, especially in El Clàssic matches.

However, Barça is more than just Catalonia’s club; it is a globalized team that has adapted to the post-modern era of football (Castillo 2007). Yet despite its global image, the team has managed to maintain its local ties to the city and the Catalan nation. This is in no small part due to the fact that Catalans have an inclusive definition of nationality. Shmeul Nili (2009) contends that Catalan nationality is defined on civic terms, rather than ethnic terms, making it something that can be passed down through familial ties or acquired through assimilation. For Catalans, language is the “core value” of their identity, making assimilation possible through knowledge and use of the tongue (Nili 2009). This civic definition of nationalism is inclusive and welcoming for immigrants, a fact that has helped sustain Catalan identity despite great influxes of labor migrants from outside the region (Johnston 1991). In the same way, Barça has not tried to shut itself off from outside influences, something readily apparent in its roster over the years. Since its inception, many of the club’s star players have been foreign nationals, such as the Dutch Johan Cruyff and the Bulgarian Hristo Stoichkov (although there has been a recent surge in Catalan members on the team). Moreover, the team draws fans from around the world, with 23,040 members from outside of Catalonia and more than half of the 1,343 official supporters’ clubs located outside of the Països Catalans. Just as Catalan nationality is open to outsiders who are willing to learn and use the language, FC Barcelona is open to anyone who is willing to support the team. However, this openness to globalization has not led to a weakening of local bonds; rather, it is the Catalans’ openness to outsiders that has allowed Barça to become a global brand while maintaining its symbolic meaning for the nation.

Language Ideologies in Catalonia

Generally speaking, language ideologies are defined as the conscious beliefs that speakers hold about language and its use (Silverstein 1979). Language ideologies are shared across groups of people and are related to, among other things, “the construction and legitimation of power, the production of social relations of sameness and difference, and the creation of cultural stereotypes about types of speakers and social groups” (Spitulnik 1998:164). In multilingual communities, ideologies influence which language is used in a given situation and shape perceptions of speakers of “other” languages. These ideas are shared by speakers within the group and shape their use of the language in the public sphere. Furthermore, nationalist language ideologies have the power to structure politics and dispute the authority of the multilingual state (Woodlard and Schieffelin 1994). In Catalonia, Catalan language ideologies are inherently tied to power struggles and politics in the multilingual region. Catalans identify their language as both the language of the region and the nation. While nearly everyone also

knows Spanish as required by the Spanish Constitution, choosing to use Catalan rather than Castilian becomes a conscious choice to identify oneself with the Catalan nation. However, not every Catalan who feels strong ties to the nation desires independence for Catalonia, and many would prefer greater autonomy within the Spanish state.

The choice to use Catalan rather than Spanish in public contests the status of Spanish as the national language, thus making it an inherently political action. Catalan has official status as a regional language in Catalonia, a position that was established in the Spanish Constitution, while Spanish is the only language that receives official status throughout the country. Spanish is favored by the state and it is a *duty* of every citizen to know the language, while Catalan speakers are only afforded the *right* to use their language (Costa 2003). The Spanish Constitution protects Spanish as the official language throughout the country and, although it acknowledges that regional languages may be given official status within their communities, does not allow for local governments to require knowing any other language, including Catalan (Costa 2003). Due to Catalan's subordinate position in relation to Spanish, deciding to speak in Catalan is a "marked" choice from the Castilian perspective (Scotton 1983). The action becomes a statement about power relations in the multilingual state and the role of the language in Catalonia. Choosing to speak Castilian, on the other hand, is a neutral act that is not recognized as a choice since Spanish is the official language of the country. Thus the conscious choice to use Catalan instead of Spanish in a public situation is, from the Spanish point of view, a marked decision that attempts to alter power relations in favor of the Catalan language.

Catalan language ideologies should not be seen in essentialist terms, however, as it would be a mistake to assume that these ideologies are homogenous and shared equally amongst all self-identifying Catalans. Within Catalonia itself, sentiments of Catalan cultural identity vary greatly from person to person. On one end of the spectrum are Spanish nationalists who recognize Spanish as their native language and will only use Catalan when forced. On the other end are the Catalanists who view Catalan as the true language of Catalonia and use it exclusively in their public and private lives, unless forced to do otherwise. Often times these opposing beliefs are attached to political ideologies, with conservative, right-wing supporters of the central government using Spanish exclusively, and Catalan nationalists and separatists speaking only in Catalan (Trenchs-Parera and Newman 2009). Since the Catalan language is the most important aspect of culture and identity for the Catalan people (MacRoberts 2001), it is no wonder that Spanish nationalists and Catalan nationalists are at odds with each other over language use and political views. Catalans who use the language exclusively in the public sector do so with a specific ideology in mind: Catalan is the language of Catalonia, and it is a right and duty to know the language as a resident of the region. The decision to use Catalan rather than Spanish makes assumptions about the linguistic power relations within the Spanish state and is linked to the political discourse of identity and nationality, regardless of whether the speakers desire independence for the nation.

Media Discourse and Barça's World Cup

In 2006 the Catalan parliament approved the Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya, which defined Catalonia as a "nation" and established greater economic, judicial, and linguistic rights within the region (Strubell 2011). The Statute was, however, met with criticism and challenged by the Spanish Constitutional Court, which eventually ruled in June 2010 that the document was not supported by the Constitution. After four years of debates, the Constitutional Court removed fifteen articles from the Statute, rousing a public outcry in Catalonia. On July 10, 2010, provoked by the Constitutional Court's ruling, over one million Catalans converged on the streets of Barcelona in protest, declaring, "We are a nation. We decide."

This historic demonstration took place the day before the FIFA World Cup final, when Spain was set to play the Netherlands, and the media discourse surrounding these two seemingly unrelated events highlights the ongoing conflict between the Spanish government and Catalonia. The day after the demonstration, the Spanish press belittled the protest, grossly underestimating the turnout, and chose to focus on Spain as a country united behind the national soccer team La Roja. Catalan newspaper headlines, on the other hand, lauded the demonstration and ignored the pending World Cup match in their headlines. After Spain's victory in the final however, the Catalan-language press claimed ownership over the championship by highlighting the contributions of Fútbol Club Barcelona to the team's success. The Catalan-language papers sought recognition for the region by invoking this long-standing symbol of Catalan nationalism while still giving ample front-page space to a continued discussion of the protest.

Capturing the biggest headlines, the front page of every newspaper displays the most important news of the day; and a close analysis of front-page news stories offers insight into the political philosophies of the papers' staff and readers. In the days following the July 10 demonstration, the Catalan and Castilian media offered varying degrees of coverage on the story. For the Catalan press the event was the main headline of the day, and absolutely no mention was made of the World Cup final that was to take place later that evening. The images of the demonstration overtook the front pages of the Catalan papers *El Punt* and *La Vanguardia* as the headlines declared the unity of the Catalan people against the Spanish government. The Castilian press, on the other hand, acknowledged the demonstration by highlighting the sole act of violence that took place during the event. As papers based out of Madrid and circulated throughout the Spain, *El País* and *El Mundo* have no specific ties to Catalonia outside of its inclusion in the country. The majority of their readers are unsympathetic to Catalan nationalism, and therefore the paper does not need to portray calls to independence in a positive light. Instead, the Castilian papers focused most of their attention of the pending soccer game in which Spain sought to win its very first World Cup victory. After La Roja's triumph over the Netherlands in overtime, the Spanish press declared unity and victory for the country while the Catalan-language newspaper *El Punt* took a different approach. Unable to ignore a clear triumph for Spain, the Catalan-language press simultaneously continued discussion of the July 10 demonstration while exercising

claims of ownership over the World Cup victory by invoking the long-standing symbol of Catalan nationalism, FC Barcelona. By looking critically at the front-page headlines of *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and *El Punt* during the FIFA World Cup final, we will examine the role that linguistic ideologies play in shaping the portrayal of daily events. Furthermore, it will become clear that by placing greater value on specific headlines, the Catalan and Spanish-language newspapers are able to contest national identities and negotiate the relationship between Catalonia and the state.

On July 11, 2010, news of the demonstration in Barcelona graced the front pages of Castilian and Catalan papers alike. However, the Spanish press chose to portray the protest in a negative light, focusing their attention on a minor act of aggression aimed at then-president of the Generalitat de Catalunya, José Montilla. Montilla, who had made every effort to preserve the event as a protest against the ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court, left the event when the large crowd reached the end of the march and was no longer moving. A few in the crowd thought he was abandoning his constituents, and he had to be lead away by security guards. *El Mundo* used the majority of its front page to declare the event a pro-independence disaster. The major headline read: “Montilla recibe su castigo tras presidir la mayor manifestación contra España” [Montilla Receives Punishment After Presiding Over the Largest Demonstration Against Spain] and was accompanied by a photo of President Montilla looking unhappy with his arms crossed. *El País*, somewhat critical of the protest in its headlines, mentioned the Catalans as “sovereign” yet cited the “Intento de agresión a Montilla” [Attempted Assault on Montilla] in the following line. The message is clear: the pro-independence Catalan protesters were uncontrollable, turning violent on their own president who oversaw the demonstration.

The two Castilian papers also featured front-page stories on the upcoming FIFA World Cup final. For *El Mundo* this was a secondary headline, quoting La Roja coach Vicente del Bosque on the unity of the team and the country. This served to undermine the pro-independence rhetoric of the Catalan protestors by stressing the unity of Spain. The major front-page story in *El País* used a similar tactic portraying a united soccer team with a homogenous identity. The front page was graced with a large photograph featuring six La Roja players, an image which included four FC Barcelona players: Carles Puyol, Andrés Iniesta, David Villa, and Xavi Hernández. The front page also listed an editorial titled “¡Visca España! Es la marca-país” [“Long live Spain!” Is the Country Brand], using the Catalan *Visca* combined with the Spanish *España* to allude to the Barça players as part of a unified team. When viewed in relation to the coverage of the Catalan demonstration on the same page, the Castilian press simultaneously decries the protest while portraying a country united behind the Spanish soccer team.

Politically, *El País* is considered to be center-left, supporting the democratic nature of the Spanish monarchy (Laitin and Gómez 1992). However, since it is focused on Spanish politics and democracy, it is not sympathetic to the Catalan independence movement. In contrast with *La Vanguardia* and *El Punt*, which are based in Barcelona, *El País* has no ties to the region of Catalonia. *El Mundo*, on the other hand, is perceived to have no political bias, although its readers tend to give less support to the leftist

political parties in Spain (Gunther et al. 2000). The newspaper gained fame in the 1990s for uncovering government corruption with its sensationalist journalistic style. However, the newspaper's zealous tactics often blurred the lines between news and opinions and contributed to the "nastiness and unsavory character" of Spanish politics during that time (Gunther et al. 2000:55). The nature of *El Mundo*'s journalistic style is evident in the way it portrayed the Catalan protest as a violent event; the headlines undermine Catalonia's authority to rule itself, depicting nationalists and pro-independence Catalans as aggressive and uncontrollable.

As a Catalan-language newspaper that enjoys widespread circulation in Catalonia, *El Punt* maintains strong ties to Catalan nationalism. Linguistic ideologies dominate the press in Catalonia and Spain, making the decision to publish exclusively in one language a highly political issue. By choosing to publish in Catalan, newspapers like *El Punt* establish themselves as representatives of the Catalan nation and language. In so doing, they are constantly involved in debates regarding the relationship of Catalonia to the Spanish state. Newspapers that publish in Catalan are more likely to associate themselves with the politics of the region by promoting the Catalan nation and the Catalan language. Furthermore, the readers themselves are making a marked decision when choosing to read a Catalan-language newspaper rather than a Spanish newspaper (Laitin and Gómez 1992). *La Vanguardia*, on the other hand, is a prominent Spanish-language Catalan newspaper that is not subject to Catalan language ideologies. Readers who select *La Vanguardia* as their source for daily news are therefore making an unmarked decision. They may also read Catalan newspapers, but their selection of *La Vanguardia* rather than another Spanish-language paper from outside of the region is related to the newspaper's connection to Catalonia.

An overview of the headlines from *El Punt* and *La Vanguardia* demonstrates completely different conceptions and portrayals of the demonstration. The Catalan-language paper *El Punt* construed the protest as a unified demand for independence from over one million people. The headline of the Sunday paper read "El clam d'un poble" [The Cry of a People] and featured a large image from the demonstration capturing thousands of protestors waving Catalan *senyeras* (regional flags), *esteladas* (independence flags), and banners reading "Adeu Espanya" [Goodbye Spain], in reference to a recent documentary of the same name. The entire front page was dedicated to coverage of the protest, and included the claim that it was a defining moment for the nation, dividing Catalan history into "before" and "after" the demonstration. *El Punt* also used the liberal estimate of 1.5 million attendees and argued that the protest against the Constitutional Court's ruling evolved into a united call for independence. Meanwhile, *La Vanguardia* emphasized the magnitude of the protest, but made no such claims to independence. Instead, the Spanish-language paper used the more conservative estimate of 1.1 million attendees—a figure given by the *Guardia Urbana*—and portrayed the demonstration as a civic protest in support of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. As a Spanish-language paper in Catalonia, *La Vanguardia* is loyal to the region while immune to Catalan language ideology.

However, both newspapers made no mention of the upcoming World Cup

match featuring the Spanish national team in their headlines. Since *El Punt* and *La Vanguardia* were trying to maintain the image of a united Catalonia and give full attention to the protest, bringing up the power of the Spanish national soccer team would have undermined the message. Although their methods for portraying the unity of Catalonia differed, with *El Punt* stressing independence and *La Vanguardia* highlighting the civic nature of the protest, giving front-page space to Spain after such a historic event would have redirected attention away from Catalonia. Furthermore, the newspapers' exclusion of the World Cup from their front pages highlights the fact that the protest was the most important news story for Catalonia. Both Catalan papers devoted their front pages to the news that they deemed most relevant to their readers, and anyone who wanted in-depth coverage of the upcoming soccer match would have selected a different newspaper.

On July 12, 2010, the day after the FIFA World Cup final, Spain's historic victory was front-page news. This was the country's first World Cup victory and the championship was celebrated in the Spanish press. *El País* declared the Spanish selection "Campeones del mundo" [Champions of the World] and printed a large photograph of the players standing in celebration around the team captain Iker Casillas as he held the World Cup trophy. *El Mundo* featured a nearly identical photograph on its front page, although it had been cropped to remove the left side of the image along with several Barça players. However, Catalans were not completely excluded from the front page of *El Mundo*; the headline in the lower right corner stated, "Menos del 1% de los catalanes asistió a la marcha contra España" [Less Than 1% of Catalans Attended the March Against Spain]. According to the newspaper's sources, the July 10 protest only had 64,400 attendees, a figure that was over one million lower than the official police count. The united Spain portrayed on the front page of *El Mundo* erases the presence of FC Barcelona players in La Roja and presents the Catalan nationalists as a weak minority. This maintains the image of Spain as a cohesive country filled with euphoria after the victory.

For the Catalan press, the July 11 World Cup victory was not easily dismissed. The triumph could not be ignored since many Catalans had a strong interest in the game. La Roja featured seven Catalan players, five of which played for FC Barcelona, and three non-Catalan Barça players, a significant portion of the team. Therefore, simply excluding the victory from the headlines would have done a disservice to the Catalan and Barça players who took part in the championship. Instead, *El Punt* exercised ownership over the victory in the name of Barça, and by extension Catalonia. While the newspaper's main headline spoke of the unity of Catalonia after the demonstration, the second headline proclaimed, "L'estil del Barça guanya el mundial" [Barça's Style Wins the World Cup]. The accompanying photo featured the Barcelona players Carles Puyol, David Villa, Xavi Hernández, and Andrés Iniesta celebrating around Iker Casillas as he received the trophy. The caption below the photo, however, ignored the presence of the Real Madrid player and La Roja captain and explained that the image captured the Barça players as they received the trophy. The process of ignoring Casillas even though he was the person physically receiving the trophy in the photograph is

similar to the methods employed by *El Mundo* in their portrayal of the victory. Both newspapers effectively erased “the Other” from their claims over the World Cup victory. Furthermore, the main headline in *El Punt* reinforced the unity of the Catalan nation after the protest as the newspaper ignored Spain’s role in the World Cup.

La Vanguardia took a more moderate approach to the victory, devoting its entire front page to the event. The newspaper featured a full-page photograph of Andrés Iniesta, the Barça player who scored the winning goal in overtime, holding the championship trophy. Rather than featuring Iker Casillas holding the trophy as the Castilian press did, *La Vanguardia* focused on the player who actually won the match for Spain, with the headline proudly proclaiming the players “Reyes del Mundo” [Kings of the World]. In the lower left corner of the photograph and editorial caption declared that a significant portion of the national team’s players came from Barça’s youth training camp, known as *La Masia*. The camp is responsible for training several star players including Carles Puyol, Gerard Piqué, and Cesc Fàbregas. Although the newspaper does not claim the victory for FC Barcelona or Catalonia, it still pays tribute to the contributions of the region’s home team.

Conclusion

The irony of the press coverage of the World Cup cannot be overlooked. While the Castilian press depicted a united Spain—a Spain that had been brought together in support of La Roja—over one million Catalans were rallying in the streets of Barcelona demanding greater autonomy. The Spanish press depicted a demonstration marred by violence and dismissed it as an event with low attendance while the Catalan press turned the protest into a unified cry for independence. However, both the Catalan and Castilian press omitted contradictory evidence that would have undermined their claims of unity and ignored the presence of the “Other” in their discussions of the World Cup final.

Fútbol Club Barcelona is a symbol of Catalan nationalism and is considered to be the “home team” team for Catalonia. Despite its global image, the club is still linked to the local community. By attributing the World Cup victory to Barça’s contributions, the Catalan-language press claims the victory not only for FC Barcelona, but also for the Catalan nation. Since the Spanish victory would have been difficult to ignore in the headlines, representing the victory in a different light keeps it aligned with the ideology of the Catalan press. Although former President Jordi Pujol acknowledged that the Spanish victory in South Africa “did its bit to muffle the effect of the Barcelona rally” (Strubell 2011:59), the Catalan press did its best to keep the story alive. Assigning the World Cup championship to Barça’s players reinforced the importance and power of Catalonia at a time when the region was struggling to renegotiate its relationship with the Spanish central government. Therefore, invoking the image of FC Barcelona was a political action influenced by language ideologies and the newspapers’ ties to the Catalan nation.

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