

JOHN HARGREAVES

# FREEDOM FOR CATALONIA?

Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity  
and the Barcelona Olympic Games



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# Freedom For Catalonia?

## *Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity and the Barcelona Olympic Games*

Although the fight for independence by national minorities has received much attention recently, there is no study of how globalised sport in its most advanced form can help to stimulate it. This book shows how the 1992 Olympic Games raised the tension that already existed between Catalonia and Spain, from the time they were awarded to Barcelona until they opened. John Hargreaves analyses and explains the way in which the conflict developed and was eventually resolved in terms of the special characteristics of Catalan nationalism, the nature of the new Spanish democracy and the special role played by the International Olympic Committee.

This book will be relevant to academics, researchers and postgraduates specialising in nationalism and Catalan nationalism, as well as being of interest to teachers, researchers and students of political sociology, cultural studies and sports studies, and professionals working in the fields of culture, sport, recreation and leisure.

JOHN HARGREAVES is Visiting Professor at the Chelsea School Research Centre, University of Brighton. He is the author of *Sport, Power and Culture*, and has published articles in *Nations and Nationalism* as well as writing numerous articles on the sociological analysis of both sport and nationalism.



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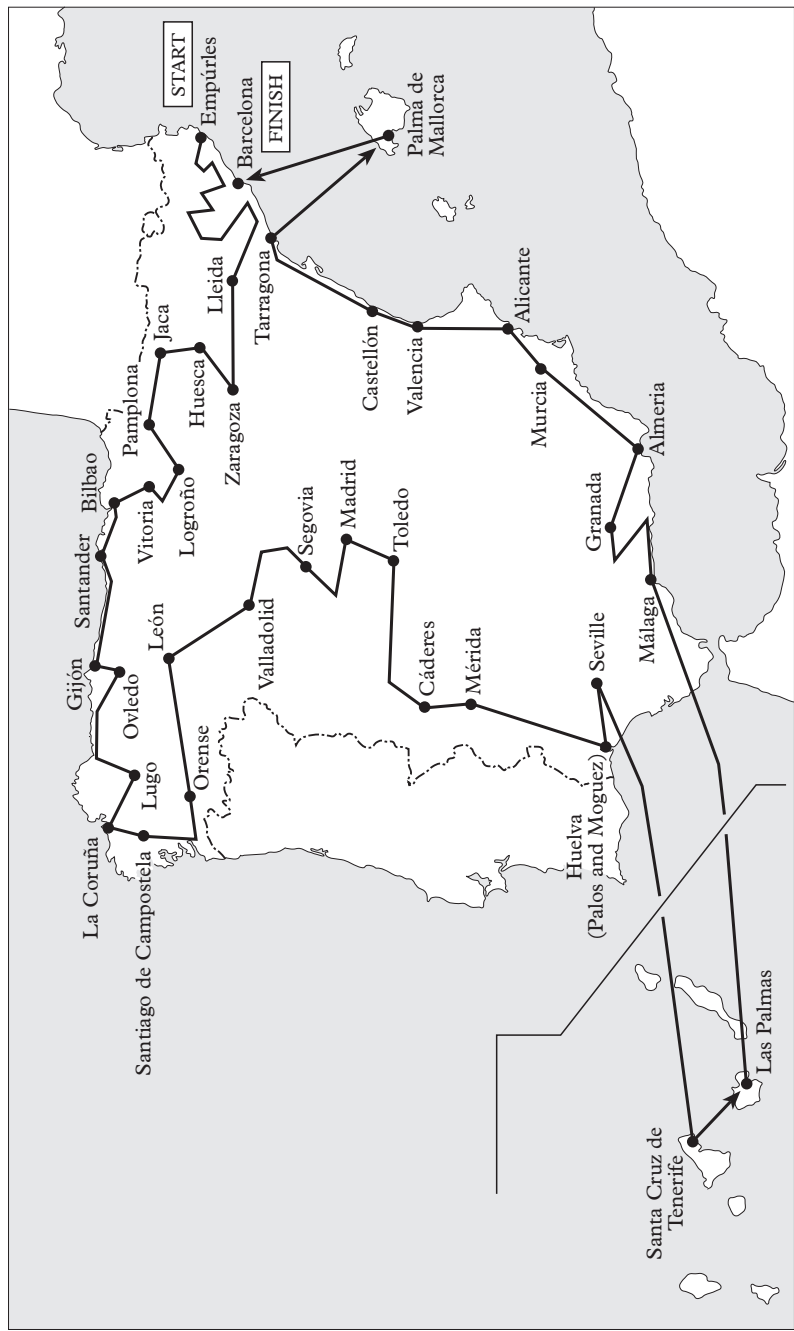
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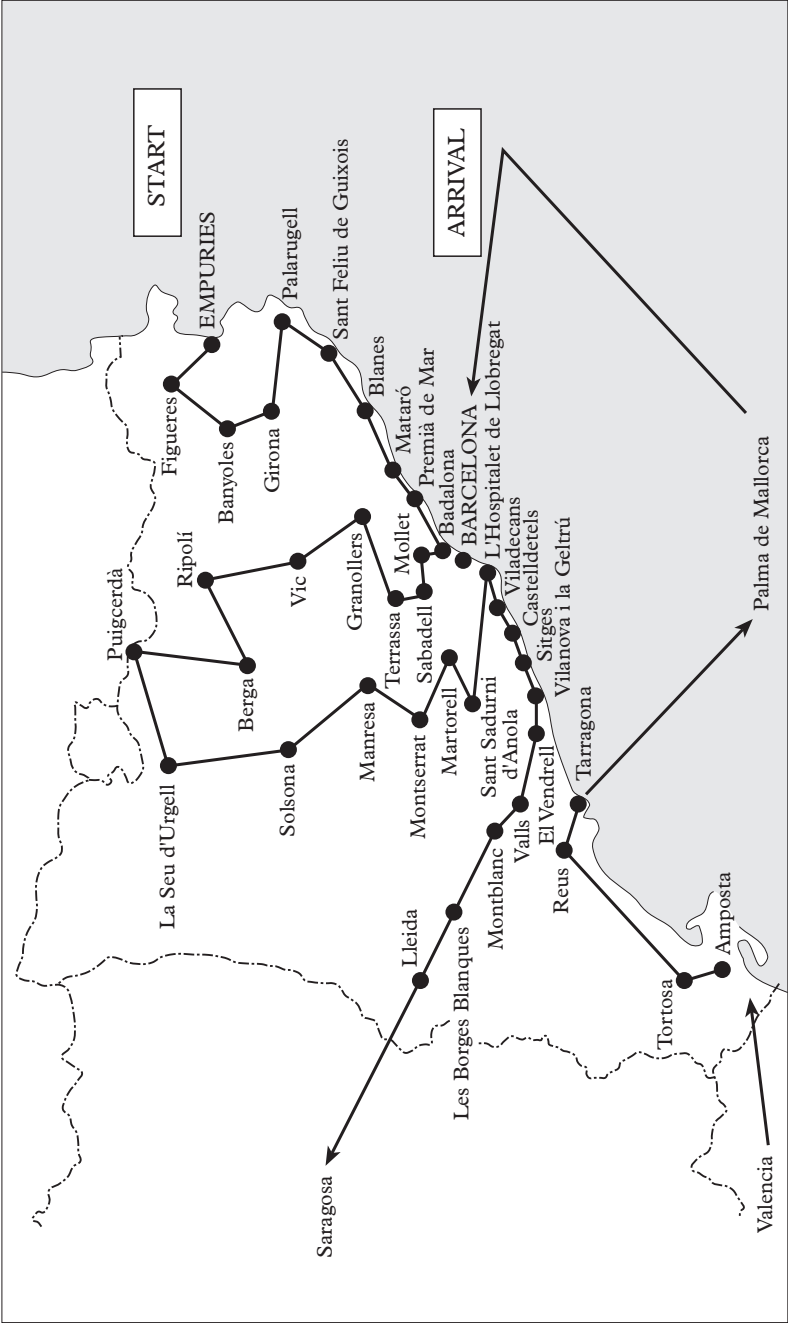
# Abbreviations

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ABC	American Broadcasting Company
COC	Comitè Olímpic de Catalunya (Catalan Olympic Committee)
CIS	Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Centre for Sociological Research)
COOB	Comité Organizador Olímpico de Barcelona (Organising Committee of the Barcelona Olympic Games)
COE	Comité Olímpico Español (Spanish Olympic Committee)
CDC	Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (Democratic Convergence Party of Catalonia) – nationalist party led by Pujol and one of the two constituent parties of CiU (see below)
CiU	Convergència i Unió (Convergence and Union Party) – the main nationalist party forming the government of Catalonia
CCOO	Comisiones Obreras (Workers' Commissions) – Communist trade union
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia) – the main separatist party
ETA	Euskadi ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Liberty) – Basque separatist terrorist organisation
FIFA	International Federation of Football Associations
IAAF	International Amateur Athletic Federation
IC	Iniciativa de Catalunya (Catalan Communist Party)
IOC	International Olympic Committee
ISL	International Sport and Leisure – the major international sports promotion agency
IU	Izquierda Unida (Spanish Communist Party)
JERC	Joventuts d' Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left Youth of Catalonia) – ERC youth organisation
JNC	Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya (Nationalist Youth of Catalonia) – CDC youth organisation
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NOC	National Olympic Committee
OCA	Olympic Council for Asia
PP	Partido Popular (Spanish Conservative Party)
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSC	Partit Socialista de Catalunya (Catalan Socialist Party) – affiliate of PSOE (see below)
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers Party)
TOP	The Olympic Sponsorship Programme
UDC	Unió Democràtica Cristiana (Christian Democratic Union) – one of the two constituent parties of CiU (see above)
UGT	Union General de Trabajadores – trade union linked to PSOE (see above)



**Map 1** The Olympic torch: its journey around Spain



**Map 2** The Olympic torch: its journey around Catalonia



# Introduction

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One of the most intriguing developments of recent years has been the strengthening of local, regional and national identities in the context of the activities of supra-national structures such as the European Union and multinational business corporations, processes of globalisation, and the emergence of a 'new world order' with the collapse of the USSR. The problem of the resurgence of nationalism in the modern world has attracted much scholarly, as well as public interest, but relatively little attention has been paid to the role of sport in this connection and to the role of the Olympic movement in particular, which is a quintessentially global phenomenon. There is no specifically sociological monograph on this problem.

It is abundantly clear that the Olympic ideal of a non-political Games contributing to international understanding cannot be taken at face value, given the extent to which the Olympic movement, in reality, is subject to the play of political, economic and cultural forces. In particular, symbols of the nation and the state and ritual practices celebrating national identities are at the core of the Olympic Games. However, it is certainly a moot point as to whether Olympism merely reflects the influence of such forces, or whether it exists in a much more complex dynamic relationship with them.

The 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games presented an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between Olympism and nationalism in the form of a case study. The host city is not only an important industrial metropolis within the Spanish state: it is also the capital of Catalonia, a historic nation with a strong sense of cultural identity. Given the past animosities between Madrid and Barcelona – not least during the civil war when Catalonia fought against Franco on the Republican side and suffered his 'politics of revenge' as a result – and given all that was at stake for Spain and for Catalonia economically, politically and culturally as a result of Barcelona's successful bid for the Games, there were bound to be tensions if not outright conflict between them, in which Catalan nationalism would play a major part.

What follows is an analysis of a specific conjuncture: Olympism had reached its apogee as a global cultural phenomenon and Catalan nationalism was flexing its muscles as part of a contemporary resurgence of ethnic nationalism. Of course, these Games had their own specific features, but hopefully an in-depth examination reveals something of the character of modern nationalism as well as of Olympism.

Chapter 1 analyses the relationship between sport and nationalism in general terms with reference to a range of instances. Particular attention is paid to the need to employ a more rigorous conception of the nation and nationalism than in the past in this connection, to the character of sport as a cultural form, and to the part played by symbols in the relationship between sport and nationalism.

Chapter 2 adumbrates further the conceptual framework for understanding nationalism introduced in chapter 1, and sets the relationship between Catalonia and Spain in a socio-historical context, showing how nationalism became a dominant force in Catalan political life. Thus it sets the scene for the conflict that was occasioned by the Olympics.

Chapter 3 examines the structure of Olympism as a global cultural phenomenon, the political, economic and cultural dimensions of its activities, and its relationship to nationalism.

Chapter 4 gives a detailed account of the nationalists' campaign to Catalanise the Games and how conflict developed between the Catalan nationalists and their opponents in the period between when the Games were awarded to Barcelona and when they actually opened.

Chapter 5 compares the extent to which the Games as a mode of cultural performance were, on the one hand, Catalanised and, on the other, Españolised, in terms of the elaborate, complex symbolic work that went on throughout the length of the Games.

Chapter 6 examines Olympic internationalist ideology and shows how it, together with Europeanisation, Americanisation and globalisation interacted with the process of Catalanisation.

Chapter 7 adduces the factors responsible for the outcome of the conflict between the competing interests that were mobilised around the Games, with particular reference to the strategies adopted by the different agents, the gains they made, and the nature of the political culture that they shared.

Chapter 8 summarises the findings, assesses the significance of the outcome for relations between Spain and Catalonia in the future, and what this indicates about the extent to which the viability of pluralist states is challenged by ethnic nationalism.

# 1 Sport and nationalism

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## Introduction

While specialists in nationalism have paid a good deal of attention to central aspects of culture such as language and religion, they have paid remarkably little attention to that other aspect of culture around which nationalism so often coheres in the modern world, namely, sport. Analysis of the relationship has suffered from inadequate conceptualisation as well as ideological bias. There is also an unfortunate tendency in the literature on this question to treat sport as a mere reflection of politics.

In realist international relations theory, if nationalism permeates international relations, then we should expect the conduct of sport at the international level automatically to reflect this state of affairs (Kanin, 1981). From Marxist perspectives sport provides a ready vehicle for diffusing nationalist ideology to the masses and diverting them from their true interests. Thus the celebration of the American nation in the 1984 Los Angeles Games has been interpreted as promoting American ideals and values in a nationalist mode that helped to conceal and mitigate the effects of major divisions in American society (Lawrence and Rowe, 1986). References to sport and the nation in the British mass media are taken to represent the hegemony of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) and successive Conservative governments in Britain are held to have used sport for 'nationalistic purposes' (Houlihan, 1997). Globalised sport is said to have legitimised British imperialism and nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Holt, 1995) and to be helping to foist Western rationality and values on the non-West today (MacAloon, 1996; Houlihan, 1994). Such accounts are deficient, not only because they have little if any conception of sport as an autonomous cultural form, but also because they have no clear conception of nationalism.

The prevalence of loose conceptions of nationalism where sport is concerned is a major source of confusion. The term has come to signify ideas, sentiments and policies, including state policy, international conflicts and supportive public opinion. Often it means no more than an irrational,

atavistic form of politics, or obnoxious and aggressive policies pursued by governments. If all policies that states and nations adopt and their consequent actions in pursuit of what they conceive to be 'the national interest' are regarded as nationalist, then the use of the term is emptied of any specific meaning and it is rendered useless as an analytical tool (Breuilly, 1993). The nub of the confusion is a common failure to distinguish nationalist politics from other forms of politics, and this stems from the propensity to equate the state with the nation, and nationalism with the behaviour of the 'nation-state'. A vast diversity of cases of sport supposedly getting tied up with nationalism can thus be adduced, making it difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a theory which would encompass all of them, and indeed making it difficult not to find a connection between sport and nationalism. When it is claimed that cases as diverse as the role played by gymnastics clubs in the process of German unification in the nineteenth century, the nineteenth-century British cult of athleticism, hooliganism among English football supporters today, the Nazi-organised Berlin Olympics of 1936, Olympic politicking between the US and the USSR during the cold war, and public references to cricket by the last conservative prime minister, John Major, all reveal the machinations of nationalism at work in sport, there is plainly a need to be clear about what is meant by nationalism.

Nationalism is a specific type of politics generated where political movements seeking or exercising state power justify their action by attributing a specifically nationalist meaning to the symbol 'nation' (Brubaker, 1996). Essentially, nationalist ideology takes the form of a claim that there exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character, one of a world of nations, each with its own individuality, history and destiny. The nation is the source of all political power: loyalty to it overrides all other allegiances and its interests take priority over all other interests and values. Human beings must identify with the nation if they want to be free and realise their potential. If the nation is to be free and secure it must have sovereignty: that is to say the nation must possess its own state so that state and nation coincide (Breuilly, 1993; Smith, 1991). The idea of the peculiar nation is the explicit foundation of nationalists' political claims: statements in these terms, often incorporating the idea that the nation is seriously threatened, constitute the central ideological assertions deployed by nationalist movements and organisations.

Confusion about nationalism results when the elementary analytical distinction between the state and the nation is ignored and the two entities are elided. The concept of the state refers to the institution which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory (Weber, 1948). Nations, on the other hand, are population

groups held together by a particular kind of enduring identity which encompasses common myths of origin, historical memories, a common culture, conceptions of common rights, duties and economic opportunities and, above all, attachment to a given territory.<sup>1</sup> Modern states attempt to minimise and overcome internal divisions by fostering a sense of national identity, and governments typically claim to act in the national interest. Consequently, the two terms, 'state' and 'nation' are taken to be synonymous, as in the tendency to refer to the modern polity as the 'nation-state'. It should be clear, however, that it is possible for nations to emerge and exist for long periods without having states of their own. And the corollary of this is that many modern states – in fact the majority of them today – despite their nation-building ambitions, are multinational, rather than one-nation states. Of course, states and nations are often nationalistic, but they are not necessarily so, for nationalist movements emerge and nationalist strategies are adopted only in certain conditions and these vary tremendously.

Lastly, it should be clear that nationalism may function in support of or against the state. States may encourage nationalism in response to perceived internal or external threats, or they may be taken over by nationalist movements emanating from below. Alternatively, a nationalist movement may be generated among a national minority seeking to enhance its position within, or gain its independence from, its host state.

### **Nationalist and non-nationalist constructions of sport distinguished**

Having cleared the ground conceptually as to the specificity of nationalist politics, it is possible to determine which kinds of cases can be classified as genuinely nationalist constructions of sport and which cannot. Let us first take the case of gymnastics and German nationalism. In the early nineteenth century, Johann Friedrich Jahn invented *Turnen*, from which German gymnastics, the modern form of competitive gymnastics, developed as a means of strengthening and directing the German national will

<sup>1</sup> The attempt to define the nation and use it as an analytical category is challenged by Rogers Brubaker (1996) on the grounds that to treat nations as 'real' substantial entities is to mistake a category of practice for a category of analysis. It is to reify a category that is a constructed, ideologically manipulated, fluid and continually changing aspect of political practice. In his opinion we would be better off referring to 'nationhood' or 'nationness'. Defining the nation is undoubtedly difficult and full of traps, but without a definition one cannot get anywhere and, as he admits, most commentators recognise that nations are not fixed entities. Of course, the same objection could be made with respect to the state, and he is inconsistent in not doing so. Also, in any case, the same objection could surely be applied to 'nationhood' and 'nationness'.

in the cause of German unification. The *Turnen* movement advocated the superiority of everything German over the foreign. Immensely successful in creating a network of clubs throughout Germany, *Turnen* became a pillar of German nationalism – so much so that when football spread to the continent from Britain it was denounced in Germany as ‘the English disease’, as un-German, a symptom of Anglo-Saxon superficiality and materialism, the product of a land without music or metaphysics. English games were considered rational, international and semitic, lacking ‘higher values’ such as reference to *Volk* and *Vaterland* (Dixon, 1986). Here we have an unequivocal case of sport being used to mobilise nationalist forces against the existing state structures and helping to produce a new, modern and highly nationalistic German state.

Contrast this with the cult of athleticism in Britain at the time. In Britain, it was to a significant extent through the cult of athleticism promoted in the public schools as the second half of the nineteenth century wore on, as the empire grew, and Britain came close to achieving global hegemony, that a sense of national superiority, tinged later with jingoistic sentiment, was diffused, especially among the dominant classes (Hargreaves, 1986). An important cultural aspect of the expansion of Britain’s power was the export of sport to large areas of the world and especially to the empire, where it provided a source of social solidarity for the British in an alien environment and a means of enculturating their subjects.

It has been argued that British nationalism thus concealed itself under the cloak of racist imperialism which, it is claimed, was a prominent feature of the cult of athleticism (Holt, 1995). The cult of athleticism as a child of its times was, no doubt, permeated by imperialist sentiment, but the claim that it was racist-nationalist is based largely on the fact that social Darwinist notions of racial superiority were currently in fashion. However, British imperialism was not a unitary phenomenon: it was driven as well by a variety of other ideal and material interests, from religious conviction, strategic considerations, economic advantage and philanthropic motives to liberal and progressive ideas. Even if we were to accept that racist imperialism inspired the cult of athleticism and that racism and imperialism could be equated with nationalism, there would still be a problem. The cult of athleticism was largely restricted to the elite’s sports, and so could not possibly have been used to help mobilise a mass nationalist movement.

The promotion of sport in Britain differed fundamentally from the pattern in comparable countries like Germany and France at the time. There was no centralised state direction of sport, or any ambition to encompass the whole population, let alone a concerted drive to promote