

Where extremes meet: Sport, nationalism and secessionism in Catalonia and Scotland

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Abstract

In this essay, we trace the symbolic conundrums of belonging, and of the reconciliation of identities, in the context of Catalan and Scottish sport and politics. Our discussion will commence with a necessarily concise consideration of past academic contentions regarding the national ‘psyches’ which have been argued to shape contemporary notions of identity and politics in Catalonia and Scotland, before turning our attention to the specific role of sport vis-à-vis these ‘psyches’ and the growing clamour for greater political autonomy for each of these stateless nations. Based on evidence drawn from the interaction between sport and politics in the two nations, we argue that secessionism is a liminal field of transformation as it includes what is seen as mutually exclusive sets of relationships (Catalans vs. Spaniards; Scottish vs. British, secessionists vs. unionists/centralists), which at the same time allows subjects to pass from one state to another and occupy them non-exclusively.

Keywords: Sport; nationalism; secessionism; Catalonia; Scotland

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the intersection between sports and the respective secessionist movements in Scotland and Catalonia. In the case of the former, organised sport has played a significant role in helping to maintain Scotland's separate identity on the global stage despite being an integral part of the United Kingdom nation state with both the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU) being formed in 1879. In Catalonia, sport also achieved the status of national symbol with the resurgence of nationalist sentiments in the late nineteenth century coinciding with the foundation of Football Club Barcelona in 1899. Ironically, however, previous comparative studies of Scotland and Catalonia have tended to focus on other issues not least language. Despite commencing with some consideration of that work, this paper primarily seeks to fill a vacuum by developing a comparative analysis of nationalism in the two nations that is centred on sport with reference to the concept of duality as expressed through the Catalan concepts of *Seny* and *Rauxa* and the Caledonian *Antisyzgy*. Discussion of nationalism in Scotland and Catalonia is followed by separate analysis of the relationship between sport and nationalism in each, followed by a conclusion which brings together the various strands of the paper.

In 1980, the second issue of the short-lived *Bulletin of Scottish Politics* published two documents under the heading 'A Nation without a State, a People without a Language' (Llobera, 1980). The nation in question was not Scotland, although the first of these two descriptions could at least have been readily shared at the time. The nation was Catalonia which, in more recent times, has been discussed in relation to Scotland far more often than was the case in 1980. Josep Llobera's (1980: 168) main concern was that one year after the signing of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, the future of the Catalan language had become

‘far more precarious and disquieting’ than in the darkest days of Francoism. Llobera’s commitment to the language was at the time unremitting to the extent that it was reported to the author by several Chilean refugees living in Hull, England, in the mid-1970s that he forced them to speak to him in very hesitant English rather than converse with him in Spanish.

In reality, however, only in a political rhetorical sense were the Catalans in 1980 ‘a People without a Language’. Officially they had two languages - Catalan and Castilian - although this is not to dismiss the ongoing struggle for supremacy of one over the other. Indeed, it has been widely argued that sustained promotion of the Catalan language in both a written and oral form has remained a pivotal cultural marker which distinguishes Catalonia from the unitary Spanish state, with the Catalan language widely used by Catalan civil institutions and the Catalan education system, resulting in a high proportion (c. 90%) of Catalan residents claiming an ability to understand the language in a written or oral form (Duerr, 2015; Guibernau, 2014; Ordeix and Ginesta, 2014). Invoking Edensor (2002), this ‘everyday’ marker of Catalan identity thus illustrates the important role of civil society institutions in terms of maintaining a sense of distinction for stateless nations within unitary states.

For its part, Scotland had three languages – English (the overwhelming first language of a majority of the population), Gaelic (the first language of a relatively small number of people living mainly in the western highlands and islands) and Lallans (a literary language in written form but also the basis of the language of everyday life for many English speakers). In Scotland’s case, however, language was far less politicised than in Catalonia even though Gaelic has been regularly called upon to attest to the distinctiveness of the nation.

If language was not a major issue in Scotland in 1980, however, like Catalonia, the Scottish nation was undeniably stateless. On 1st March 1979, the Scottish people had voted

on the British government's proposals for an elected assembly in Scotland, a nation which had given up its independence prior to the age of mass democracy and, since 1707, had existed politically within the context of the United Kingdom. For some, however, the referendum gave Scots the opportunity to resume some part of their ancient autonomy and rights and the proposals were accepted. The 1979 referendum saw a 'Yes' vote of 51.6% against a 'No' vote of 48.4%, on a turnout of 63.8%; this meant only 32.85% of the electorate being in favour of a Scottish Assembly, with 30.78% against, and 36.37% who did not vote at all (Harvie, 1998; Ichijo, 2004; Leith and Soule, 2011). Given that this failed to reach the 40% threshold set by the UK government through its acceptance of the 'Cunningham Amendment' (Harvie, 1998), the Scotland Act was repealed despite achieving a majority in favour in the referendum. To claim, however, that a degree of long-lost autonomy would have been introduced as a consequence of the vote was to ignore the extent to which Scotland had enjoyed a considerable amount of autonomy even while locked within the constitutional arrangements of the UK (Paterson, 1994).

The various pillars of this national autonomy that are customarily invoked include distinctive legal, educational and local government systems and Presbyterianism, rather than Episcopalianism, as the national form of worship, in the institutional form of the Church of Scotland. Influential as the latter was from the Reformation onwards, however, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century another, at least as significant, pillar had been added to the edifice of Scottish autonomy in the shape of organised sport. With institutions such as the SFA and the SRU in place, international sporting competition could begin, initially between Scotland and England alone and soon after embracing both Ireland and Wales.

In Catalonia, sport also achieved the status of national symbol. The resurgence of nationalist sentiments in the late nineteenth century coincided with the foundation of Football Club Barcelona. The Catalan nationalist elite was quick to adopt the new game, including

such emblematic presidents like Josep Sunyol, who was shot by Francoist forces in 1936 for his Republican and Catalanist ideas of citizenship, which he closely associated with sport. Jordi Pujol, the first president of the post-Franco Catalan government said this about football's role under the repressive Franco regime (1939-75): 'Barça is like other folkloric manifestations of our people—a reserve we can draw on when other sources dry out, when the doors of normality are closed to us' (in Burns, 2012: 245). More recently, the traditional sport of human tower building has become a particularly iconic encapsulation of secessionist sentiments (Vaczi, 2016).

Sport therefore can be argued to act as an important signifier of autonomy for stateless nations such as Catalonia and Scotland (Boyle, 2000; Boyle and Haynes, 1996; Garcia, 2012; Iorweth, Hardman and Rhys Jones, 2014; McFarland, 2013; Nili, 2009; Vaczi, 2015). Given this, the forthcoming discussion compares the extent to which sport has played a role in the recent growth of support for political autonomy in both contexts. Whilst the political, cultural and legal contexts in which the recent respective plebiscites on Catalan and Scottish independence have differed, as has the role of sport within these contexts, we will argue the existence of both parallels and disjunctures regarding the nexus between sport and the 'nation' is highly instructive for understanding the impact of sport within contemporary political nationalism.

In 2010, the Spanish Constitutional Court rejected the Catalan Government's proposal for a new Statute of Autonomy arguing, among other things, that it was unconstitutional because it referred to Catalonia as a 'nation.' The Constitution does not recognize any nation other than the Spanish and allows regions to refer to themselves only as 'nationalities.' It was this rejection of their nationhood that first drove massive numbers of Catalans to the streets in 2010 to claim independence under the banner 'We are a nation. We decide.' Our point of departure is to explore the conditions of statelessness or 'nationless-ness' through the

ambiguous subjectivities that emerge through sport in secessionist contexts. There is a sense in which the secessionist subject is, to borrow from psychoanalysis, a ‘split subject’ or, even more revealingly, a ‘barred subject’ (Parker 2003): divorced from its object of desire (state-and/or nationhood), it is always thwarted by the existence of contradictory attitudes side by side, and the impossibility of ‘wholeness’ as the subject is ‘barred’ from full presence, self-identity, or self-consciousness. It is a state marked by transitoriness and ambiguity as the ‘threshold subject,’ a motif borrowed largely from Dostoevsky. The stateless subject, we show here, emerges in the fissures of dislocations, inhabits ‘double spaces’ (Seitz 2017), and suffers some ‘double binds’ (Bateson 1973).

We aim to capture these complexities as we trace the symbolic conundrums of belonging, and of the reconciliation of identities, in the context of Catalan and Scottish sport and politics. Our discussion will commence with a necessarily concise consideration of past academic contentions regarding the national ‘psyches’ which have been argued to shape contemporary notions of identity and politics in Catalonia and Scotland, before turning attention to the specific role of sport vis-à-vis these ‘psyches’ and the growing clamour for greater political autonomy for each of these stateless nations. Identifying and unpacking the sport world’s positions and impasses in secessionist contexts will help us understand secessionist subjectivities as both incomplete and over-determined at the same time, as contested sites where, with the words of Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘extremes meet.’

Politics and the ‘psyche’ of two stateless nations

Between the ‘common sense’ and ‘madness’ of Catalan politics

It is not uncommon for cultures to organize their moral universe around binaries, which would surface in morality tales, everyday conversations, oral tradition, and even sport. In his seminal essay on the Balinese cockfights, Clifford Geertz describes the event as an enactment of a primordial duality where ‘man and beast, good and evil, ego and id, the creative power of aroused masculinity and the destructive power of loosened animality fuse in a bloody drama of hatred, cruelty, violence, and death’ (Geertz 1973: 420-421). The Mexican *lucha libre* acts out moral qualities through its ‘good guys’ (*técnicos*), and ‘bad guys’ (*rudos*) (Levi 1997: 63). In the Basque game of pelota, the binary ethos of morality vs. immorality is manifested through the noble, clean game of the back-court player ‘lion’ contrasted with the mischievous, cunning game of the front-court player ‘fox’ (González Abrisketa 2012). For Catalans, the way things get done ranges between the two extremes of *seny* ‘common sense,’ and *rauxa* ‘madness.’ *Seny* is considered as the culturally salient and desirable psychosocial disposition (Ferrater i Mora, 1944). Everything can be done with *seny*, even things that are paradigmatically about losing control, such as drinking at festivals (Noyes 2003, 136).

In politics, a particular manifestation of Catalan *seny* is *pactisme*, a strategy of consensus that has its roots in Medieval political culture as a collaborative, rather than confrontational, relationship between the king and the urban ruling class (Desfor Edles 1999). Catalan *pactisme* stands in contrast with what Zulaika calls the Basque ‘no-saying culture’ (1988: 300): a defiant attitude stereotypically attributed to what is seen in Spain as rebellious Basques who veto, boycott, walk out or fight, while Catalans embrace a consensus. In 1975, after the death of Franco, Spain embarked on its democratic Transition, and ETA’s campaign intensified in the Basque Country. Catalonia, in turn, did not just go along with the building of a new Spanish state, but in fact emerged as one of its driving forces. ‘Core Catalan nationalist symbols,’ Desfor Edles writes, ‘especially democracy, Europeanism, *pactisme* and

seny, not only meshed nicely with transitional themes of modernity, reconciliation, and the politics of consensus—but they helped define these themes’ (1999: 39). A manifestation of a common vision was that 90% of Catalan voters said ‘yes’ to the Spanish Constitution drafted in 1978.

Catalonia’s shift toward the idea of independence resulted from a series of political, social and cultural developments in Spain and, like in case of Scotland, pro-independence feelings intensified when dealing with the conservative central government of the *Partido Popular* (People’s Party). Increasing state-region antagonism is due, on the one hand, to the hard line conservative position with regards to regional concessions in comparison with left-wing central governments; on the other hand, the leftist strain in pro-independence positions in Catalonia has been historically dominant. In 2003 a left-wing Catalanian government started to push for greater financial autonomy and a reform of the Statute of Autonomy. What ensued was two Spanish rejections of Catalan propositions for a new fiscal arrangement in 2005 and 2010. While pro-Spain actors may reduce the independence movement to Catalans’ pursuit of a new financial plan, and thus highlight their disdained stereotype as capitalist moneymakers (Brandes 1990), the shift from the desire for greater financial autonomy toward independence had important symbolic triggers.

Catalonia has held a series of minor or major referendums since 2009, but the Spanish government has been staunchly rejecting the officialdom of all of these referendums. Eventually overcoming its internal left-right divisions, the Junts pel Sí (Together for Yes) coalition of the CD, ERC, and civil organizations won 62 of the 135 seats in the 2015 regional elections. Although the coalition had promised a unilateral declaration of independence in case of victory, it had subsequently discarded it because, as in case of Scotland, the ‘Yes’ vote (48%) fell short of the desired mandate of at least 50% of voters. Instead, the new pro-independence Catalan government decided to hold a referendum in

October 2017. The Spanish government declared it illegal, citing Article II of the Constitution, which establishes that Spain is one and indivisible. Spain-Catalonia relations plummeted on voting day in October 2017 as the Spanish police shut down voting centres, confiscated ballot boxes, and forcibly prevented people from voting, resulting in 800-plus civilian injuries. Leading politicians and cultural figures of the independence movement went into exile in Europe, and Catalonia's statute of autonomy was suspended. Recent political developments in Spain and Catalonia have ranged from tragic through melodramatic to absurd: governmental standby, repeated elections, temporary governments, police brutality and political imprisonment, independence declaration and its suspension 40 seconds later indeed created a climate of 'madness' where no one really knows what happens next.

From a conservative centralist perspective, Catalonia's current independence movement has been seen as a political shift from 'common sense' to 'madness.' With a shift from *pactisme* to *independentisme*, pro-Spain actors generously implied that Catalans took a holiday from their *superego seny* by pointing out a divorce from their cultural character. Spain president Mariano Rajoy watched the 2014 non-binding referendum from his office, and expressed his wish that by Monday, Catalonia 'recovers its *seny*.' Pro-Spain parties campaigned under the banner of 'common sense', the 'Platform for *Seny*' was founded, and the pro-independence efforts were routinely described as 'irrational folly,' 'madness' and 'fantasy.' In 2015 the leading Spanish daily *El País* published an op-ed article titled 'Tribute to the Basque *seny*' (*El País* 2015), which compared the 'constructive and cordial' (currently non-independentist) Basque government with the 'terrible and hardly intelligent' Catalan one. Who would have thought, the article questioned, that the much-praised *seny*, this Catalan word that evokes common sense and deliberation, would abandon the politics of its natural habitat and settle, of all places, in the Basque Country? By alienating Catalan political

subjects from their culturally endorsed trait, political discourse effectively hystericized secessionist subjectivities.

'Head', 'heart' and the 'Caledonian antisyzygy' in Scottish politics

The condition of living in a stateless nation but surrounded by institutional reminders of partial autonomy has resulted in a belief amongst most Scots that 'Scotland is distinctively *ours*, to be defended against encroachments from outside (Paterson, 1994: 1). It has also led, however, to a conflicted understanding of what it means to be Scottish, and how Scottishness and Britishness can be reconciled, if at all. For intellectuals, this conflict has on occasion produced extreme reactions. When Scottish poet, Hugh MacDiarmid wrote in 1926, 'I'll ha'e nae hauf way hoose, but aye be whaur extremes meet' ('I'll have no half way house, but always be where extremes meet') (MacDiarmid, 2008), he could easily have been referring to the internal conflicts that can take over people's lives as characterised by the Scottish novelist, Robert Louis Stevenson (2012) in his *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. This preoccupation in Scottish literature with the conflicted personality has been captured in the concept of the Caledonian antisyzygy, as understood by Gregory Smith (1919),

in the very combination of opposites – what either of the two St Thomases, of Norwich and Cromarty, might have been willing to call “the Caledonian antisyzygy” – we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his (sic) political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is his admission that two sides of the matter have been considered (Smith, 1919: 4).

Even more relevant perhaps are the following words of the Scottish-born polymath, Patrick Geddes,

Here we are divided between two exaggerations – one, that of a legendary superiority in almost every conceivable respect to almost all conceivable people; the other of excessive self-deprecation, as if we had no nationality worth the name (cited in Macdonald, 2009: 152).

Initially a literary concept, the ‘Caledonian antiszygy’ has served as a means by which to understand the Scottish intelligentsia’s reaction to the Scotland’s loss of statehood and absorption into a united polity in 1707. On the one hand, there was a retreat into antiquarianism and a quest for solace in the nation’s romantic past. On the other hand, there were those who forged the Scottish Enlightenment and sought to be more modern, to write better English and, in some cases, to be better Britons than their counterparts south of the border (Daiches, 1952). For most Scots, however, even those most closely associated with the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, the loss of statehood has meant living in that liminal space between those extremes and concomitantly between Scottishness and Britishness. To the end of his life David Hume was concerned about his Scottish accent and, although Adam Smith had acquired the spoken and written English of the English during six years of study at the University of Oxford, like Hume he was very much a product of his native country with its poverty, its superior universities, its learned societies and ‘its internalized sense of inferiority’ (Crehan, 2016: 92).

Indeed, Nairn’s (1977) arguments on the existence of ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ suggests that many Scots can thus reject the claims of political nationalist movements seeking to achieve Scottish independence, whilst maintaining a cultural identification with a distinct Scottish nation; such arguments thus epitomise the ‘head’ versus ‘heart’ debate which has

been argued to underpin the Scottish constitutional debate and the nature of Scottish national identities. For Pittock (2012: 14), the aforementioned preservation of Scottish civic institutions is of great importance for the ideas of sovereignty and identity in Scotland, given that ‘from the beginning the union abolished and preserved Scottish sovereignty, and is to that degree a paradoxical as well as ambivalent document’. Although this incorporating approach to Scottish civic institutions can also be argued to have been replicated in the Catalan context through the Statutes of Autonomy afforded to Catalonia within the Spanish constitution, historical and recent developments in each context regarding political secessionist movements illustrate that the British government has continued to adopt a more conciliatory approach to such claims in comparison to that of the Spanish state.

For example, as the issue of Scottish autonomy has gradually grown in prominence within Scottish and British politics since the late 19th century, UK-wide political and governing institutions have attempted to at least partially accommodate such claims. This is evident in the gradual legislation for enhanced devolved power to Scotland from the Westminster Parliament, with the historical failures of the Scottish ‘home rule’ legislative bills in the 1910s supplanted by the establishment of the Scottish Office in Edinburgh in 1937, replicated later when the unsuccessful devolution campaign of 1979 was ultimately addressed through the successful (re)establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 (Devine, 1999; Harvie, 1998). These developments were at least in part a response to growing public sentiment regarding the existence of a Scottish ‘democratic deficit’ whereby the preferences of the Scottish electorate sat at odds with the UK as a whole, most notably during the period of the Conservative government from 1979 to **1997** which saw the arrival of ‘Thatcherism’, ushering in economic and social policies which had considerable implications for Scottish society. A number of commentators have highlighted the lasting impact of Thatcherism in manifesting a sense of a political divide between Scotland and England (Hearn, 2014;

Lecours, 2012; Leith and Soule, 2011). Indeed, McCrone (1992: 93) argued that it is “difficult to envisage a political ideology more at odds with Scottish sensibilities and identity than that which has emanated from the South during the 1980s”.

Furthermore, the contrasting conciliatory approach of the Conservative-led coalition Westminster government to the demands for a public referendum on Scottish independence by the Scottish government led by the nationalist Scottish National Party differs starkly from the approach of the Spanish state to the Generalitat de Catalunya. The result of the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections placed the SNP in a position to hold an independence referendum, with its 69 MSPs providing the party with an overall majority. At the 2011 elections, the SNP was able to exploit dissatisfaction with the Labour government following the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, and the return of the Scottish ‘democratic deficit’ at Westminster with the establishment of the coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats following the 2010 general election (Mycock, 2012). The SNP was able to form a majority government even though it only received 45.4% in the constituency vote and 44.0% in the list vote (SPICe, 2011), and despite the AMS electoral system which has been argued to have been designed to avoid such an eventuality (Harvie, 1998; Johns et al., 2013). The negotiations with the coalition Westminster government resulted in the signing of the ‘Edinburgh Agreement’ in October 2012 which legislated for a single-question referendum before the end of 2014, in line with the SNP’s preference for a referendum date in autumn 2014.

Whilst the ‘Edinburgh Agreement’ ruled out the proposal for a second question in the referendum for further devolution powers, despite the popularity of such an option during the ‘National Conversation’ public consultation (Scottish Government, 2009), the close-run nature of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum led to further concessions from unionist parties regarding further devolution to the Scottish Parliament in the form of ‘The Vow’

(Daily Record, 2014), a late intervention which has argued to have helped to secure the eventual ‘No’ vote to Scottish independence. Indeed, it can be argued that ‘The Vow’ in many ways illustrates the continued influence of the ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ in contemporary Scottish politics, with the accommodation of both the ‘heart’ and the ‘head’ of undecided voters who were deemed to have swung the balance in the favour of the pro-union campaign.

Sport in Catalonia: Between the global and the local

FC Barcelona is a football club where extremes meet in terms of local and global identities. It is *més que un club*, ‘more than a club’ as a symbol of *catalanitat*, and *un equip que uneix el món*, ‘a team that unites the world,’ as the controversial Qatar Airlines endorsement goes. Barça is by far the most recognizable Catalan brand in the world, while many global fans simply see it as a Spanish club. The club has crafted an international façade that is sufficiently neutral not to distract from sport performance and consumption.

At the same time, club membership and its electoral census ensures that real management stays in Catalan hands. To be a member, one has to have at least a second-degree family relationship to someone who is already a member, which creates a sense of primordial connectedness that goes beyond symbolic kinship. Moreover, to be able to vote, one should be resident of Catalonia not by decree but by sheer practicality, for this most global of clubs offers no online or mailing voting options. Members have to physically show up to vote under the tents outside of Camp Nou, in the Mediterranean summer heat. Below and beyond the club’s global reach, voting rights and practices are discreetly contingent on Catalanian rootedness.

It is hard to over-estimate the importance of voting for the perpetuation of a direct participatory spirit where club members may easily feel disenfranchised by politics and globalization. The desire to vote in politics has been historically linked to voting in sport. Under Franco, voting for presidents was banned in football clubs, because it ‘would have given the opportunity for an uncomfortable comparison with the lack of democracy in the national order’ (Shaw 1987: 122). FC Barcelona, however, found furtive ways to exercise the act of voting on minor affairs uncontrolled by the regime, which helped maintain a spirit of democracy. Today, the town hall meetings that presidential candidates hold during their campaign offer a scene rarely accommodated by global, multi-billion sport businesses. Fans of all ages and social strata challenge the candidates, some of the most powerful socio-economic agents, businessmen, media moguls or lawyers of the country. In July 2015, candidate Josep Maria Bartomeu’s town hall meeting exuded the familiarity of a small village council, where practical questions were discussed about travel arrangements, ticket re-sales, players’ behaviour, or the accommodation of fans with disabilities. The questions and comments ranged from poignant to slightly surreal, with much cheering and laughter. If only for the duration of the campaign, and at the level of fantasy as sceptics would add, club members feel empowered in the operations of their club.

Because it has to balance its local and global identities, Barça’s political position is rarely expressed directly. ‘Barça doesn’t have to say anything about where it stands,’ Catalan fans will tell you. ‘We *know*.’ The club’s support constitutes a tacit understanding that lives in the minds and hearts of locals, as it did throughout the Franco regime. An instance of a complicit wink took place at the 2016 *el Clásico* against Real Madrid, when the terraces of Camp Nou displayed an unlikely mosaic formation: the shape of a human tower or *castell*. Human tower building is a two-hundred-year old traditional sport from rural Catalonia, which is lately booming as, among other things, a site of neighbourhood solidarity and Catalan

independentism (Vaczi 2016). What went unnoticed for the four hundred million television spectators of the *Clásico* worldwide was a gesture of identification with *catalanisme* through a traditional sport associated with the working classes and rural culture. The gesture revealed the ‘double spaces’ of Catalan secessionism through a modern sport standing for right wing bourgeois *catalanitat*, and a traditional sport standing for left wing working class Republicanism.

Every athlete’s dream? Between the Spanish and the Catalan National Teams

The romance of an obscure rural sport’s appropriation of nation building from a global giant lasts until we are reminded, for example by the *New York Times*, of football’s unchallenged ability to disseminate political messages worldwide. ‘Anticipating Anthem Protests, Spain Braces for ‘Verbal Violence,’’ the *Times* wrote in April 2018 (Keh 2018). The Spanish *Copa del Rey* King’s Cup has always represented Spain’s central powers, and finals involving regions such as the Basque and Catalan both reflect and generate centre-periphery antagonisms (Vaczi 2018). The first notable football whistling goes back to 1925 in Barcelona, to the regime of Primo de Rivera, who had just overthrown the constitutional government with a military coup. The event had major political repercussions: the stadium was shut down, and the President of FC Barcelona was exiled from Spain. The Les Corts stadium would be re-opened only after 12 religious practitioners blessed it in order to exorcise the ‘malevolent separatist spirits’ that had contaminated in (Burns 2011: 124). The recent tradition of contemporary whistling emerged across three cup finals (2009, 2012, 2015) between FC Barcelona and the Basque Athletic Bilbao, which some centralists sought to illegalize (Vaczi 2018).

Another site of contestation concerns national teams. Unlike in the UK, the Spanish federations do not allow for the officialdom of regional national teams; regional teams are only allowed to play unofficial friendlies against each other at Christmas, which fans properly consider inconsequential. This produces a conundrum that is proper to secessionist contexts only: athletes represent states with which they might not identify, and who may feel uncomfortable with the symbolic persona imposed upon them. 'It's been too long that they've been pressuring us with a sentiment that is not ours' (Marca 2017) Nuria Picas, Catalan ultra-trail world champion said about what psychoanalysis would call their 'hysterical deadlock' resulting from alienated desire (Žižek, 2006: 38-39). In patriarchal society, for example, an instance of a woman's alienated desire is when a man imposes his expectations on her, and she wants what her big Other, man wants her to want. The players' double bind is that whatever they do, they will be punished. If they refuse to represent the state, they harm their careers as athletes. If they choose to represent the state, they jeopardize their personal integrity, and disappoint their local fans with whom they actually share a sub-national identity. The double bind has a third injunction, which stipulates that one cannot exit the field (Bateson 1973). In Spain, this corresponds to the Federation's right to withdraw a player's license if they refuse to play for the national team, effectively keeping them in the field.

'Nacho's dilemma' was an apt title of a 1995 *El País* article to capture sub-national players when facing the invitation to the Spanish national football team. Nacho Fernández, from Galicia, rejected that it was 'every athlete's dream to play for his country.' Instead, he was 'neither interested, nor thrilled' about the possibility of playing for Spain. His rejection cost him a year of suspension. Two emblematic Basque players of the 1970s and 80s, Inaxio Kortabarría and José Ángel Iríbar also rejected playing for Spain. 'For me, there was a moment of contradiction,' Iríbar said in an interview in 1980. 'I could no longer ask for the amnesty of Basque ETA prisoners, and then be ambassador of Spain with the Spanish

national team' (Gómez 2007: 66). More recently, before the 2006 World Cup, the Catalan Barcelona defender Oleguer Presas explained to coach Luis Aragonés 'how he saw the world,' and told him that 'when there is no sufficient commitment or sentiment, it is better that other persons go' (Marca 2012). His comments generated a lot of controversy, and he lost some of his endorsements.

Another secessionist athlete subjectivity is the one who chooses to prioritize their career and play for Spain in spite of their privately held nationalist convictions. 'I played for Spain 158 times,' former basketball player Jordi Villacampa said, 'and I don't regret it. Now, am I Catalan? Yes. Would I like to vote? Also. And I would vote yes [for independence]' (Marca 2017). There is also the approach mastered by Barcelona defender Gerard Piqué, who artfully obfuscates his position by flaunting his *catalanisme* publicly at pro-independence rallies, campaigning for the referendum, supporting the release of Catalan political prisoners, playing for Spain, *and* denying he favours independence (AS 2017). Piqué transcends and even mocks the binary agonies of the split subject. When questioned whether he 'gave it all' for Spain, he insisted that his position '[was] not incongruent,' and while 'it was not his case,' he believed that 'an independentist could play in the Spanish national team because there is no Catalan national team, and an independentist has nothing against Spain,' and might even find Spain 'a great country' of 'great people' (AS 2017). Piqué feeds into the deepest anxieties of centralists about an anti-Spain player sabotaging the national team from within, a spectre that appeared each time the Spanish national team underperformed at international games.

Not that the possibility of playing for Catalonia or the Basque Country in an official regional team would eliminate double binds. There is a sense in which the ban on regional national teams might be a relief for players who, below and beyond their political views, actually want to play for the prestigious Spanish national team. When for example Fernando

Llorente from Athletic Bilbao signed a petition for a Basque national team, centralists suspected ETA-related nationalist coercion, because Llorente always referred to playing for Spain as ‘a dream come true.’ ‘How is it possible,’ a commentator wrote, ‘that a twenty-three-year-old man signs a petition that goes against his dream?’ (ForoGraciasAznar 2008). In a climate of intensifying regional nationalisms, it is quite unthinkable that a player, given the option, could choose to play for Spain rather than Team Catalonia or Basque Country without a backlash from his local fan community. There must be therefore players who are secretly grateful for the Spanish Federation’s ban: they can take refuge in that that they act out of necessity to protect their license, and play for Spain in the absence of a regional team.

Catalan sport for Yes

‘Although they won’t say it,’ London 2012 Olympic swimmer Claudia Dasca said, ‘80% of the sport world wants independence’ (Marca 2017). Catalan athletes and clubs have been vocal about independence, and federations have been preparing for post-independence transformation for years. Among elite athletes and coaches who have campaigned for ‘yes’ besides the ones mentioned before are football coach Pep Guardiola, the basketball player brothers Pau and Marc Gasol, cyclist Anna Ramírez, footballers Marc Crosas, Oriol Rosell, or Ángel Rangel, to mention a few. Pep Guardiola was the most well-known face of the yellow-ribbon campaign, which cost him a 20,000-pound-punishment from the Football Association, for wearing a political symbol during Premier League games. Several elite sport clubs, including FC Barcelona, have joined in social media to ‘reject the crushing of rights and liberties and the self-government of Catalonia [and to] support any initiative that helps us vote at the [October 2017] Referendum’ (Públic 2017).

From an institutional perspective, the Olympic Committee of Catalonia (*Comité Olímpic de Catalunya* COC) was established to work toward the international recognition of Catalan athletes as early as Tokyo 2020 with the support of the Catalan Government's General Secretary of Sport (*Secreteria General de l'Esport*), and launched the campaign Sport for Yes (*l'Esport pel Sí*). The COC was supported by 56 Catalan sport federations, which means 80% of all federations in the region favoured independence. They are coordinated by the Union of Catalan Sport Federations (*Unió de Federacions Esportives de Catalunya*). Simultaneously, the Catalan Sports Platform Proseleccions works toward the recognition of Catalan national teams. Catalonia can delegate a team if Spain chooses not to in a given sport, which is how the region has 21 national teams in peripheral sports.

According to the Platform, 'the fastest way to achieve that Catalonia may officially compete in all sports is independence' (Públic 2017). Unsurprisingly, they argue that few sectors would gain so much with independence, and few are so ready to leave as sport. While there is substantial insecurity about the economic future of Catalonia after potential independence, actors in sport speak with remarkable self-confidence, which may be rooted in a few significant sport achievements: to a lesser degree the successes of the Sanchez-Casal high performance tennis academy, and to a greater extent the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, Catalan football. These successes turn Barcelona into a symbolic equal, and sometimes even superior, to Madrid (see Hargreaves 2000, Vaczi 2015), for example when Madrid lost the 2020 Olympic bid in the final round in 2012. The Sanchez-Casal Tennis Academy gained international fame as the Spanish Armada of tennis players, while a great number of those players are Catalan. Centralists like to present doomsday scenarios where FC Barcelona plays against third division teams in a 'Catalan league,' but the riposte is quick and confident. 'Any major national league would be happy to have us,' former FC Barcelona president Joan Laporta told us with an air of superiority. 'The French, the English, the

German, we have plenty to choose from with the moneys we would bring. But believe me,' he winked, visibly enjoying the double bind of the Other, 'The Spanish league will be the first one to want Barça to stay. They need us.' This confidence, however, fails to consider that FC Barcelona too owes just as much to its arch-rivalry with Madrid, and that the Spanish national team offers attractive prospects to Catalan players. A Catalan national team would have had much less chance winning a World Cup and two Euro Cups, even if Catalans dominated the Spanish national team's roster and play style.

With Catalan Government subsidies, the Plataforma Proseleccions created a detailed study with the objective of identifying and quantifying the economic impact of potential independence on sport. The 2017 study was titled *The Economic Impact of Catalonia's Independence on Catalan Sport Federations*, assessed the economic situation of Catalonia's major federations and Olympic programs, and estimated the costs and benefits of secession (Plataforma 2017). According to it, sport's gross value added GVA would grow by 7.4% in case of independence, and the sport sector's weight in Catalan economy would increase from 1.34% to 1.44%. Sport would bring in 2570 million euros, 176.2 million more than it does as part of Spain. The study argues that sport would dramatically increase Catalonia's international visibility as athletes could compete in Catalan colours. Sport federations would also benefit from secession, the study argues. The only income football would lose is that coming from the Royal Spanish Football Federation (*RFEF*), which would be amply compensated by income generated in Catalonia through competitions, television rights, endorsements, betting and lotteries, sales, and Catalan government subsidies. It must be added that these are the findings of a pro-independence organization; in the absence of contrary studies, we may only wonder if these figures are not overly optimistic.

Sport, nationalism and the Scots

Analysing anthems and an 'anachronism'

It has long been argued that the historical anachronism which has resulted in the existence of independent Scottish sporting teams within international sport has acted as an additional signifier of Scotland's nationhood, over and above the aforementioned independent civil institutions retained after the 1707 Act of Union which created the UK (Blain, Boyle, and O'Donnell, 1993; Jarvie and Walker, 1994). For example, competing on a regular basis with England in international sport, particularly football, undeniably enhanced a sense of Scotland as a place apart albeit within the United Kingdom. However, writing in 1991, James Kellas, himself a Scot, observed that 'Scottish football supporters do not seek political independence for Scotland more than other Scots, as far as is known, nor do they give massive support to the Scottish National Party' (Kellas, 1991: 21). The following year, Jim Sillars of the Scottish National Party complained that 'Scotland has too many ninety minute patriots whose nationalist outpourings are expressed only at major sporting events' (quoted in Jarvie and Walker, 1994: 1). However, to quote the words of the 'anthem' sung before Scottish international rugby union and football games, 'those days are passed now and in the past they must remain'. Large numbers of Scottish football fans as well as fans of sport more generally clearly did vote for independence in the referendum of 2014. Whether this was true of Scottish sports people is harder to gauge. As we shall see, the better known athletes who voiced their opinion were more often than not supporters of the continuation of the union with one very notable exception.

In contrast to Catalonia, therefore, it can be argued that Scottish national sporting teams have been most closely associated with notions of Scottish national identity, given that there is no such corollary to the status of FC Barcelona for any one club within Scottish club

football. As has been discussed extensively elsewhere, the two largest football clubs in Scotland, Celtic and Rangers, have traditionally been associated, due to their association with Catholicism, republicanism and Irish nationalism (in the case of Celtic) or with Protestantism, loyalism and British unionism (in the case of Rangers) in past academic analyses (Bradley, 2013; Flint and Kelly, 2013; Jarvie and Walker, 1994). Therefore, the ethno-religious and sociocultural affiliations of the two Glasgow clubs means that there is no specific football club around which pro-Scottish-independence identities could crystallise historically in the same way in which FC Barcelona have at times been framed, despite the fact that recent surveys of pro-independence support have demonstrated a rise in this regard amongst supporters of both clubs (Wings Over Scotland, 2014a, 2014b).

Nonetheless, even if such sentiment cannot be simply conflated with political nationalism, the Scottish representative sporting teams afford an opportunity to maintain a sense of distinction for Scots within the Union. In football, despite the diminishing status and performance of the Scottish national team which has failed to qualify for a major international tournament since the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France, the exploits of the ‘Tartan Army’ of Scottish national team supporters have been argued to act as a conduit for the expression of Scottish identities, stereotypes and subcultural behaviours which are often deliberately juxtaposed against the fan cultures of the main national rivals, the ‘Auld Enemy’ of England (Bairner, 1994; Giulianotti, 1991). Furthermore, even in the more socially conservative sport of rugby union, the symbolism of events such as the ‘Six Nations’ competition in which Scotland competes against England, Wales, a united Ireland team, France and Italy offers a similar platform for the performance of Scottish distinctiveness, with the relatively recent decision in the 1990s to use the unofficial Scottish national anthem of ‘Flower of Scotland’ rather than the official British national anthem of ‘God Save The Queen’ argued to represent a barometer of growing Scottish cultural nationalism (Jarvie,

2017; Jarvie and Reid, 1999; Jarvie and Walker, 1994). However, the decision may have also been pragmatic in nature due to concerns about potential replication of the booing of ‘God Save The Queen’ which had been evident at Scottish international football matches (Jarvie and Reid, 1999) and the whistling by Catalan and Basque fans at Copa del Rey finals.

Sporting personalities and the Scottish ‘indyref’

Despite the lack of clear correlation between sporting nationalism and cultural nationalism for Scots, this did not necessarily mean that sport was ignored within the lengthy and (mostly) healthy public debate during the period of the ‘indyref’, the moniker adopted by many for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. In contrast to the arguments outlined above by Claudia Dasca regarding the support of Catalan sportspeople for independence, however, the Scottish context was predominantly characterised by political neutrality from Scottish sportspeople and teams on the matter, with the exception of a few notable interventions on both sides of the constitutional debate.

Support for Scottish independence from within in the sporting world was particularly subdued throughout the majority of the campaign, except for the pro-independence ‘Yes Scotland’ campaign’s attempts to create a ‘Sport for Yes’ campaign group which was only able to recruit relatively low-profile sporting personalities such as Michael Stewart (football), Alex Arthur (boxing), Connie Ramsay (judo) and Samera Ashraf (kickboxing and karate). However, the last-minute intervention of Scottish tennis star Andy Murray on the morning of the referendum marked a significant moment in terms of the connection between sport and the pro-independence campaign:

Huge day for Scotland today! no campaign negativity last few days totally swayed my view on it. excited to see the outcome. lets do this!

(https://twitter.com/andy_murray; 18th September 2014)

Andy Murray has won three Grand Slam titles (US Open in 2012 and Wimbledon in 2013 and 2016). He also won gold medals in the Olympic Games men's singles competition in 2012, when also won the mixed doubles silver medal with Laura Robson, and again in 2016. In 2015, he inspired Great Britain to victory in the Davis Cup. In total, he has played in nine Grand Slam finals and would almost certainly have won more titles had he not been competing in the same era as three of the greatest ever players – Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

At least as significant, however, in the eyes of many Scots has been his attitude towards England. In anticipation of the 2006 FIFA World Cup Finals and in response to teasing that Scotland had failed to qualify, Murray joked that he would 'support whoever England were playing against' (*Independent*, 2012). He later expressed his regrets about this comment, admitting that it had cost him the support of some English fans (*Independent*, 2012). The abuse which he received was to be repeated after he tweeted on the morning of the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. Murray subsequently admitted that it had not been in character to have acted in this way but he added that he had no regrets about declaring his support for independence (*Guardian*, 2014).

None of this is to suggest that Murray can be compared with overtly nationalist sports stars from other small nations such as Dražen Petrović, a basketball player and the national team captain who was the most popular athlete of Yugoslavia in the 1980s – but who practically immediately after the break-up of Yugoslavia became 'a Croatian national sports icon' (Hrstić and Mustapić, 2015: 153). Nevertheless, as a consequence of

his views and of his demeanour, he has been identified by many in England as someone who is quintessentially Scottish – both dour and anti-English. The reality is, however, that he exists in that liminal space between Scottishness and Britishness along with so many of his compatriots.

The tendency of many English people to conflate Englishness and Britishness may help to explain why Murray's Britishness is often ignored. Not only has he represented Team GB in the Olympics, an arena from which many sport celebrities have emerged (Jackson and Andrews, 2012) but, in 2016 in Rio, he led the British team into the stadium at the Opening Ceremony, carrying the Union Flag. Moreover, in addition to inspiring the British team to victory in 2015 the Davis Cup. Murray also accepted the Order of the British Empire in 2013 and a knighthood awarded in the 2017 New Year's Honours List. So how can a supporter of Scottish independence also accept that he is British? The answer lies in specific application of the concept of the 'Caledonian antiszygy' which has exercised the minds of Scots for many generations, in this case the yoking together of Britishness and Scottishness which in recent years has brought many Scots, including Murray, to that place 'whaur extremes meet'.

The dualistic expression of Britishness and Scottishness in the domain of sport was harnessed more effectively by the pro-union 'Better Together' campaign, who were able to recruit a much wider range of high-profile personalities from the two most popular sports in Scotland, football and rugby (Harris and Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017; Whigham and May, 2017). Furthermore, the pro-union campaign also received vocal support from Lynsey Sharp, a 800m runner who had represented both Scotland and Great Britain in athletics in events such as the Commonwealth Games and the Olympic Games, with Sharp giving media interviews outlining her support for the constitutional status quo as well as using Twitter in the same way as Andy Murray to pronounce her pro-union

support. However, given Sharp's lesser profile in comparison to Murray's global status, and the fact that the vast majority of other pro-union sporting advocates highlighted above were retired footballer or rugby players, it can be surmised that the pro-union campaign may have been much more successful in terms of the 'quantity' of sporting endorsements but the pro-independence campaign were undoubtedly the victors in terms of 'quality' in terms of profile through Murray's last-minute endorsement. Regardless, the extent to which these interventions bore any impact on the final outcome of the referendum is highly questionable, at best (Jarvie, 2017; Whigham, 2017).

Sport for Yes: Playing for (only) Scotland

The pursuit of sporting endorsements by both of the official Scottish referendum campaign groups (despite reservations about their importance) was complemented by a degree of political leveraging of sport as a policy area within the official constitutional proposals by the SNP-led Scottish Government in their White Paper for Scottish independence (Scottish Government, 2013). In particular, the proposals for sport as a policy area within the White Paper drew upon the findings of the 'Working Group on Scottish Sport', a group of sportspeople, sports administrators, academics, civil servants and politicians commissioned by the SNP-led Scottish Government to examine the potential impact of independence on Scottish sport (Scottish Government, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, this group appeared to be tasked with placing a particular emphasis on showing the benefits of independence in line with the SNP's broader push to secure a 'Yes' vote in the referendum, whilst also identifying simple solutions to any potential barriers for Scottish participation in international sporting competitions (Jarvie, 2017; Whigham and May, 2017). In this sense, the Scottish Government's approach to sport

was analogous to the broader ‘Yes’ campaign: emphasise the positives, and ignore or refute the negatives.

The aforementioned Scottish ‘democratic deficit’ was central to the framing of the Working Group’s arguments: Scottish sport was argued to be constrained by the constitutional status quo, resulting in the lack of independent Scottish representation in the Olympics, Paralympics and the UK’s sporting governance, in turn causing declining levels of sports participation in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014). Despite the lack of robust evidence to substantiate the afore-mentioned claims, Scottish independence was posited as the ‘magic bullet’ to end Scotland’s sporting woes, particularly within the Scottish Government’s White Paper:

Independence will mean that more Scottish sportswomen and sportsmen will have the opportunity to compete at the highest level of international competition. It will also mean that the key decisions on athlete development will be taken in Scotland with the needs of the athlete at the centre. This will help many more of our sports-people reach their full potential (Scottish Government, 2013: 179).

Within sport, both neutral observers and pro-union campaigners highlighted this somewhat obstinate approach from the ‘Yes’ campaign with regards to legitimate points of contention in their proposals. Firstly, given that sport policy is already devolved to the Scottish Government, the validity of their arguments regarding the specific need for Scottish independence as a means to achieve the goals of the Working Group was debatable. Secondly, when concerns were raised by ostensibly neutral sporting personalities such as Chris Hoy, a retired track cyclist and Scotland’s most successful Olympian, regarding the potential impact of the loss of access to UK-wide funding,

sporting facilities, and training programmes, these were held as evident of tacit support for a 'No' vote from Hoy by pro-independence campaigners, ignoring Hoy's deliberate silence on his constitutional position (BBC, 2013).

Regardless of the validity of these assumptions about Hoy's voting intentions, the tendency of pro-independence campaigners to frame anyone who highlighted potential logistical barriers following Scottish independence as a dour 'No' voter was undoubtedly a polarising phenomenon with the referendum debate. Whilst those who placed their head above the parapet to raise similar concerns or to explicitly state their support for a 'No' vote, such as the afore-mentioned case of Lynsey Sharp, could undoubtedly expect to become embroiled in such debates, the negative framing of commentators who were attempted to remain politically neutral was unlikely to be an effective method of addressing the concerns of the important floating 'Don't Know' voters during the campaign.

Finally, the White Paper's contentions that 'more Scottish sportswomen and sportsmen will have the opportunity to compete at the highest level of international competition' (Scottish Government, 2013: 179) also highlights the centrality of a symbolic conundrum for some Scottish athletes: their dual representation of Scottishness and Britishness. This conundrum has become embroiled in past political debates on the symbolism of Scottish sporting successes, with ex-First Minister and SNP leader Alex Salmond's attempts to distinguish the success of Scottish athletes of those of 'Scolympians' rather than members of 'Team GB' receiving wide criticism (Harris and Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017). In many ways, the dualistic symbolism for Scottish athletes who may represent Scotland at events such as the Commonwealth Games whilst also representing the UK at the Olympics can be argued to create a dilemma for these athletes in terms of their symbolic positioning and personal feelings on national identity. Indeed,

this can be held to be a sporting example of the aforementioned ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ in action at this intersection between sport and politics, as sportspeople are torn between arguments of the ‘head’ for their sporting success and the ‘heart’ in terms of their personal political position.

Conclusion

Scotland and Catalonia are in a liminal state of transformation. It is often said that Scotland is only one generation and an effective Brexit away from another, this time successful ‘indyref,’ and Catalonia has been in a constant state of turmoil since the illegalization of their 2017 independence referendum. The suspension of Catalonia’s autonomy, police violence at voting stations, the imprisonment and exile of the rank and file of Catalan politics is pushing formerly neutral citizens toward independence, while social divisions are palpable. Catalans are looking to Scotland as a much-awaited precedence of secession in a European Union that has practically no directives as to the fate of new states. For obvious reasons, many Scottish scholars and political activists became increasingly interested in Catalonia during the first decade of the twentieth-first century, prompting McInnes (2004: 135) to issue the warning that ‘Catalonia is not Scotland’. Writing in 2010, Marti-Tomas (2010: 32) argued that ‘national identity has different meanings and representations in Scotland and Catalonia. It has a cultural sense in Scotland, while it is more political in Catalonia’. Even if this was true when it was written, which is highly debatable, the claim that national identity in Scotland is somehow less than political is surely absurd. Indeed, it is the cultural element that has all but disappeared from separatist rhetoric in Scotland while cultural distinctiveness remains a powerful accompaniment to political demands in Catalonia.

Because of the loyalties it requires in a field of antagonistic competition, sport is uniquely positioned to show the broader dilemmas of secessionist subjectivities. Considering the ambiguities and transitoriness of secessionism, it might be revealing to approach secessionist contexts as a liminal field where extremes meet and interact within the same matrix of ritual transformation. Turner illustrates such fields with the transition of ‘boy’ to ‘man:’ While becoming transformed and commencing to play the various adult male roles, ‘he may retain... the boyish roles of son and brother towards those to whom he originally related in those roles’ (Turner 1977: 56). This transition is only thinkable in a liminal field that goes beyond binary oppositions: one that condenses ‘components of two different states of the same matrix related by transformation’ (Turner 1977: 56). Our examples show that secessionism is a similarly liminal field of transformation as it includes what is seen as mutually exclusive sets of relationships (Catalans vs. Spaniards; Scottish vs. British, secessionists vs. unionists/centralists), which at the same time allows subjects to pass from one state to another and occupy them non-exclusively. FC Barcelona player Piqué perfectly embodies this liminal persona with the (apparent) ease with which he transitions back and forth between pro-independence Catalanist rallies and the Spanish national team locker room.

Positioning oneself in this secessionist matrix might cause existential questions, but it is also the same field that offers some solutions. In 1994, in a private conversation with one of the authors who had complained of the dilemma of balancing dual national identities, the English political scientist Bernard Crick suggested that this dilemma also provides Scots, such as the author, with great opportunities to be British when they want to be and Scottish when it suits. He felt that, as an Englishman, he was missing out. Life in the UK has undeniably offered Scots a chance to blame the misfortunes and failures that happened on the English and not on themselves. With increasingly devolved powers

in the hands of the Scottish government, of course, that situation has begun to change, and it remains to be seen what happens when there will be no extremes to meet, and Scots too will be ‘missing out’.

Through our examination of the relationship between sport and secessionist politics in Scotland and Catalonia, we have revealed striking differences between the two nations as well as important similarities. Each is at a pivotal point in its history. Sport will continue to play a role in debates about their political futures. What remains to be seen is whether the extremes will be reconciled or allowed to persist, thereby leaving the peoples of the two nations to continue to wrestle with existential crises brought on by living where the extremes meet.

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