

Freedom For Catalonia?

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

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Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	<i>pages</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>Maps</i>	x
Introduction	1
1 Sport and nationalism	3
2 Catalan nationalism	16
3 The relationship between Olympism, globalisation and nationalism	39
4 The war of the flags and the paz olímpica	58
5 Catalanisation versus Españolisisation	96
6 Symbolising the international dimension	113
7 The outcome	130
8 Conclusion	160
<i>Bibliography</i>	166
<i>Index</i>	173

Tables

1 National and regional identification in Spain and Catalonia	<i>page 32</i>
2 Evaluation of the role of the king and the royal family during the Barcelona Olympic Games	144
3 Evaluation of the success of the organisation of the Games	144
4 Evaluation of the results of the Games in relation to previous expectations of the outcome	145
5 The image of Spain that the Games projected abroad in terms of efficiency, security and modernity	146
6 The image of Catalonia that the Games have projected abroad in terms of efficiency, security and modernity	146
7 Opinion concerning the contribution of the Games to improving the international image of Barcelona	146
8 Opinion concerning the level of effort that was made by public institutions in order to achieve the successes of the Games	148
9 Opinion concerning which governmental institutions made the biggest economic contribution to the organisation of the Games	149
10 Opinion concerning the public institutions that improved their image the most because of the Games	149
11 Knowledge of the various personalities involved in the Games and the evaluation of their role (rest of Spain)	152
12 Evaluation of the role of the various personalities involved in the Games (Catalonia)	152
13 Evaluation of the use of the Catalan language as an official language in the Games	158
14 Evaluation of the use of the Catalan flag and the Catalan national anthem together with those of Spain during the Games	158
15 Opinion concerning the contribution of the Games to improving relations between Catalonia and the rest of Spain	158

1 Sport and nationalism

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.¹ 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

¹ 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

sport for military preparation and national unity. Those who favoured such policies in ruling circles were a small minority who failed to obtain the requisite support for their programme (Hargreaves, 1986; Kruger, 1996). Sport was, in the main, firmly in the hands of elements within civil society – the public schools, the churches, and the voluntary associations – whose efforts to spread a suitably modified version of the cult of athleticism, through the rational recreation movement, were limited to targeting only certain sections of the population deemed to be in need of social order and discipline. Sporting activity in Britain before 1914 may often have had patriotic overtones but it hardly amounted to the kind of nationalistic mobilisation we see at the time in Germany and France.

Today, great national sporting events like the FA Cup Final, enveloped in rather elaborate ritual and ceremonial activity, deploy powerful symbols of the nation – the presence of royalty, flying the Union Jack, playing the national anthem, singing ‘Abide with me’, etc. – and thereby celebrate national unity, but this is far from constituting a mobilisation of nationalist sentiment as such. It is true that English football hooliganism today is tinged with xenophobia and ethnocentrism, but this involves only a minority of supporters and hardly amounts to the significant manifestation of English ethnic nationalism that some commentators are wont to detect. Nor should the vociferous support given by immigrant groups to visiting cricket teams from their countries of origin, when they play against England, be necessarily taken as expressions of anti-British nationalist sentiment, although clearly questions of ethnic and national identity are involved here (Werbner, 1996).

In fact, paradoxically, the way that indigenous nationalism manifests itself in sport in Britain is predominantly in the form of minority, peripheral nationalism directed against the British state. Apart from Welsh and Scottish nationalism, which tends to be given vent in football and rugby matches against England, and which is of limited political significance (Jarvie and Walker, 1994), easily the most important nationalist construction of sport within the British state concerns Irish nationalism. The thinking of leading Irish nationalists like Archbishop Croke lay behind the foundation in 1884 of the Gaelic Athletic Association. He complained of ‘the ugly and irritating fact that we are daily importing from England not only her manufactured goods . . . but her fashions, her accents, her vicious literature, her dances and her pastimes to the utter discredit of our grand national sports, and to the sore humiliation, as I believe, of every son and daughter of the old land’ (Holt, 1995: 45). The Gaelic Athletic Association established itself as the most important sporting body in Ireland in the struggle for Irish independence that culminated in the formation of the Irish Republic in 1921. It pursued a policy of promoting exclusively Irish

sports, like hurling and Gaelic football, and refused to play English sports on the grounds that they undermined Irish culture. It plays a prominent part in the Irish republican, nationalist movement in Northern Ireland today (Sugden and Bairner, 1986; 1993). Indeed, sport is one of the most important ways in which divisions between the Catholic nationalist and Protestant unionist communities are maintained. Although rugby, cricket and hockey are organised on an all-Ireland basis, i.e. their governing bodies embrace the British North of Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (with which Irish nationalists north of the border want to unite), these particular games are played mainly by members of the Protestant unionist community. The most popular game in both communities – soccer (football) – despite much governmental effort to make it function in a way that breaks down communal barriers, divides the two communities, since clubs increasingly tend to be exclusively identified with one or other community (Sugden and Bairner, 1993; Bairner and Darby, 1999).

There are many other instances of stateless nations and peoples systematically cohering around sport against their host states, including Quebec nationalism against Anglophone Canada (Harvey, 1999), Norwegian nationalism directed at Sweden before the two countries separated (Goksøyr, 1996), Flemish nationalism against Francophone Belgium (Vanreusal *et al.*, 1999), the Finns against Tsarist domination, the Slav nationalist Sokol movement against their Austro-Hungarian, Tsarist and Ottoman oppressors in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Guttmann, 1994), and independence movements among the many peoples emerging from colonial rule in Asia and Africa in the twentieth century, such as South Africa, India and the West Indies (Guelke, 1993; Guelke and Sugden, 1999; Appadurai 1990; James, 1976; Monnington, 1986; Stuart, 1996).

Sport has played an important part in the development of African nationalism and one of the most striking, and in some ways unusual, cases is that of the emergence of the new South Africa (Guelke, 1993). Under the apartheid regime the sense of identity of the white community, and in particular the Afrikaners, cohered to a considerable extent around a fanatical attachment to sports, especially to rugby and cricket. Tolerance of the regime in international circles was achieved to a significant extent through its international sporting contacts. Consequently, the international sports boycott of South Africa from the 1970s onwards proved to be a potent weapon in the hands of the anti-apartheid movement: it reinforced black nationalism and pan-Africanism, helped to demoralise the whites, and was a major factor in the demise of the regime.

The fact that South Africa was so heavily implicated in, and reliant upon, the globalised sports system was absolutely fundamental to the

successful outcome of the anti-apartheid struggle. Every international sports body, from the IOC and FIFA to individual international sports federations and virtually every government, was persuaded through an extensive world-wide campaign lasting for thirty years to boycott South African sport. Campaigns around globalised sports like rugby and cricket, and around the Olympics, possibly did more damage to the South African apartheid regime in propaganda terms and did more to mobilise opposition to apartheid world-wide than any other form of action. That regime collapsed, not primarily from internal opposition which, important as it was, was relatively ineffective against South Africa's formidable security apparatus, but from globally organised pressure in the political, economic and cultural spheres, and global sport proved to be, in many ways, South Africa's Achilles' heel.

The African National Congress (ANC) government now in power regards sport as one of the main instruments for building a multiethnic nation, although there is little concrete evidence that it actually performs that function, given the enormous divisions between the different racial groups (Guelke and Sugden, 1999).

Nationalism has been the ideological bedrock of fascist and quasi-fascist regimes and they provide some of the most outstanding examples of the subordination of sport to state nationalism. Mussolini's Italy pioneered the process whereby sport and leisure institutions for the mass of the population were thoroughly integrated into the corporate state (De Grazia, 1981), and top-level sport was systematically developed with the objective of producing successful national teams for the greater glory of the fascist nation-state. Thus the international prestige of Italy was enhanced when it took second place in overall terms in the Los Angeles Olympics of 1932 and when it won the FIFA World Cup in 1934 and 1938 (Kruger, 1996).

Although Franco's Spain cannot be classified unequivocally as a fascist regime, its overall character places it closer to that type of political system than any other. Sport, and in particular football, was made to serve the cause of *franquista* nationalism in the most thorough attempt in Spanish history to create a centralised, homogeneous Spanish nation (Shaw, 1987; Burns, 1999; Duke and Crolley, 1996). The Spanish League clubs were taken over and administered by Franco's placemen with the intention of transforming the football stadium into a kind of nationalist church where the nation and its values could be celebrated through nationalist propaganda, ritual and symbol.

Japanese fascism lacked the degree of coordination and a mass-based party that characterised Italian and German fascism, but like them it was virulently nationalist. Sport was accordingly structured with the aim of

producing a fit and healthy population ready for war, and elite sport was generously supported by the state with the objective of enhancing Japan's prestige through success in international competition (Abe, Kiyohara and Nakajima, 1992).

German nationalism was at the root of national socialism, and in terms of planning, organisation, political control, ideological content, techniques of presentation (particularly the use of the media) and financing, the manner in which the Nazi regime staged the Berlin Olympics of 1936 probably represents a watershed in the relationship between sport and nationalism, in that it revealed how effectively international sport could be used by a ruthless state nationalist machine (Mandell, 1971). One aspect among many that exemplified the Nazis' mastery of sport for nationalistic purposes was the Olympic torch relay, now a standard feature of every Games. Invented by the 1936 Olympic Games organiser and classical scholar Carl Diem, like these Games as a whole it was designed to mobilise German nationalist sentiment in the most unprecedented, spectacular way. For the first time the sacred Olympic flame was conveyed by a torch lit at Olympia, the birthplace of the ancient Games in Greece, and carried by a relay of hundreds of athletes through the intervening countries to the host city, Berlin. Mythology, classical scholarship, costume, architecture, dance, music, images of the countryside, sport and recreation, were all integrated into an elaborately staged exercise, involving complex ceremonies and ritual practices, which was intended to symbolise the supposed links between the Nazi state, German culture and the origins of European civilisation. The exercise was brilliantly filmed for propaganda purposes by Hitler's favourite filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl. In this context the torch relay functioned as a symbol of Germany's greatness and her role as a leader of European civilisation. In subsequent Olympic Games it would come to signify quite different things.

In common with national socialism, communist forms of totalitarianism attempt to obliterate civil society and thoroughly to incorporate sport into the service of the state. Although the former German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union and, today, Cuba have been enormously successful in using sport to represent them favourably on the world stage, it would be a mistake in most cases to assimilate fascist and communist uses of sport to the same nationalist category. With the exception of Cuba, which is a rather special case,² the meaning of the nation is different in

² Arguably, the nationalist element in Cuban communism is at least as important, if not more important, than socialism. The official slogan *Patria o Muerte* ('Homeland or Death') is one indication of the regime's strength of commitment to the politics of nationalism.

these instances: clearly, the symbols that communist regimes deploy signify specific nations, but in most cases the ideological underpinning is state socialist and internationalist rather than nationalist. Therefore the fact that sport is so thoroughly integrated into the diplomatic armoury of these regimes is best understood in terms of international relations theory, such as it is, rather than theories of nationalism.

The same is true of much of the functioning of sporting activity in the modern state system. In the cold war conflict between the two superpowers that developed around the Olympic Games from 1952, when the Soviet Union entered the competition for the first time, success in the medal table supposedly demonstrated the superiority of American capitalism or Russian communism. The culmination of this policy was the US boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980, in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and it was followed by the Soviet Union's boycott of the next Games in Los Angeles, in retaliation.

The superpowers in this instance, like many states, favoured the use of sport as an instrument of foreign policy in pursuit of their perceived 'national interests', largely because it is cheap and relatively risk-free, and they implemented their policy with regard to sport in a realist and pragmatic mode that had little if anything to do with nationalism. The objective may be to gain legitimacy internationally: for example, when Mexico's one-party state staged the Olympics in 1968 and Argentina's military regime staged the World Cup in 1978 – occasions that were used to create an impression of political stability, whereas in reality the opposition was being violently repressed. The motivation may be, partly, to wrongfoot an opponent, as when South Korea used the Seoul Olympics in 1988 to make an invidious comparison between itself and the communist North. Or it may be for a mixture of reasons, including nationalist sentiment. Smaller, weaker countries, like Kenya with its excellent record in distance running, can put themselves on the map through success in international sport, and this is often part of their 'nation-building' strategy.

Explaining the linkage between sport and nationalism

It is unlikely at this stage that any single theory of nationalism can satisfactorily explain all the aforementioned instances, let alone the many more that exist. Realistically, the most that can be expected is that a framework or approach at a relatively high level of generality can be formulated which can be appropriately modified and refined, as required, for the analysis of a given case or cases. Such an approach would require at the very least a synthesis of perennialist and modernist approaches to

theorising nationalism, as well as an adequate notion of sport as a modern cultural form.

A synthesis of the two major kinds of approach to nationalism, the perennialist and the modernist, is required because exclusive reliance on either one of them has its dangers: the perennialists tend to downplay the importance of structural bases of nationalism, and modernists to downplay the significance of its cultural antecedents. Perennialism stresses the ethnic origins of nations and the importance of cultural tradition and of cultural nationalism as a foundation of nationalism. Nations cannot be constructed, invented or imagined out of thin air, as modernists and post-modernists seem to imagine (Smith, 1986, 1991; Armstrong, 1982; Hastings, 1997; Llobera, 1994). Modernists, on the other hand, stress that nationalism is a response to increasing state centralisation, capitalist economic development, and an associated tendency to cultural homogenisation in societies undergoing modernisation, and that the cultural and political traditions that nationalists are so often willing to defend with their lives are, in fact, relatively recent concomitant inventions (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Anderson, 1983; Breuille, 1993).

Sport and nationalism are interrelated through their anchorage in common cultural traditions that may undergo sharp transformations as modernisation occurs. Sport functions as a point of coherence for national movements to the extent that it is central to the culture, or can be made so by a nationalist movement. Seen from a perennialist perspective, just as nationalism has pre-modern origins, so sport has its pre-modern origins in games, physical recreations and pastimes of all kinds that are an important part of the cultural life of all pre-modern societies. That is why sports so often have associations with rural life. A people's identity forms around such pursuits as an integral part of its attachment to place, territory or homeland, its myths of origin, its customs, its art and literature, its language and religion, its memories of great events in the past, or whatever. Where civil society is very well developed, as in the case of pre-industrial England and some other parts of Britain, participation in a rich variety of popular sporting recreations was well institutionalised – folk football and cricket, horse racing, cruel sports involving animals, pugilism and wrestling, bowling, footracing, forms of golf and so on – and sports more exclusive to the elite such as tennis, shooting, fencing and hunting flourished as well.

The sports we play and watch today, in contrast, are the result of modernisation processes in which such traditional recreational forms were reformed and restructured, and thereby their meanings were transformed. They were 'nationalised' in the sense that they largely lost their

original local and social class associations as they were diffused in homogenised or standardised forms throughout the country; indeed they were universalised, in so far as Britain exported much of its sporting tradition to the rest of the world. In this modernisation process sports came to occupy a central position in the popular culture of very different kinds of societies. Concomitantly, a sense of national identity cohered around popular sporting forms like football in Europe and in Latin America, and around other sports like cricket in the white dominions, the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent. In this country this process occurred to some extent spontaneously, but increasingly it occurred at the behest of the urban gentry, sections of the intelligentsia and astute politicians, who consciously attempted to engineer a national identity (Hargreaves, 1986). In Britain sport became part of the mythology of national identity to the extent that love of sports, and the values of fair play that they are supposed to inculcate, are still thought to differentiate the British from other nations. Sport could not have acquired such status in the national consciousness had it not been so deeply rooted in the culture of pre-modern Britain, but also, had it not been thoroughly modernised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the whole, though, sport was not imbued with nationalist meanings as such in this particular case. Elsewhere it clearly was, as some of our examples show, and the reasons why depend on the particular circumstances of each case. With more comparative work we should be in a better position to begin to formulate the necessary and sufficient conditions in which nationalism and sport become linked.

Any aspect of culture – music, literature, religion, architecture, etc. – may, in principle, be given a nationalist inflection, depending upon its specific features and the political context. There are certain features of sport, however, which enable it readily to represent the nation and function well as an adjunct of nationalist politics in given circumstances. At the most basic primordial level, sport gratifies the play instinct by providing opportunities for acquiring and exhibiting valued physical qualities connecting man to nature and which for most of our history have been necessary for physical survival – skill, endurance, strength, speed, etc. Crucially, it provides opportunities to acquire and display moral qualities – courage, aggression, leadership, self-control, initiative, willpower, steadfastness in adversity, self-sacrifice, loyalty – qualities commonly perceived as essential for cultural and for national survival.

The contest element in sport is especially significant because it allows opposition, conflict and struggle to be experienced and represented in extremely dramatic and spectacular ways, whereby sports can be made to map national struggles. Sporting contests are liminal: they are conducted

according to rules that suspend reality by equalising contestants' chances of winning. If, on the whole, there are no such rules ensuring equal competition between states and nations in the real world, the laws of sport allow them to compete equally by proxy, and in doing so a potential is generated which facilitates the articulation of nationalist sentiment. The ritual activity which now envelops the great sporting contests – dramatic openings and closings, victory ceremonies, etc., in which national symbols are prominently deployed – does, to one extent or other, draw on national cultural tradition, but what we witness in sport as a result is a representation of the nation that is quintessentially modern. The increasing elaboration of rules and regulations, the application of science and technology to enhance participants' performances, state intervention and control, mass marketing, spectacularisation and the globalisation of sport are aspects of a universal modernising process. Far from eroding nationalism, the modernisation of sport may provide it with new opportunities to mobilise support, given the right conditions. Once sport is harnessed to nationalism, it constitutes a powerful cultural resource in its service. Through sport, highly condensed and instantly effective images of the nation can be diffused to mobilise the potential nationalist constituency and to legitimate the movement externally. The power of such images resides in their impact, not only at the cognitive level, but above all at the emotional level, and in their appeal to the aesthetic senses.

The most potent and decisive way nationalist ideology is communicated and nationalist mass movements are generated and sustained is through the language and symbolism of nationalism. Modern nationalism is a complex ideology incorporating abstract ideas about autonomy, identity, national genius, authenticity, unity and fraternity, in terms of which given populations are characterised by a significant proportion of their members (most importantly by nationalist intellectuals and the intelligentsia) as actual or potential nations (Smith, 1991). Language and symbolism, rite and ceremonial play a crucial part in demarcating boundaries between communities. Nationalist language, symbolism, rite and ceremonial connect nationalist ideology to the culture of wider segments of the population, that is, to popular or mass ideas and beliefs, sentiments, customs, styles, mores and ways of acting and feeling shared by members of a community of historic culture, so that the nation and national identity become a 'natural' part of the culture. Sporting occasions, big and small, provide almost limitless possibilities for deploying the language and symbolism of the nation – flags, anthems, parades, oaths, folk costumes, national recreations, spectacular cultural performances incorporating mythology, the arts, music, poetry, song, dance, design and so on –

symbols which, in certain circumstances, may be manipulated by a political movement and attributed with a nationalist meaning. As we have seen in the case of the *Turnen* movement, an entire sport may even be invented in the service of a nationalist project.

Nationalism can be understood as a form of civil religion. In his sociology of religion Durkheim noted the power of symbols and ceremonies to evoke intense emotional identification with the collectivity (Durkheim, 1982). But it is not simply a question of emotional response: the sacred aura with which nationalist symbols are endowed means that they can exert an especially powerful impact, not only at the emotional level but also at the cognitive and aesthetic levels simultaneously. Ritual and ceremonial activity are rule-governed forms of behaviour of a symbolic character that draw the attention of participants and onlookers to objects of thought and feeling which are held to be of special significance (Lukes, 1975). Ritual symbols 'condense many referents uniting them in a single cognitive and affective field. Each has a "fan" or spectrum of referents which tend to be interlinked by what is usually a simple mode of association, its very simplicity enabling it to interconnect a wide variety of signification' (Turner, 1970). Ritual symbols may very powerfully connote, as well as denote, what is important; and what they connote – that is, what they covertly convey – is often more important. Nowhere is all this more apparent than in the case of nationalist symbols and ceremonies. They embody nationalism's basic concepts, making them visible and distinct for every member, communicating the tenets of an abstract ideology in palpable, concrete terms that evoke an instant emotional, cognitive and aesthetic response from all strata of the community (Smith, 1991: 77). Durkheim characterised religious ritual as, in reality, a celebration of society. Similarly, nationalism could be characterised as the community self-consciously worshipping itself as the nation. In many ways the ceremonial and symbolic aspect is the most decisive in the success and durability of national identity because it is the area in which individual identity is most closely bound up with collective identity. Today the chief reason why the symbolic and ritual aspects of nationalism impinge so directly on the sense of individual identity lies in the revival of ethnic ties and ethnic identification.

As we shall see, the Olympic Games is especially rich in symbol and ceremonial, and these points apply particularly to the Barcelona Olympics because they were permeated by the language and symbolism of Catalan nationalism. We will focus later on how these key symbols were deployed.