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BETWEEN BULLETS AND BALLS: THE ROLE OF FOOTBALL IN THE RECENT
HISTORY OF COLOMBIA'S ARMED CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the history and anthropology of how Colombia's most popular sport, football (soccer), shaped and was shaped by the most violent period in the country's internal armed conflict from 2000 to 2016, between the Government, the paramilitary groups and the leftist guerrillas, chief of which was the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Using official documents, newspaper archives, oral histories, documents from the National Historic Memory Group and supporting literature on this period, I argue that the guerrillas and paramilitaries used and even weaponized football, using it to further their interests by capitalizing on its popularity. Football also proved crucial to the violence's de-escalation with the peace agreements signed between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC in 2016. To explore the complexity and plurality of the armed conflict's interactions with football, I conceptualize the sport according to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields, arguing that football's objects, actors and interests were used as instruments that served each group's objectives. Because of this appropriation and use of the sport, there was a conscious and purposeful change in how the conflict related to and reshaped the meaning of football beginning in the early 2000s. Football thereby became a political tool and a determining factor in the construction of national identity and the Colombians' understandings of violence and peace.

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A note on terms:

This thesis on the anthropology of sport and violence in recent Colombian history deploys the term ‘football’ to refer to what in the United States is known as ‘soccer’. I do this because its use is a better reflection of the profound meaning that the sport (in Spanish, *fútbol*) has for those this thesis is about.

Introduction

An astonishing void: official history ignores football. Contemporary history texts fail to mention it, even in passing, in countries where it has been and continues to be a primordial symbol of collective identity.

Eduardo Galeano¹

Three Stories, One Game

In 1998, Colombian audiences saw for the first time what is now a classic of the country's filmmaking history and a constant reference for its soccer fans: *Golpe de Estadio* (translated as *Time Out* for English speaking audiences, it loses the wordplay on the term Golpe de Estado, or coup in Spanish). Its plot revolves around the fight between guerrillas and the Colombian military for control of a new extraction camp set up by an international oil company in the rural town of Nuevo Texas. But the confrontations are interrupted in the interest of both sides in watching a match of the qualifiers for the 1994 USA World Cup. A truce is signed to watch the game between Colombia and Argentina together since there is only one working TV that remains in town after the confrontations have damaged the rest. In the middle of violent confrontation, soccer—or, as it is called by most of the world except the United States, football—takes over the lives of those involved. Football is the real priority.

In a scene that illustrates these contradictions with the characteristic humor of director Sergio Cabrera, soldiers return to the camp where the captain asks one of them, “Man, are there

¹ Galeano, Eduardo, *Football in Sun and Shadow*, trans. Mark Fried (New York: Bold Type Books, 2013).

any wounded?” The soldier responds, “No, no, no wounded. There’s two injured but nothing too bad. The Pibe got hit on the knee and Leonel almost twisted his ankle.” Realizing that the soldier is referencing the national team’s members playing the match and not the fight, the captain reacts, “No, not there man!”² While it is presented with exaggerated humor, there is a clear message throughout the movie: not only is football the most important thing for everyone on both sides, it is also the only thing that can bring them together to a truce, albeit lasting only the time it takes to watch a match.

Beyond the cinematographic dramatization of a football-motivated peace, there seems to be a great degree of truth in Cabrera’s proposition as seen in the later experiences of former fiscal policy adviser, María Inés Agudelo. In 2001, the president of Colombia, Andrés Pastrana, and his government were conducting a series of peace talks with the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in El Caguan municipality in the Caquetá department. At the time, Agudelo was the adviser of the Superior Council of Fiscal Policy (CONFIS) and was asked by the then-Minister of Finance and future president, Juan Manuel Santos, to go to the area of El Caguan to give a talk to the FARC leaders about how the national budget was designed as part of the larger ongoing peace process. The presentation was scheduled for July 29 of that year—the same day that the men’s national team was set to play against Mexico in the final of the Copa America 2001, hosted by Colombia. After over three hours of travel to get there, Agudelo recalls how she was only able to go through half of what she had planned when the guerrilla leaders ordered the meeting to be suspended: it was time to watch the game that would see Colombia attain its only official title in men’s soccer history after beating Mexico by the minimum margin (1-0).³ Agudelo, who

² *Golpe de Estadio*, directed by Sergio Cabrera (Bogotá: Caracol Televisión, 1998), online, <https://archive.org/details/GolpeDeEstadio>.

³ María Inés Agudelo, personal communication, February 14, 2020.

had tickets for the game, made the long trip back to the capital, only getting to the stadium in time for the last minutes, and the only goal, of the game.

The anecdote does not reach the extent to which the film portrays peacebuilding through the motivation of football, but it certainly makes the movie only an adaptation of the reality that this thesis explores: the history of how football has been such a driving force in Colombians' understanding that it had the power to bring together—however temporarily—actors that were on opposite sides of Colombia's internal conflict, trying to kill each other. The significance of *Golpe de Estadio*, and its similarity to real life as exemplified by Agudelo's anecdote, was once again illustrated 20 years later when, in 2018, the government of Juan Manuel Santos organized an event for reconciliation in Dabeiba, Antioquia around football: it was titled Golpe de Estadio II. As the newspaper *El Tiempo* reported, ex-guerrilla fighters, demobilized paramilitaries, victims, members of the Armed Forces, former professional players, victims, and other members of the community came together to play a match as a symbolic action towards peace. The event culminated in a scene that strongly echoed the 1998 film: members of all groups, along with the film's director Sergio Cabrera and president Juan Manuel Santos, gathered to watch Colombia's debut in the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia against Japan.⁴

These three examples point to a much larger story. The conspicuous presence of football in all three instances hint at the role of the sport in Colombia's internal armed conflict as an instrument that served the objectives of different actors. Newspapers, anecdotes, archives, public statements, initiatives, and even official policies point in the same direction: football's use and even weaponization by the actors involved should be included in any comprehensive attempt to understand the history, impacts, and realities of the armed conflict—the longest internal conflict

⁴ Valentina Vogt, "El partido por la paz que se jugó en una cancha antioqueña," *El Tiempo*, June 20, 2018.

in the history of the modern world. While it is often disregarded as superficial entertainment, simply as “just a game,” the argument here is that football went far beyond a ludic activity that was omnipresent by mere coincidence. In other words, it has been, to this day, a driving force and essential tool for many people involved in Colombia’s conflict and it should be considered as an active part of how people lived and understood the conflict as it relates to their reality. Equally relevant is the study of how the instrumentalization of football in the conflict evolved through time and how that process of change made football such an important part of the conflict. Thus, the study of the recent history of the armed conflict through the lens of the presence and uses of football can yield new insights of the conflict and complement previous efforts of understanding the modalities and dimensions that its history and posterior de-escalation have meant for the country. Similarly, it is very telling of how football itself was shaped and conditioned by the external circumstances in which it was used, even violent ones.

Like in many other countries, in Colombia this sport holds a very important place in the society due to its symbolic meaning, its importance in the collective understanding, its extended presence in most Colombians’ everyday life, and its power to move people. As such, football offers a unique perspective to reinterpret the events that have defined what it means to be Colombian, how the country tells its own history, and how it attempts to move forward after years of dramatic violence. Understanding its role in the recent history of the conflict is both important and necessary to construct a better framework through which its events are studied and interpreted. Football—as a tool, as a field, as a space, as an activity, and as a game—is another way to think about the internal armed conflict in Colombia.

Previous Approaches to the Conflict

The internal conflict was such a protracted and defining phenomenon in the history of Colombia that it has gathered the attention of many scholars from various disciplines. Its study has included a large array of techniques and fields that have attempted to understand its beginnings, its development, and its end. Studies conducted have also been interested in its consequences and ramifications, in its meanings and interpretations, including at the personal, communal, and national level. While there are dozens of published works on the subject, there are three disciplines that have perhaps stood out as the most prominent fields from which scholars have approached the matter. These three are all fields that have traditionally been applied to similar subjects around the world and that have a well-established theoretical framework that merit some discussion.

The first of these, and probably the most intuitive, are approaches from a historical and political perspective. Some scholars, like Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín (2006), have used political science frameworks, such as the ‘new wars’ thesis, to analyze the development of the conflict. Through these, the relationship between terrorism, civil war, and crime have been explored, highlighting the need to locate these belligerent actions within the political context and in relation to the response they elicit.⁵ Other studies have looked at the relationship between the conflict and the drug traffic. To that extent, Susan V. Norman (2017) argues that there has been a “narcotization” of Colombia and that drug trafficking has been a defining factor in empowering illegal groups and protracting the conflict. She also studies its role in the 2016 peace process and the implications it had in the permanent demobilization of the FARC guerrilla.⁶ Additionally,

⁵ Francisco Gutierrez Sanin, “Policy Arena: Internal Conflict, Terrorism and Crime in Colombia,” *Journal of International Development* 18 (2006): 137-150.

⁶ Susana V. Norman, “Narcotization as Security Dilemma: The FARC and Drug Trade in Colombia,” *Studied in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 8 (2018): 638-659.

scholars have taken a historical comparative approach to identify lessons and strategies that have worked in other cases of peace talks and the transition from war to peace. In the context of the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC guerrilla, some have been cautious to warn about the risks and limitations learned from similar previous attempts.⁷

Finally, there are many comprehensive works that have studied the history of the conflict, from its origins to its end, including its defining moments. Examples of this include books on the history of Colombia by Jorge Orlando Melo⁸ and Marco Palacios.⁹ A crucial work focused exclusively on the history of the conflict is the general report created by the Group of Historic Memory (Grupo de Memoria Histórica) resulting from extensive research that was commissioned as part of the 2016 peace process between the FARC and the government.¹⁰ Other more specific works include Robert Karl's *Forgotten Peace*, in which the historian look at the violence from the perspective of the peacemaking effort led by ex-president Alberto Lleras Camargo between 1958 and 1966. Initially labeled as the “creole peace” and later as the “forgotten peace,” the book uses newspapers, individual biographical stories, and regional and national documents to understand the processes that shaped the brief period of peace during the first years of the Frente Nacional (1958-1974), a Liberal-Conservative pact to share power after Gustavo Rojas Pinilla's military dictatorship. It focuses on the area of Marquetalia in the region of Gran Tolima—what is now the departments of Huila and Tolima—as the key place to understand the pivot time between the

⁷ Carlos A. Ospina, Thomas A. Marks and David H. Ucko, “Colombia and the War-to-Peace Transition,” *Military Review* 96, no. 4 (2016): 40-52.

⁸ Jorge Orlando Melo, *Historia mínima de Colombia* (Madrid: Turner Publicaciones, 2017).

⁹ Marco Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia: Colombia 1875-1994* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1995).

¹⁰ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 2013).

period of La Violencia (1947-1956), the relative ‘creole’ peace, and its posterior oblivion as leftist guerrillas were created in the area during the 1960s.¹¹

From the social sciences, an important anthropological perspective of the conflict and violence can be found in Ingrid Bolívar’s work. In it, she argues that violence in Colombia should be recognized as a problem that demands that we account for the social and institutional structures, the objectivity of the social struggle, but also for the ways in which the different actors make sense of their particular actions. To that extent, she notes the need for a framework that understands violence but that also recognizes the misalignment of the political apparatus as the mediator between the public and the private.¹² Furthermore, Bolívar has proposed that a historical and political understanding of the conflict emphasizes that violence is not just extreme, or just an exterior impact upon the mental health of the individuals affected: violence, as an attribute of social relationships, also creates subjects.¹³ In a sense, I will argue that this also happened with the instrumentalization of football as a tool for violence (and peace), in which the sport became the means through which subjects and their collective relationships were contested and recreated. Lastly, another useful work is Alexander Fattal’s *Guerrilla Marketing*. In this work, Fattal explores the Colombian government’s strategies to incentivize the demobilization of leftist guerrilla fighters by turning them into consumer citizens.¹⁴ Perhaps the most revealing of these tactics as it pertains to this study is the use of footballs thrown from helicopters onto the insurgency groups’ camps to persuade their members that they could be watching the game from home.

¹¹ Robert A. Karl, *Forgotten Peace: Reform, Violence, and the Making of Contemporary Colombia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

¹² Ingrid J. Bolívar, “Deseos y Temores: reconocer la sociedad en la violencia?,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, no. 3 (1999): 110-116.

¹³ Ingrid J. Bolívar, “Descifrar nuestra hostilidad política: historias caegorías e intenciones,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, no. 36 (2010): 145-148.

¹⁴ Alexander L. Fattal, *Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

This is by no means a comprehensive account of all the studies that have been made in those fields; it also does not include all the fields that have studied the Colombian internal armed conflict. The objective here is to illustrate some of the approaches that have been taken to study and interpret the events that have shaped Colombia in the last decades from a historical and anthropological perspective. Furthermore, this brief account of previous studies evidences the trend of approaching the conflict as a subject usually associated with the traditional disciplines applied on subjects related to war, violence, and victims all over the world. There is, thus, space for alternative approaches that complement past research and can offer new perspectives coming from different fields—including the fields that study sports and their role in societies.

Previous Approaches to Football

Football is a sport that has spread around the world. It has reached all corners of the planet to the point where the International Football Association Federation (FIFA) has more country members than the United Nations. Its reach goes far beyond that of being just an athletic game to become a social phenomenon and a cultural practice. In his 974-page long seminal work on the global history of football, journalist and sociologist David Goldblatt begins his book with a pertinent question: “Is there any cultural practice more global than football?”¹⁵ Regardless of the answer, the very fact that this question could be asked illustrates the importance it has had in many parts of the world. As such, the academic and commercial literature on the sport and its importance

¹⁵ David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Soccer* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), xiv.

in societies is rich and abundant. It lays out an important precedent for what is being attempted here.

According to Robert Gordon and Marizanne Grundlingh (2016), it was anthropologist Max Gluckman who pioneered the study of sport, in particular football, through the social sciences. He made ground-breaking contributions in the process of founding of what is now primarily known as the sociology of sport.¹⁶ Through the years, scholars have studied an array of subjects through football such as its influence in international politics,¹⁷ the reflection of socioeconomic and geographical demography through the sport, and its role in reinforcing and contrasting prominent ideas of race, gender and class in societies.¹⁸ Furthermore, football has been the subject of many studies exploring national identities and how the sport plays an important part in their construction and interpretation.¹⁹ Within these, there has been research on the relationship between football and nation in countries such as England, Scotland and Germany.²⁰ Many scholars have also written on Spain and how the identities of the autonomous communities are reflected and confronted, like in the case of Catalanian independence, on the football field and through its symbols.²¹ This line of work has expanded beyond Europe and explored nations around the world, including the role of football in the changing politics and society of countries like Korea and Japan.²²

¹⁶ Robert Gordon and Marizanne Grundlingh, "Going for the Reds: Max Gluckman and the Anthropology of Football," in *New Ethnographies of Football in Europe*, ed. Alexandra Schwell *et al.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21-36.

¹⁷ Alexandra Schwell *et al.*, "People, Passions—but What about Politics?" in *New Ethnographies of Football in Europe*, ed. Alexandra Schwell *et al.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 228-234.

¹⁸ Richard Giulianotti, "The Cultural Politics of Play: Ethnicity, Gender and the 'Post-fan' Mentality," in *football: a sociology of the global game* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 146-165.

¹⁹ Richard Giulianotti, "The Twentieth-century Sport: Football, Class and Nation," in *football: a sociology of the global game* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 23-38.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Liz Crolley and David Hand, "Chapter 7: One nation, one team, one image: Catalunya and the Basque Country in Spain," in *Football and European Identity: Historical narratives through the press* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 119-134.

²² Liz Crolley and David Hand, "Chapter 11: Marshalling art: the portrayal of North East Asian football," in *Football and European Identity: Historical narratives through the press* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 177-197.

Significantly, there is also an important number of studies that have addressed the role of football in defining events and process in countries all over the world. To this regard, research is diverse, presenting examples that aim to understand how many African nations have interpreted and dealt with the enduring consequences of colonialism.²³ Moreover, other examples have looked at how football mediated the tense, often violent, relations between Serbia and Croatia after the breakup of Yugoslavia. In many ways, the sport was one of the few or only paths of interaction and communication that the two countries had, making the field a stage for nationalistic demonstrations but also the manifestation of a possible path to peace.²⁴

Recently, larger works have yielded comprehensive accounts of football in countries closer to the Colombian context. Jonathan Wilson (2016), for instance, wrote a detailed account of the history of football in Argentina. In his work *Angels with Dirty Faces*, he not only traces the origins of the sport and its athletic evolution but is very interested in its meanings for the Argentine society. Football, he concludes, has replaced outdated symbols of national identity like the *gaucho* and, nowadays, everything on the national agenda is represented in a dialogical manner on the field. An instance of this worth noting is Wilson's analysis of how the military dictatorship used the 1978 FIFA World Cup hosted by the country as an instrument to reinforce their power and distract the attention from its abuses.²⁵

In a similar study, sociologist David Goldblatt (2014) makes the argument that Brazil is a country that is the fifth largest country by area and population, that has the sixth or seventh largest

²³ Liz Crolley and David Hand, "Chapter 9: The colonial shadow: Africans in the French imagination," in *Football and European Identity: Historical narratives through the press* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 151-163.

²⁴ Ivan Dordević and Bojan Žikić, "Normalizing Political Relations through Football: the Case of Croatia and Serbia (1990-2013)," in *New Ethnographies of Football in Europe*, ed. Alexandra Schwell *et al.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 39-54.

²⁵ Jonathan Wilson, *Angels with Dirty Faces: How Argentinian Soccer Defined a Nation and Changed the Game Forever* (New York: Nation Books, 2016).

economy, and yet there is not a single field in which it excels beyond other countries except for one: football. In his work, titled *Futebol Nation: The Story of Brazil Through Soccer*, he explained what this implies for the country's society and how the sport is latent, if not very explicit, in all aspects of it. Goldblatt follows the social, political, and cultural developments through Brazil's history as told by players on the field and reflected by the game.²⁶

This thesis builds on how scholars have explored the role and importance of football, and sport in general, within the Latin American context from a historic perspective. In *Fútbol! Why Soccer Matters in Latin America*, Joshua Nadel argues that because football is interwoven into regional and national identities as well as historical narratives it helps explain the history of contemporary Latin America.²⁷ More specifically, Brenda Elsey has argued that sports mediated the international relationships between the United states and Latin American countries through the Pan-American games during the 1950s. She concludes that these games evidenced the end of the 'good neighbor' approach that had dominated the relationships earlier in the twentieth century and also became the stage in which cultural and political interests were expressed.²⁸ Additionally, in her book *Citizens and Sportsmen*, Elsey explores the development and evolution of football in Chile as it relates to politics and society. She argues that it integrated working-class men into urban politics, and that it "connected them to political parties, and served as venues of political critique."²⁹ In the context of the Colombian armed conflict, I argue that football served an equally important role in being used as a tool for the objectives of the actors that used it. Weaponized by

²⁶ David Goldblatt, *Futebol Nation: The Story of Brazil Through Soccer* (New York: Nation Books, 2014).

²⁷ Joshua H. Nadel, *Fútbol! Why Soccer Matters in Latin America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).

²⁸ Brenda Elsey, "Cultural Ambassadorship and the Pan-American Games of the 1950s," *The International Journal of the History of the Sport* 33, no. 1-2 (2016): 105-126.

²⁹ Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 2.

a plurality of actors, football in Colombia became a significant part of many peoples' experiences of the conflict, first as a source of violence, then as a space for peace and reconciliation. Pablo Alabraces, in two volumes he edited, *Futbologías*³⁰ and *Peligro de Gol*,³¹ also presents a useful work covering football and society in Latin America from a variety of perspectives from the social sciences and humanities. Particularly pertinent are those focusing on narratives and rituals of identity, violence, and politics. What I argue here builds and expands on what has been written by those scholars: the influence, significance and change of the sport in historically relevant processes that have shaped the countries in which they take place—in this case the internal conflict of Colombia.

Recently, others in academia have focused on the intersection of football and society specifically in the case of Colombia. The aforementioned Ingrid Bolívar, for instance, has studied how the process of professionalization of football during the 1940s and 1950s created foundational narratives of identity in Antioquia. This was because the 'entertaining' profession of football had no place in the prior narrative that emphasized 'Antioqueños' as hard and productive worker. At the time, football contested the social perception of their identity and created new one.³² During the conflict, football would be similarly used to contest, reinforce, destroy or alter narratives that fluctuated with time as violence and war changed and evolved. Finally, Peter Watson offers the clearest antecedent to this work as he analyses ex-president Juan Manuel Santos's use of football for political objectives during his presidency, particularly during the 2014 World Cup. Watson argues that it was a government wide implementation of the sport through Santos's discursive

³⁰ Pablo Alabraces, *Futbologías: Fútbol, Identidad y Violencia en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: CLASCO, 2013).

³¹ Pablo Alabraces, *Peligro de Gol: Estudios sobre deporte y sociedad en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: CLASCO, 2000).

³² Ingrid J. Bolivar, "Antioquia's Regional Narratives and the Challenges of Professional Football in Medellín during the 1950s and 1960s," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 37, no. 5 (2018): 582-597.

inclusion of football into subjects of the national agenda, the peace process and his reelection at the forefront of those. I largely draw from what Watson has established but go beyond that by looking at the role of football in the conflict as an evolving process that changed beginning in the early 2000s and culminated during Santos's presidential terms. In this work, I explore how the instrumentalization of football changed in that period until it occupied a significant place in Colombian society's understandings of the conflict and its ending.

Once again, this brief overview of the field is not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, it establishes that there is a consolidated framework of research on football and its meanings. These are all valuable studies that serve as a solid base from which to draw the delineations of the present study. They are also comparative instances that can help interpret and enrich our understandings of the Colombian case, elucidating at the same time its uniqueness and its repetitions towards a plausible global schema of the sport.

Finally, for the purposes of this work, one proposed conceptualization of football in previous research is particularly useful. As proposed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the theory of social fields is a conceptual framework that has been extended to football, where it has clarified the sport's presence, meanings, and uses. Under this theory, society is viewed as a structure comprised of several fields according to their own characteristics and those of other fields. A 'field', then, is made of social relationships that define its objects at play and the specific interests, creating fields like the economic, the political, and other micro-fields inside the macro-field of society. In this sense, Bourdieu and others like Jairo Clavijo have suggested the existence of the sports field.³³ This implies that it has its own distinctive objects and actors, and that it exists in interaction with other fields. As such, conceptualizing football as a field that makes part of the

³³ Sanchez and Clavijo Poveda, "Entre el orgullo y la indignación", 298-99.

social structure of Colombia is useful for analyzing how it has interacted with other fields and how its components have played a role in various process of identity, violence, and peace.

Questions and Approach

After reviewing previous approaches made by scholars towards the study of the internal conflict in Colombia and the sociology of football, multiple questions arise regarding the intersection of the two. What has been the role of football in the recent history of Colombia's armed conflict? How has it shaped the national identity of the country? How has the sport been present in the violence of the conflict (if it has been at all)? Did football play a role in the de-escalation of war and the following efforts of peacebuilding and reconciliation? These general subjects are some of the large questions that this work aims to answer.

This thesis studies the intersection between football and conflict within the Colombian context through the use and analysis of newspapers, official archives, published works, individual oral histories, and supporting secondary sources. These methods allow for more nuanced, often complicating, answers to the big guiding questions. Much attention is given to important distinctions in the meanings, formation, context, and interpretation of the actors and objects involved so as to give a comprehensive, yet rigorous, framework that enables an informed understanding of the subject. In light of this objective, this work is divided into three sections, each addressing a central concept—identity, violence, and peace, respectively—that are in constant redefinition and reinterpretation as part of the process explored in this study. The first section is interested in understanding the historical origins and development of both football and the armed

conflict in Colombia before arriving at the target time frame of interest, 2000-2016, where both of these participate in the dialogical construction of a national identity. The second chapter explores the interaction and intersection of football and violence since the beginning of the century. Here, both violence and football are understood as social fields that transgress each other, creating in the process new meanings of the sport and defining how those involved in the conflict understand their experiences within it. Finally, the third chapter is concerned with the use and practice of football in the interests of resistance, peace, and reconciliation. To that end, it is addressed how football was instrumentalized as a tool, a space, and an activity by many actors in diverse ways corresponding to their interests.

In the first chapter, “The Construction of a National Identity”, I lay down the historical context that leads to and defines the period studied (2000-2016). I do so by drawing from a variety of secondary sources that help frame the events and processes with which I construct my argument through brief accounts of the recent history of Colombia and the history of football in Colombia. Then, I argue that football is a crucial aspect of people’s understanding of nationhood and the perception of a national identity, albeit not uncontested. The second chapter, “Football as a Social Field of Violence”, deals with the intersection between football and violence. I argue that football was weaponized by the actors of the conflict as a tool to achieve their objectives and impose their agenda over the group suffering from the violence. I do so through the use of exemplary cases that elucidate the ways in which the symbols, spaces, and objects of the sport were targeted and used for their value to the victims. In chapter three, “Football in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation”, I explore multiple initiatives that have instrumented football in their efforts to recover from violence and rebuild their lives and identities after being affected by the conflict. The argument looks at the different ways in which these initiatives used and benefitted from the sport, including their

effectiveness and the reaction of other actors to them. These differences are significant to the extent that they reflect and are explained by larger political and historical positions—revealing the discrepancies and heterogeneity of reconciliation in Colombia through these initiatives, some starting decades ago, others still being contested.

The study of the role of football in the recent history of Colombia's armed conflict suggests a change that can be witnessed during the early 2000s, in which football was no longer affected by violence as an extension of the conflict. Instead of being a passive victim of the war overflowing onto those that participated in the sport, football became an active tool that actors in the conflict used to expand their agency in service of their objectives. The first examples of this illustrate the weaponization of the game as a way to inflict violence and impose the perpetrator's interests by using the spaces, subjects, and symbols associated to football to contest the collective identity and the social fabric of the community. With time and with the de-escalation of violence, the same aspects of the sport were again instrumentalized but for the purposes of peace and reconciliation. From local initiatives to government programs, these uses were expressed in diverse ways to disparate degrees of effectiveness, in turn giving them different meanings. It is in these contrasting experiences that the growing importance of football for people's understandings of nation and conflict can be better grasped. While the instrumentalization of football was widely present in the conflict, its expressions, meanings, and implications varied depending on the subject using and interacting with it.

Chapter 1

The Construction of a National Identity

With the ball on his foot and the national colors on his chest, the player who embodies the nation marches off to win glory on far-off battlefields. If he returns defeated, the warrior becomes a fallen angel.

We are because we win. If we lose, we no longer exist. Without question, the national uniform has become the clearest symbol of collective identity, not only in poor or small countries whose place on the map depends on soccer.

Eduardo Galeano

Recent History of Colombia

On November 6th, 1985, at around 11:30 a.m., twenty-five men and ten women forcefully entered Colombia's Palace of Justice in the center of Bogotá. They were members of the M-19 guerrilla—a left-leaning insurgency group created in 1970—and would go on to commit one of the most defining moments in the nation's recent history as they violently took control of the building. The action was part of a publicity campaign to draw attention to their movement, a type of action for which they were known for. In fact, this was not the first instance in which the armed group took this approach: they famously stole the independence hero Simon Bolivar's sword in 1974³⁴ and took over the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in 1980 after staging a false football game as a distraction in front of the building.³⁵

³⁴ Jorge Aníbal Gómez Gallego, José Roberto Herrera Vergara and Nilson Pinilla Pinilla, *Informe final: Comisión de la Verdad sobre los hechos del Palacio de Justicia* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario, 2010), 19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

On that morning of 1985, the government sent all available army battalions to the location as a response. After crossfire that took the lives of civilians and soldiers alike, the government gave the order to retake the Palace at 2:05 p.m., after which four military tanks entered the building.³⁶ The ensuing events are unclear, and most accounts of what took place in the building are inconsistent at best, contradictory at worst. Over the period of 27 hours—from the time the attack began until the government officially declared itself to be in control of the building again—the events resulted in three fires, one of which destroyed most of the left side of the building, claimed a total of 98 victims, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,³⁷ and resulted in the forceful disappearance of 11 people. To this day, many questions remain unanswered, particularly those that refer to the ethical issue of government's response and actions—for instance, those related to the eleven disappeared who were almost certainly tortured and killed by the military, or the fact that multiple magistrates were killed by bullets fired by the army and not the M-19 guerrilla.³⁸

But perhaps one aspect that is often left out when these events are recounted in newspapers and the media as well as in the public collective memory of those 27 hours is precisely the most pertinent for this work. Between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. of that Wednesday, the same time that the third and largest fire that destroyed half of the building began,³⁹ the then Minister of Communications, Noemí Sanín, started calling some of the most prominent radio and TV journalists active at the time. The message was clear: they were to refrain from all references of what was going on in the capital under the threat of being forcefully closed by the military. Instead,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁷ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, “Caso 10738: Holocausto del Palacio de Justicia,” Organización de los Estados Americanos, 2011.

³⁸ Gómez Gallego, Herrera Vergara and Pinilla Pinilla, *Informe final*, 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

they had to broadcast different programming: football.⁴⁰ There was a game scheduled to be played in Bogotá, less than ten miles away from the burning Palace of Justice, between Millonarios and Unión Magdalena. According to historian and journalist Alberto Galvis, games were not usually broadcast at the time; it was argued that this could decrease stadium assistance.⁴¹ But that day, with no prior notice, millions of Colombians watched the ball roll between Millonarios and Unión Magdalena, indifferent to the flames and bullets forever leaving their mark in the nation's history.

Sanín repeatedly denied these instances of censorship, even in front of the Truth Commission established many years later. However, one of the journalists that received the Minister's call, Yamid Amat, recalls Sanín saying long after the events that this “was the only way to save the democracy.”⁴² Whatever divergences can be found between each version, the fact is that football was purposefully used as a tool for distraction and misinformation. Most people do not know about the explicit orders from the government to broadcast the game, including high school history teacher and Millonarios fan, Camilo Villamizar, who vividly remembers “the images of that match and the images of the burning building as a single event.”⁴³ Football, thus, was an alternative weapon of the government, one that allowed it to hide the dramatic scenes—and its negligence—at the center of the capital. If anything, this was a strong precedent, a symptom, for what became a trend in subsequent decades as violence and football often intersected. Its instrumentalization and the nature of such relationship shifted, but the sport remained closely tied to the country's violence, particularly to the conflict.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴¹ “Millonarios – Unión Magdalena (1985),” Señal Colombia Deportes, Youtube, December 15, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB8d_59L3Co

⁴² Gómez Gallego, Herrera Vergara and Pinilla Pinilla, *Informe final*, 90.

⁴³ Personal communication, August 9, 2019.

Patterns and singularities

The history of the armed conflict in Colombia can be understood as the escalation and continuation of a nation-wide violence that began over sixty years ago. Although the instability and inequality that produced the conflict in the first place have characterized the country for much longer, the events of the *Bogotazo*—the assassination of political leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and the ensuing riots in April 1948—seem to be the germinal place for the modern conflict. Moreover, while the modalities, actors, and intensity under which the conflict operated changed over time, a general pattern can be seen from the distance of history. As Marco Palacio's book title suggests, Colombia has been a country that for decades existed between efforts at legitimacy and the pervasiveness of violence.⁴⁴

The conflict was rooted in Colombia's circumstances of social inequality and poverty, an economic model centered on the support of businessmen and landowners and distrustful of the *campesinos*, the tolerance of the government regarding military abuses, and the absence of the State and its institutions in most rural areas of the country.⁴⁵ Because of its origination in these deep ills that affect the daily lives of the majority in Colombia, the armed conflict has been the main, if not the only, subject of concern around which the entire society and politics have revolved for over half a century. Understanding its evolution is a necessary step to study any topic in the recent years due to its prevalence.

The period of interest exists within a specific frame of political, social, and economic conditions that shape the events being studied. The internal conflict is probably the most characteristic of these conditions. Fought mainly by three groups—guerillas, paramilitaries and

⁴⁴ Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia*.

⁴⁵ Melo, *Historia minima*, 281.

the military—it has occupied a central role in the national agenda, to the point in which most other aspects of the country have revolved around and been shaped by it. These conditions are not independent from each other or from the historical trends that have constructed the contemporary Colombia. Conversely: there is a clear continuum since the middle of the twentieth century in which one of the biggest trends is the escalation of the conflict in all its dimensions to the point where violence became commonplace. Indeed this trend can be most explicitly evidenced by the evolution of the homicide rate for every 100,000 people: it was 32 in 1960 (the highest in the world at the time); 32 in 1965; 34 in 1970; 39 in 1975; 20 in 1980; 57 in 1985; 86 in 1990; and 95 in 1993.⁴⁶ According to historian Marco Palacios, these numbers made Colombia the country with the highest rate of murder in the world.⁴⁷

Because of this, an overview of the recent history of Colombia that highlights the economic, political, and social factors at play in the creation and evolution of the conflict provide context for a better understanding of the place that football occupied. This historical account begins with the assassination of the political leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in 1948, an event known as the *Bogotazo*, and the ensuing period of *La Violencia* during the fifties and the military dictatorship of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-57). It follows with the bipartisan ruling known as the Frente Nacional (1957-74), the return to single party governments, to finally address how the country was stalled between violence and peace. The *Bogotazo* is here chosen as the beginning of Colombia's recent history as it is understood as a breaking point from which a thread that continues

⁴⁶ Marco Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia: Colombia 1875-1994* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1995), 330.

⁴⁷ Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia*, 330.

until today can be recognized. It was with that germinal event in 1948 that “Colombia entered a period of civil war form which it had never fully emerged.”⁴⁸

Furthermore, to fully recognize the changing character of the conflict as well as its protagonists and contexts, the four periods defined by the Historical Memory Group (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, GMH by its Spanish initials) are used as to characterize shifts in the modalities of the armed conflict over time. The first period (1958-1982) was the transition from bipartisan violence between the followers of the two political parties to subversive violence; the second (1982-1996) comprised the expansion of the guerrillas, the creation of paramilitary groups, and the partial collapse of the State; the third period (1995-2005) was marked by the escalation of the armed conflict; and, lastly, the fourth period (2005-2012) was characterized by the military counteraction of the State and the failed attempts to establish peace with the paramilitary.⁴⁹

La Violencia and the military dictatorship (1948-1957)

By the time Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, one of the most prominent figures and a presidential candidate for the Liberal Party, was assassinated in April 9, 1948 violence in Colombia existed as confrontations between the supporters of the two main political parties in the country: Liberals and Conservatives.⁵⁰ Each side saw the creation of armed groups that supported them: the government backed ‘*chulavita*’ police and hired hitmen for the latter, and liberal guerrillas and communist self-

⁴⁸ Carlos A. Ospina, Thomas A. Marks and David H. Ucko, “Colombia and the War-to-Peace Transition,” *Military Review* 96, no. 4 (2016): 40.

⁴⁹ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 2013), 111.

⁵⁰ Jorge Orlando Melo, *Historia mínima de Colombia* (Madrid: Turner Publicaciones, 2017), 213.

defense peasant movements for the former.⁵¹ The death of the Liberal leader provoked an immediate response of his followers, with a national reach, and intensified the clashes between the two groups. Between April 9th and the night of the 10th, 2,000 people in Bogotá and 500 in the rest of the country died in what was later known as the *Bogotazo*.⁵² It was this event that sparked the period of *La Violencia* in which bipartisan violence radicalized in most regions of the country.⁵³

The next year, 1949, liberal guerrillas started acting in the departments of Antioquia, Tolima, and the region of the Llanos Orientales (Eastern Plains), reaching large numbers of participation ranging between 2,000 and 3,000 members by 1952.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the first forms of communist-inclined guerrillas were created in 1950 in the departments of Cundinamarca and Tolima, gaining the support of the Communist Party (Partido Comunista, or PC) in the same year.⁵⁵ The formation of these organized groups added to the already crude violence that took place all over the country. Analyst Paul Oquist calculates that 193,017 people died between 1948 and 1966, most of them between 1948 and 1953.⁵⁶

It was in 1953 that the Army General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla rose to power with a coup backed by the military, the Catholic Church, and most of the actors sidelined by the deposed Laureano Gómez, leader of the Conservative party and president after the *Bogotazo*.⁵⁷ He came into government under the promise of the reestablishment of peace and a reshaping of Colombian institutions. Under Rojas Pinilla's tight control, the government became dedicated to the cult of personality of the dictator, which was further reinforced by the economic boom of the time due to

⁵¹ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 112.

⁵² Melo, *Historia mínima*, 215.

⁵³ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 112.

⁵⁴ Melo, *Historia mínima*, 219.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵⁶ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 115.

⁵⁷ Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia*, 211.

the rise in the price of coffee.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, press censorship and other forms of oppression became commonplace and the government started to lose support from many sides as they tried to create a new constitution through a National Constitutional Assembly that supported Rojas Pinilla. After only four years in power, his antagonism towards most sectors of the elite and his efforts to perpetuate his power resulted in his stepping down.⁵⁹ He was unable to attain any form of peace: violence had increased by the time he resigned.⁶⁰

From bipartisan to subversive violence (1958-1982)

After the military dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, the two dominant parties made a bipartisan deal to alternate the presidency for the next twenty-four years, giving Liberals and Conservatives three presidential periods each.⁶¹ With an agreement that eliminated almost any trace of democracy, the conflict historically dominated by the confrontation between political affiliations took an abrupt turn: what was technically a single-party government made any partisan (Liberal-Conservative) violence meaningless. Instead, the government now focused upon fighting new sources of violence: subversive, leftist guerrillas. These organization, primarily created during the 60s, came to dominate many rural areas where the State was negligent, if even present. The Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC, by its Spanish initials) were officially created in 1965 after the military bombed the *independent republics* in Marquetalia, Tolima—the central

⁵⁸ Melo, *Historia minima*, 226.

⁵⁹ Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia*, 217.

⁶⁰ Melo, *Historia minima*, 226-28.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

agglomeration of the group.⁶² Almost at the same time were created the National Liberation Army (ELN) in 1962 and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) in 1967, also of leftist ideology.⁶³ These organizations were founded to protest Colombia's land ownership: large estate owners controlled the majority of the land useful for agriculture and the government offered little representation or warranties for the rural population.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, these subversive groups did not dominate the national agenda during the 60s and 70s as they were confined to the peripheral zones where the *campesino* was mostly affected and for which the elite had little regard.⁶⁵

With the creation of the 19th of April Movement (M-19) in 1974 by a dissident group that broke off from the FARC communist guerrillas began to into the center of attention. M-19 used propagandistic actions in the capital, Bogotá, to bring national attention to this phenomenon.⁶⁶ The most famous of these actions being the takeover of the Palace of Justice, the building where the Supreme Court of Justice operated. When this happened in November 1985, the government ordered fully armed tanks to enter the building. In the two-day chaos, over 100 people died, including Supreme Court magistrates, under unexplained, ambiguous circumstances in what is now known as the Holocaust of the Palace of Justice.⁶⁷

By 1982, the national landscape of violence was characterized by the continuous expansion of the communist guerrillas under the permissive policies of the governments. It was also by that time that the Americas' cocaine boom prompted the creation of the drug cartels, particularly in Medellín and Cali.⁶⁸ During the rest of the 1980s, the cartels would strengthen to the point of

⁶² Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 117.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁴ Melo, *Historia mínima*, 234.

⁶⁵ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 127.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁶⁷ Melo, *Historia mínima*, 234.

⁶⁸ Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia*, 217.

threatening national stability. At the same time, paramilitary groups organized all around the country to become a new prominent actor within the internal conflict.

The State collapses, violence increases (1982-1996)

The end of the sharing of power between Liberals and Conservatives and the return to single party governments saw the Conservative Belisario Betancur's administration (1982-1986) make new efforts to reach a peace deal with the guerrillas, especially with the FARC.⁶⁹ However, these attempts failed. By 1986 violence had increased by 50%.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the expansion of the guerrillas and their influence over larger territories started to be resisted by self-defense groups that sought in arms the protection that the State failed to give them. The evolution of these groups into highly organized paramilitary organizations was also financed and supported by the military forces, the latter enraged by the passive stance of the government.⁷¹

Each illegal actor chose particular modalities of violence to assert their dominance: the guerrillas used kidnapping, the cartels used terrorist attacks like bombs and high-profile assassinations, and the paramilitaries used massacres to instill fear.⁷² All this was largely funded by drug trafficking as during the 1990s the number of hectares of illicit coca plantations and tons of cocaine production rose exponentially. Colombia was no longer just the refining and distribution center but also, by 1998, the world's largest producer.⁷³

⁶⁹ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 136.

⁷⁰ Melo, *Historia mínima*, 257.

⁷¹ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 139.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷³ Susana V. Norman, "Narcotization as Security Dilemma: The FARC and Drug Trade in Colombia," *Studied in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 8 (2018): 641.

During the late 80s multiple high-profile assassinations—including a Minister of Justice, well known journalists, and three presidential candidates for the 1989 election—led to a state of crisis in which the State had little control over the affairs of the country.⁷⁴ Under César Gaviria's government (1990-1994), a new constitution was created in 1991 and Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellín cartel and the biggest sponsor of terrorist attacks, was killed in 1993, ending the period of narcoterrorism although not the cartel.⁷⁵ By the time Escobar was killed in Medellín, the homicide rate in the city for every 100,00 people reached 400,⁷⁶ a number suggestive of the dimensions of violence at the time.

Guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the fight for control (1996-2005)

In the decade between 1996 and 2005, the internal armed conflict reached its highest levels of violence as the leftist guerrillas, the extreme right paramilitary, and the government fought for control of the country's territory. The paramilitary forces increased the number and frequencies of massacres during these years; they also organized into the United Self-Defense of Colombia (AUC) and participated in the elections of 2002, putting 250 mayors and 26 congressmen in power.⁷⁷ The dominant guerrilla during those years was the FARC, which by 2002 had reached 28,000 members and were present in 622 municipalities—or about 60% of the country.⁷⁸ During

⁷⁴ Melo, *Historia minima*, 257.

⁷⁵ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 155.

⁷⁶ Katherine Vallejo, Jose Tapias, & Ivan Arroyave, "Trends of Rural/Urban Homicide in Colombia, 1992-2015: Internal Armed Conflict and Hints for Postconflict," *BioMed Research International* (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1155/2018/6120909>.

⁷⁷ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 160.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

this period, the most inhumane modalities of violence became customary everywhere, particularly in rural areas.

It was that same year, 2002, when Álvaro Uribe Vélez was elected on his promise to fight back against the guerrillas. He did so effectively as from 2002 to 2007 the FARC were decimated and forced out of many areas under their control for decades. During the same period, the homicide rate decreased by 50%.⁷⁹ But he accomplished this through many illegal channels and modalities. The most documented of these were false positives: innocent *campesinos* that were assassinated by the military and dressed as guerrilla fighters in order exaggerate the number killed and reinforce the effectiveness of his tactics. Uribe was extremely permissive with the paramilitary groups, who also attacked the guerrillas.⁸⁰

The national homicide rate for every 100,000 people went from 256 people in 2002, the worst year of the conflict, to 143 people in 2005; this fast decline became almost stagnant until 2010⁸¹, when Juan Manuel Santos became president. The heart of the conflict was largely unchanged: in 2002, 1.1% of landowners controlled 52.2% of all the private land in Colombia.⁸²

The decline of violence and the beginning of peace (2005-2016)

As mentioned above, violence steadily decreased in the five years prior to 2007 as the government forced the FARC guerrilla to retreat to their original territories of influence. However, the homicide rate became stagnant and what had been effective counter-insurgency strategies were

⁷⁹ Melo, *Historia minima*, 276.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁸¹ Vallejo, "Trends of Rural/Urban Homicide", 5.

⁸² Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 178.

no longer viable since to continue with the military offensive would have been, under the new conditions, costly and ineffective.⁸³ What was indeed a big change in the landscape of the national conflict was the peace deal signed with the AUC in 2008. The talks had begun in 2004 and by the time they were signed, the process was considered a failure as it neglected the rights of the victims and gave practical impunity to the former members of the paramilitary group. Furthermore, the signed agreement had little warranties for the demobilized combatants, thus many of them ended up retaking the arms although not as unified. A new upsurge of paramilitary activity was seen in 2011 and 2012.⁸⁴

At the end of Uribe Vélez' second presidential period (2006-2010) many of the illegal methods employed by the military and the government became public and, with the failed peace process with the AUC, there was concern that his authoritarianism had undermined Colombian institutions. While he had been very successful in breaking the FARC's homogenous control in many areas of the country, his militaristic approach was no longer viable. It was then, in 2010, that Juan Manuel Santos was elected as president under the promise of continuing the hardline stance against armed groups, a promise he quickly broke.⁸⁵

In 2011, Santos began to open channels of communication with the FARC, and in 2012 an official negotiating table was established in Havana, Cuba.⁸⁶ The peace talks again initiated a decline in the homicide rate, which fell in 2015 to levels that had not been seen in thirty years.⁸⁷ When the final agreement was finished, it was put to a vote by the Colombian people in a plebiscite in 2016. The vote against the agreement won by a small difference. The plan's rejection by the

⁸³ Melo, *Historia minima*, 278.

⁸⁴ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 184.

⁸⁵ Melo, *Historia minima*, 278.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁸⁷ Vallejo, "Trends of Rural/Urban Homicide", 5.

people was largely due to disagreements with the legal procedures for the demobilization of ex-FARC combatants, mainly concerned with their impunity. This was reinforced by a propaganda campaign from former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez who appealed to the emotions of people by labeling the negotiations as being crafted by *castro-chavismo* ideology (influenced by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez). After making a series of changes to the document in response to the claims of the people, the Peace Agreement with the FARC guerrilla was approved by Congress in late 2016, making the deal official.⁸⁸

History of Football in Colombia

If there is one thing to take from a brief overview of the history of football in Colombia is that the country's political history and history of the sport follow very similar paths. This is no coincidence as they have determined and responded to each other in a form of dialogue. The violence and instability that have characterized the country since 1948 has permeated so much into football that it cannot be understood without considering it. At the same time, the sport has been present and used in some of the most important and symbolic moments that define the history of the country and the development of the circumstances that characterize contemporary Colombia. Neither of them has ever entirely escaped the other and, while there are examples in which one serves to hide or counteract the other, they are connected. To study the place and role of football is, by extension, to study Colombian society—its identity, its people, and its shaping events.

The arrival of football in Colombia followed a similar pattern to that of the rest of world: the English established commercial harbors in the last years of the nineteenth century, in

⁸⁸ Melo, *Historia minima*, 279-80.

Colombia's case in the coastal city of Barranquilla where people started playing the game. It increasingly grew in popularity and then spread through the British-built railways across the country.⁸⁹ It differs from other countries though by the relatively late appearance of a formal national football federation (now known as the *Selección Colombia*) in 1936—the parallel institution was created by Argentina in 1893, by Uruguay in 1900, and by Paraguay in 1906, for example. Anthropologist David Quitián Roldán argues that this comparative delay can be explained by the prevalence of violence in the country, which limited the spread and formalization of the sport since people were more concerned with war and conflict.⁹⁰

By the 1940s there was relative peace in the cities under Liberal hegemony, opening the door for football to become the most popular sport. When the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in the *Bogotazo* took place in 1948, there were already efforts to create a professional league under the Federation's supervision when violence broke out. The first professional championship in Colombia began in August of that year.⁹¹ Political scientist Andrés Dávila explains that this was no coincidence—the start of professionalism in football is closely related to the political state of the country as the government used the sport as a distraction from the ongoing unrest.⁹² This is indeed evidenced by the actions of the President and of Congress. The President sponsored the money to bring in international players in order to attract more attention, and Congress used the State budget to finance the 10,000 peso prize for the champion.⁹³ In this sense, the very foundation

⁸⁹ David Quitián Roldán and Olga Urrea, “Fútbol, radio y nación (1946-1974): una visión antropológica de la violencia en Colombia”, *Espacio Abierto, Cuaderno Venezolano de Sociología* 25, no. 2 (2016): 59.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Soccer* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 277.

⁹² Andrés Dávila and Catalina Londoño, “La nación bajo un uniforme: Fútbol e identidad en Colombia 1985-2000”, in *Futbológicas: Fútbol, Identidad y Violencia en América Latina*, ed. Pablo Alabarces (Buenos Aires: CLASCO, 2003), 131.

⁹³ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 279.

of professional football was closely related to the violent reality of Colombia. And this was only the first precedent of the interconnected history of the two.

The following six years, until 1954, were a golden period for Colombian football. This was a period known as *El Dorado* due to the incredible level of football due to the presence of star players from all the region, and later also European players attracted by the quality of football and money. But the very factors that allowed Colombian clubs to dominate the sport in these years were in direct violation of the regulations established by the International Football Association Federation (FIFA) which held financial limits to what teams could spend on players. The latter forced the Colombian football league's governing institution, the Dimayor, and its members to abide to their rules if they wanted to participate in international tournaments and, most importantly, if the national team was to be a member of the Federation.⁹⁴ The clubs obeyed, but the fact that they violated such norms was the first illustration of another aspect that would characterize the country's football until the end of the century: the relationship between the sport and illegality.⁹⁵

Between violence and illegality

This triangular relationship between football, violence, and illegality reached its height in the 1980s as exemplified by three events. First, the FIFA had granted Colombia the right to host in 1986 the World Cup, the most important tournament in football. But by the end of the 1982 World Cup in Spain, Colombia had descended into chaos as the leftist guerrillas grew in size and power and the drug cartels in Cali and Medellín expanded with the cocaine boom. The resulting

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁹⁵ Dávila and Londoño, "La nación bajo un uniforme", 132.

context of violence and insecurity forced FIFA to reconsider their decision and, in the end, it was Mexico that hosted the only World Cup that Colombia was close to organizing. This has been the only change of the organizing country in the history of FIFA.⁹⁶

The second event is related to one of the most defining events in the internal armed conflict: the aforementioned takeover of the Palace of Justice by the M-19 guerrilla in 1985. After the guerrilla fighters took control of the building, the government sent in armed tanks and the military to retake it. In the midst of confusion and unrest for what was considered as an inadequate response from the State, government officials prohibited all media from broadcasting or even mentioning what was going on. Instead, as noted in the introduction, the Minister of Communications at the time ordered that a game that was scheduled for that same night in Bogotá not only be played but also televised and commented by all media sources, both in TV and radio, under the threat of otherwise being shut down by the armed forces. In this way football became, once again, a distraction to cover the violence that was present in the very capital of the country.⁹⁷ That 2-0 game between Millonarios and Unión Magdalena was a State sponsored spectacle designed to hide a defining moment in the national history, just like in 1948. (See Figures 1 and 2 with the synchronous images, the first being hidden from the public by the second).

⁹⁶ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 635-36.

⁹⁷ Martin Lleras, “El partido que ocultó la toma del Palacio de Justicia”, *Hablaelbalón*, July 17, 2018, <https://hablaelbalon.com/balon-de-cuero/futbol-oculto-toma-del-palacio-justicia>



Figure 1. Palace of Justice in flames. November 6, 1985.⁹⁸



Figure 2. Millonarios (2) vs. Unión Magdalena (0). November 6, 1985.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ “Millonarios – Unión Magdalena (1985),” Señal Colombia Deportes, YouTube, December 15, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB8d_59L3Co

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, football was not only used by official institutions. Most of the big clubs in the cities—including Atlético Nacional from Medellín, Millonarios and Santa Fe from Bogotá, and Deportivo Cali and América from Cali—were controlled and funded by drug lords and the cartels. They used their teams not only for their own personal entertainment, but also to gain popularity amongst the people; it was also another way of competing between each other. The influence that they had over professional football was so extensive that when Hernán Botero Moreno, a leading member of the Medellín cartel and the *president* of Atletico Nacional, was extradited to the United States for drug trafficking and money laundering, the Colombian league shut down one week in solidarity with him.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, football went beyond a medium of entertainment and appeasement—like most aspects in the Colombian society, football was touched by violence too. While this is was sadly illustrated in many examples of referee bribing, extortion, and assassinations, it was in the most significant event of Colombian football during the 90s that violence would become most explicit in the sport. The national team went to play the 1994 World Cup in the United States as favorites after beating Argentina 5-0 in the qualifiers leading up to the tournament. However, the Selección was quickly eliminated in the group stage after an own goal from the captain Andrés Escobar. After returning to Colombia defeated and humiliated, Escobar was shot six times in the chest by the body guard of the Gallón brothers, paramilitary leaders and drug lords.¹⁰¹ Over 120,00 people attended his funeral.¹⁰² This was an early and very public suggestion of what became common during the early 2000s: football, its space, and its actors were also a subject of violence.

¹⁰⁰ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 646.

¹⁰¹ Jose Andres Sanchez and Jairo Clavijo Poveda, “Entre el orgullo y la indignación: La Selección Colombiana de Futbol 1993-1994, una mirada antropológica”, *Estudios socioculturales del deporte. Desarrollos, tránsitos y miradas* 154, no. 845 (2018): 300.

¹⁰² Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 788.

The rest of the 90s and the following decade were a midpoint between violence and peace in which football struggled to find stability, just like the entire country did. Colombia was granted the hosting of the 2001 Copa América, South America's national team tournament, which exhibited both trends. In the months leading to the cup, there were bombing in Cali, Medellín, and Bogotá—all host cities—threatening the organization and opening the possibility that it would cancel the event. The situation was so fragile that even Argentina and Canada decided not risk it and resigned their spots. Conversely, during the actual tournament, there was a successful and bilateral ceasefire between the government and the illegal armed groups, leading to an entire month of relative peace: the tournament was carried out normally and Colombia won (its biggest success at the national team level).¹⁰³

It would not be until 2012 that the Selección Colombia would reach again world recognition. By the end of that year, the national team was ranked fifth best in the world by the FIFA—an incredible rise from 36th at the beginning of the year. The rise was steady as it went to be fourth in 2013 and reached its highest ever position in 2014 when it was third. After the 2014 World Cup, it lost some spots but remained in the top 10 with the exception of 2017 (13th) and 2018 (14th). The marked improvement lead to a rise in its popularity, both inside and outside the country, and coincided with the development and signing of the Peace Accords with the FARC guerrilla. As it will be argued in detail later, these were not entirely coincidental and existed within a symbiotic relationship between president Juan Manuel Santos and the Selección.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 814-15.

In Search of a National Identity

The value and importance of studying football as a vector of understanding a society, a nation, or a historical period has been established above. The role the sport has played in the areas of constructing nationhood, in defining and perpetuating political movements and moments, and its significant influence in different societies is not a phenomenon unique to Colombia. Conversely: most of the literature written on the subject addresses better known cases like England, Brazil, and Argentina. Football is a crucial aspect that should be taken into account when aiming to get a better understanding of a given society in which the sport is so important as it is in Colombia.

This is particularly important in the country's context because, as Andrés Dávila argues, there are few, if any, symbols, institutions, or idols that cluster the collective identities and that serve as a unifying object in the construction of nationhood.¹⁰⁴ Elaborating on this idea, Dávila says that “we [Colombians] do not have a revolution. We were liberated by a Venezuelan. We do not have any *caudillos*. So, around what do we construct our identity?”¹⁰⁵ On this, Arturo Charria, the director of the Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation (Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación), largely agrees. He adds that “Our binding element as a nation is grief, loss, orphanhood—in that sense feeling torn.”¹⁰⁶ Something that strongly resonates with Dávila's view of football, as he argues that the national team has not really ever won, “and the one time we won, there were 96 deaths.” He highlights that, because of this, the construction of an identity around football goes through the emotional and passionate, not through the rational.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Dávila and Londoño, “La nación bajo un uniforme”, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Personal communication, August 20, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Personal communication, August 9, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Personal communication, August 20, 2019.

In that search for a field of Colombian society in which the ‘us’ of all peoples converge, football has gained an advantage over most options. This goes beyond theory and observation as a nation-wide survey carried out in 2013 found that 94% of Colombians thought that this sport was important. This is not only for their daily lives, but also in many other domains according to 92% of the surveyed people who agreed that football was important in all areas including the community, the neighborhood, the municipality, the department, the country, and worldwide.¹⁰⁸ Numbers like these demonstrate that football is not limited to an activity of entertainment but that it also has important implications in the reality of the citizens. And it is echoed in the opinions of people that do not study football as an academic subject. For instance, Efraín Gutierrez, a private driver in Bogotá, asserts with conviction that football “is the only [thing] that unites all, all, all the country. There is no regionalism, no *barras bravas* from any side: it is a single family.”¹⁰⁹ Another example is Marvin Díaz, a nurse at a health center, who believes in the unifying power of the national team and argues that “it really teaches us that we must share and work like that, like a team.”¹¹⁰ The importance of the sport is underlined in most people’s perception of it in relation to the national identity, something that unites all Colombians under a single flag (or jersey, in this case).

But this shared idea does not go uncontested. Some, like Alfonso Rodríguez, a retired soldier from the army, find this association shallow and erroneous. Rodríguez lost his two legs and left arm after stepping on a landmine set by the guerrilla when he was on duty, back when he used to love and play football. “When I came back from my injuries, I realized people valued more the flag when the *Selección* was playing than when a soldier gave his life for the country,” he says,

¹⁰⁸ Centro Nacional de Consultoría, *El Poder del Fútbol* (Bogotá: Pregraf Impresores, 2014), 20-21.

¹⁰⁹ Personal communication, August 15, 2019.

¹¹⁰ Personal communication, August 15, 2019.

“so I disconnected from football, from what it means and its passion—I don’t care if the *Selección* plays or wins.” He adds that it is troubling for him to see how a team of unsuccessful players that do not go beyond the quarterfinals of the World Cup are hailed as heroes and yet, no one honored his fellow soldiers who died serving those same people.¹¹¹ Rodríguez highlights the commonplace juxtaposition of football and nation in people’s imaginaries, but this extends to explicit messages in spaces like the media, as is the case of *El Tiempo*’s front cover the day when Colombia was no longer host of the Copa América 2001 due to violence: the national flag, patriotic symbol, is shown waving just above a large-scale football (Figure 3). Others contest the idea from a perspective of inclusion, arguing that the idea that the national team represents the national identity is illusory and exclusive. This is the case of Gonzalo de Francisco, political scientist and part of the negotiating team in past peace processes with guerrillas like the M-19 and the EPL. He does not deny the power of the *Selección* to create a sense of unity and nation, but he points out it does not include groups as important as the indigenous populations and even a large percentage of women.¹¹² The depth and strength of football as a unifying symbol of collective identity for *all* Colombians is certainly a subject that is open to debate and contestation. But what Rodríguez’s words point at is a very evident passionate and emotional association between football and a *perceived* national identity. Whether it is a good one, or whether it should be one, or not, is a judgment of a different nature.

¹¹¹ Personal communication, August 12, 2019.

¹¹² Personal communication, July 26, 2019.



Figure 3. *El Tiempo* front cover. June 28, 2001.¹¹³

It is in the general perception and conception of football as a converging space that its importance for the construction of a national identity can be argued. According to Pablo Alabarces, this sport becomes a symbolic arena that is a prime location to study, by extrapolation, characteristics of society.¹¹⁴ This arena is created by narratives of community that are anchored in

¹¹³ Redacción El Tiempo, "Colombia perdió la Copa," *El Tiempo*, June 28, 2001. Photo by author.

¹¹⁴ Pablo Alabarces, *Peligro de gol: estudios sobre deporte y sociedad en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2000): 214.

the rivalry between teams—from the local to the international level. The popularity of football and the natural spaces that it creates for rivals makes these narratives more easily internalized by the members of the community. In turn becoming a conductor of a sense of belonging, in this case, of nationalism.¹¹⁵ The prevalence and reach of mass media amplify this process. This is what David Quitián and Olga Urrea’s argument is based on: the advent of mass radio stations and their increased reach happened at the same time that football turned professional in Colombia, the former being incentivized by the latter. In a country in which most news stories are related to the pervasive violence that affects the lives of the majority of the population and where the State has been so absent and unable to give any guarantees to the people, audiences of radio and television looked for entertainment. And in this, as illustrated with some of the examples above, football is champion. Therefore, communal sharing of the experience of this sport, and the rivalries it generated, reinforced the narratives of unity since the very origins of professional football and the development of the Selección Colombia.¹¹⁶

To explain why football was so appealing and took such deep roots in Colombian society, Andrés Dávila uses a series of historical reasons that demonstrate the resemblance and response of the sport with the reality that people lived. First, he argues, football originated in a context of violence—detailed above—and it grew as a source of entertainment that separated the pain of violence and conflict from the spectacle on the field. Second, it responded in great resonance to the issue of regionality and rivalry. Football had the double condition of not being concentrated in the capital as most affairs of the country were, and it offered a symbolic but important place where those rivalries could be expressed. Finally, and as mentioned above, football in Colombia was

¹¹⁵ Centro Nacional de Consultoría, *El Poder del Fútbol*, 40.

¹¹⁶ Quitián Roldán and Urrea, “Fútbol, radio y nación”, 57.

intrinsically connected to illegality, which made that illegality and the violence that it marked less aggressive and far more comprehensible. It also legitimized the levels of illegality in the country.¹¹⁷



Figure 4. *El Tiempo* front cover. October 13, 2013.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Dávila and Londoño, “La nación bajo un uniforme”, 132.

¹¹⁸ Redacción El Tiempo, “A la conquista de Brasil 2014,” *El Tiempo*, October 13, 2013. Photo by author.

Nonetheless, this relationship has not been of the same nature since the very inception of football, even since its professionalization. There is no doubt that it had been an important field within the Colombian society. And, following the arguments laid above, the way in which the sport became connected with the reality of the country, meant that the evolution of the two resembled each other. That being said, the national team had not been a symbol of national identity from the very onset. Rather, its power as a crucial—even the only—symbol of collective unity is far more recent. Political scientist Jairo Clavijo, and his colleague, anthropologist José Sanchez, find the germinal moment of this association as it is today in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Particularly, they argue that the match that Colombia won 5-0 against Argentina in Buenos Aires in 1993 was a foundational moment from which the overlapping concept of “national pride” became the symbolic capital that connected nation and sport.¹¹⁹ It was after that victory that Colombia became the great candidate to win the 1994 World Cup, making it the first time since the creation of the *Selección* that there was a success to some extent. Since then, and especially during the great success (relative to its history) in the 2014 World Cup, the symbols of football have transcended into the national construction of an identity. Images like the one shown in the front cover of *El Tiempo* the day that Colombia qualified for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil are a recent phenomenon (Figure 4). Linking football with the national pride of ‘conquering’ Brazil, replacing Rio de Janeiro’s Christ the Redeemer statue with Radamel Falcao, captain of the *Selección*, this image is the result of a trend that has been increasingly important since that seminal moment in 1993. Today, there is little doubt of football’s overwhelming presence in the collective perception of Colombians when they are constructing their own sense of a national identity.

¹¹⁹ Jose Andres Sanchez and Jairo Clavijo Poveda, “Entre el orgullo y la indignación: La Selección Colombiana de Fútbol 1993-1994, una mirada antropológica”, *Estudios socioculturales del deporte. Desarrollos, tránsitos y miradas* 154, no. 845 (2018): 299.

Chapter 2

Football as a Social Field of Violence

It was no coincidence that the murder of [Andrés] Escobar took place in one of the most violent countries on the planet. Violence is not in the genes of these people who love to celebrate and are wild about the joys of music and soccer. Colombians suffer from violence like a disease, but they don't wear it like a birthmark on their foreheads.

Eduardo Galeano

Football and Violence

“The hardest thing for us was the conflict, so that caused an impact and divided the community, it was the hardest thing for us.” These are the words of William Rentería Toscano, resident of the *corregimiento*¹²⁰ of Vallecito in the municipality of San Pablo, Bolívar. He is the football announcer and commentator of his community. Everyone there knows him and, although he does not have a microphone and audiences that reach the millions, he is considered to be a key part of the football games and tournaments that are regularly organized in the area, especially when playing their ‘rivals’ of the *corregimiento* of El Diamante. Aside from the great pleasure that this activity gives him, he also states that he does so because “the sport is what motivates us the most

¹²⁰ This term is used in Colombia to describe population that live together but that do not constitute a municipality.

to move forward,” a difficult process given the violent experiences to which the community has been subjected to.¹²¹

On June 22nd, 2000, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) paramilitary group came into the *corregimiento* and burned down half of the houses and buildings as a statement of power and a sign of coercion for the community to be cooperative. Three months later, the same group came back and burned the other half. All the inhabitants of the area were forced to move elsewhere as they left behind most of their belongings and the remains of what they now call the Old Vallecito. The community relocated and built the new Vallecito. Still, they were not out of danger and the conflict continued to condition their lives—including football. In the years following the AUC attacks, the area was a disputed territory between the guerilla and the paramilitary, making crossfire a common threat to the residents of Vallecito. As William recalls with nonchalance, he no longer knows how many times he had to hide in his kitchen as a teenager.

What he also remembers were the armed checkpoints set around the community to control the movement of people and goods. Because football was seen as a rebellious activity, it was largely prohibited. Teams that wanted to play another *corregimiento* nearby had to ask permission, which was rarely given. This also extended to footballs to the point that, as William tells, “he who was caught with a ball in those times perhaps they wouldn’t forgive his life.” Another reason why balls were seen as such a threat was their frequent use as bombs: explosive devices would be hidden inside them by the opposite armed group and used to attack those that controlled the checkpoints. So, they began hiding deflated balls under the food or the oil barrels that they were transporting, hoping they would go unnoticed in the checkpoints. “If we risked our lives bringing

¹²¹ “Vallecito (Bolívar),” June 5, 2018, in *Y dónde es el partido?*, produced by Andrés Orozco Quintero, <https://www.rtvcpplay.co/series/y-donde-es-el-partido/vallecito-bolivar>

a football,” explains William, “it is to demonstrate that the sport is something big in this *corregimiento*, and it is something we think should stay.”¹²²

With time, illegal armed groups left the area as the army continued their counterinsurgent movement and national peace agreements were signed with the major groups. Violence left; football remained. As another resident of Vallecito tells, “football began to be loose, free.” His name is Arnel Ubaldo Lobo, owner of a small shop in the community. While holding a trophy they won in a football tournament for the reintegration of the communities of the municipality, he reaffirms that “the sport is the most fundamental part for the reconstruction of the social fabric.”¹²³

The ambivalence of football between being a symbol and cause of violence and being an instrument and process for peace and reconstructions is the evidence of the strength of the sport to create a sense of collective identity, of a group. The example of Vallecito, Bolivar is one amongst many, one that illustrates a trend that would come to characterize the role of the sport in the recent history of the armed conflict. It is its dimensions as a tool and space for violence that became central to the intersection between the two during the turn of the century and the early 2000s. As argued above, there had been a relationship between the sport and violence from the very start of professional football. There was, however, a shift during the late 90s that extended into the next decade in which football was no longer a distraction from violence or a victim by extension of the conflict. From that time on, it was consciously weaponized as an alternative tool to exert violence and impose the interests of the groups committing the violent acts. This change was due to the intrinsic ability of the sport in constructing a sense of community and identity, an aspect to be exploited through the same process it was created.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Football has a powerful appeal to the construction of identities as part of a club or team. From the local, amateur level to the national, professional teams the sport reinforces the sentiment of belonging of those that practice and follow it. This tendency and ease to become a space for such constructions is due to certain inherent characteristics like those of rivalry and opposition, its semantics of social solidarity, rituals of conflict and consensus, and the cultural, economic, or religious differences at play.¹²⁴ This identity around a team is consistently being reinforced by its symbols: names, badges, flags, shirts, colors, stadiums, and more all denote membership of a particular group (and the exclusion from the rest). The use of these in-group markers taps into those characteristics of football as they both imply affiliation to the team and constitute a challenge to the members of the other rival groups.¹²⁵

Under these circumstances of social bonding, football-related violence is not a rare phenomenon. Violence has been tied to the sport from its very beginnings: the first reports of aggressive behavior from the public inside the stadium came parallel to the first official games in England during the later decades of the nineteenth century.¹²⁶ In fact early forms of organized football fan groups that frequently committed acts of violence (known as *hooligans* in the United Kingdom) against players, referees, and other team's fans were common before the First World War, sprouting from Glasgow down to London.¹²⁷ Although isolated at first and understood as circumstantial acts of maladjustment and disorderly conduct, *hooliganism* grew larger through the twentieth century. By the 1960s, and particularly during the 1980s, these groups had become a primary target of the United Kingdom's public agenda, putting in place several policies to repress

¹²⁴ Richard Giulianotti, "The Essence of Football: the Historical and Social Bases of the Global Game", in *football: a sociology of the global game* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999).

¹²⁵ Daniel M. T. Fessler, Colin Holbrook, and David Dashoff, "Dressed to Kill? Visible Markers of Coalitional Affiliation Enhance Conceptualized Formidability", *Aggressive Behavior* 42 (2016): 299-300.

¹²⁶ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 63.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

violence inside and outside of football stadiums.¹²⁸ But this was not an exclusively British phenomenon. Similar groups developed and strengthened all around the world during the second half of last century with notable presence in South America and Europe. Aside from the *hooligans* in England, there were the *siders* in the Netherlands, the *ultras* in Spain, the *tifosi* in Italy, the *torcidas* in Brazil, and the *barras bravas* in Spanish-speaking Latin America that came to dominate much of the media attention related to football.¹²⁹

This was also the case for Colombia. Organized fan groups were created for almost every professional team, particularly for the ‘big’ teams that dominated in the largest cities like Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. The football-related violence in the country resulted in many people injured and often dead as a regular feature of the national championship. Moreover, criminal and paramilitary groups were involved in these *barras bravas* as they presented the opportunity of extending their power and drug trafficking networks.¹³⁰ According to Jorge Bautista, who works at the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center for Historical Memory) in topics related to memory and pedagogy, paramilitary groups that controlled the areas close to the city of Medellín, where the club Atletico Nacional is from, have also imposed checkpoints where they have robbed, humiliated, and even killed traveling fans that went to see their teams play against Nacional.¹³¹ One of these cases was reported by *El Tiempo* in June, 2001, when a fight broke out between the traveling fans from Nacional (coming from Bogotá) and fans of the club Millonarios from Bogotá, a paramilitary column of 300 men stopped the fight by firing to the sky. They let the

¹²⁸ Richard Giulianotti, “Spectator Cultures: Passion at Play in Europe and Latin America”, in *football: a sociology of the global game* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999): 39.

¹²⁹ Rafael Jaramillo Racines, Germán E. Gómez Eslava, and John A. Castro Lozano, “Prólogo”, in *Fútbol y barras bravas: Análisis de un fenómeno urbano* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2018): 14.

¹³⁰ Peter J. Watson, “Colombia’s Political Football: President Santos’ National Unity Project and the 2014 Football World Cup,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 37 (2018), no. 5: 602.

¹³¹ Personal communication, August 16, 2019.

Nacional fans go and took the Millonarios fans to a nearby estate that was under their control.¹³² “At that point, they cut the hair of the fans [to humiliate them] and tell them to leave all the money they have. Then they sent the buses back to Bogotá.”¹³³ The phenomenon became so preponderant that the government was forced to create several laws aiming to deescalate the violence inside and outside of the stadiums, even getting to the point of restricting the access of visiting fans.¹³⁴ Colombia was certainly not exempted from the common violence related to football as the sport created deep and strong reactions in its most involved fans.

However, violence was related to football in a different way, perhaps like in no other country in the world, as it got entangled within the internal armed conflict of the nation. What is being examined in this chapter, thus, is not the commonly found violence that can be seen all over the world as fans become aggressive in acts that are an internal part of the sport, but a new dimension of violence that understands football as a subject of violence within the context of the armed conflict in Colombia. This is to say that study of football can be extended into a new subject of study through which the history of violence in Colombia can, and should, be understood. There was a systematic involvement of football in the history(ies) of the armed conflict, and vice-versa, that was neither fortuitous nor rare. In this sense, an account of exemplary events from the first decade of the twenty-first century can illuminate the dimensions of such interconnected fields and the extent to which each needs to consider the other to get a complete understanding of the its nature and development. These instances of the relationship between football and violence also help to elucidate the changes that took place during those years in relation to how the sport was used by violent actors in the conflict. They become explicit evidences of a phenomenon that came

¹³² Redacción El Tiempo, “Paramilitares frenan a barras bravas,” *El Tiempo*, June 11, 2001.

¹³³ Personal communication, August 16, 2019.

¹³⁴ Jaramillo Racines, Gómez Eslava, and Castro Lozano, “Prólogo”, 241.

as a result of the shift from violence spilling over football—and it being a mere political distraction from the events taking place in the country—towards an active appropriation and use of the sport. This created a conscious and purposeful change in how the conflict related to and reshaped the meaning of football beginning in the early 2000s. Football thereby became a political tool and a determining factor in the Colombians' experiences of violence.

Football as a Field of Violence

Recalling the conceptualization of football as a social field according to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields, this proposition of football as a field within the social structure is useful to understand its interaction with another prominent field in Colombia: the violence field. With its own actors and objects, violence within the context of the internal armed conflict can also be conceptualized as a social field. Holding them at the same level with corresponding characteristics helps elucidating the interaction between the two. The latter is extremely intricate and surpasses the usual violence that is associated with the sport. This is because the specific actors, interests, and objects at play in each separate field have transgressed their own 'typical' fields into the other in a way that makes it necessary to study such interactions in order to understand the field.

In some instances, the field of violence has entered the field of football, reshaping in many ways its interests and relationships that define it. In others, it is the objects of football that have entered the field violence to play a central role in the modalities and dimensions in which the armed conflict has developed. But the point here is that such interactions are not coincidence or simple extensions of the violence that affected the entire country. The armed conflict in Colombia did in fact affect almost every single aspect of life. However, its transgression into the football

field, not only professional but also at all playing levels, was a conscious decision made by the actors precisely because of the value of football's objects and relationships value to the construction of a sense of community. The importance, omnipresence, and capacity of identity construction have made of football a target of violence because of the symbolic and practical effect that disrupting such connection with the people implies.

The following examples illustrate the extent to which they have both coexisted in the larger structure of Colombian society, making the football field a necessary factor to be included in the larger understating of the history of the internal armed conflict.

When Violence Transgressed Football

On Friday April 22nd, 2000, Andrés Estrada was kidnapped as he came out of a church where he was taking part of a religious ceremony. It was past ten at night when two women and three men, all armed, forced him to get into the car they had just came out from. The following day, the police still had no information of his whereabouts or the authors of the crime, although there were enough hints to point towards the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) as the authors. It would only take one more day for Estrada to be released and for the ELN guerrilla to be established as the sole perpetrators of the act. The armed group would later accept that it was a 'mistake' to kidnap him, opting to release him after only two days.¹³⁵

Andrés Estrada was a famous football player during the 90s and early 2000s. Born in Medellín, he played as a midfielder in many of the big clubs of Colombia, including Deportivo

¹³⁵ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 813.

Cali, Once Caldas, and Atlético Nacional and was part of the national team that played the 1998 World Cup in France. It was with Nacional (playing between 1998 and 2000) that he obtained most success, including a league title in 2000 and the Copa Merconorte in 1999.¹³⁶ He was by all accounts one of the great Colombian players at the time, labeled as “one of the most prominent members of the team” by the newspaper *El Tiempo*.¹³⁷ That Sunday, the day he was released from captivity, Atlético Nacional and Deportivo Cali played a league match in Medellín. As *El Tiempo* reported on that day’s issue, the players of both teams (both in which Estrada had played) decided not to start the game until he was free, forcing the game to start 25 minutes later. He was well and unharmed. The ELN never acknowledged that delay in the match was one of the reasons why they realized it was a mistake to kidnap him, but it was certainly a powerful public demonstration of football against violence.¹³⁸

Although they never fully explained their reasons, the short kidnapping by the leftist ELN guerrilla was most likely part of their campaign to commit public attacks as a form of propaganda and to gain recognition. This was not a rare occurrence, especially for these groups. While the random kidnapping of everyday people was a regular technique that guerrillas used to blackmail for rescue money, it was a common strategy to target the famous and those that were most followed by the people. Thousands of people had been kidnapped in the past and many more were still under captivity, but in this case, there was no random choice. The kidnapping of Estrada responded to his position and profession as football in Colombia offered an obvious space for gaining visibility and playing with people’s emotions. In this sense, football was targeted by the armed groups because of its importance in the construction of the national and regional identities.

¹³⁶ National Football Teams, “Andrés Estrada Murillo”, Online.

¹³⁷ Redacción El Tiempo, “Secuestrado Andrés Estrada,” *El Tiempo*, April 23, 2000.

¹³⁸ Redacción El Tiempo, “Liberado Andrés Estrada,” *El Tiempo*, April 24, 2000.

However dramatic this episode might have been personally to Estrada and his family, and generally for football fans, this was just one case in many where violence transgressed into football as means to impose their interests and create national visibility. Perhaps the most telling of all examples were the events that preceded the Copa América in 2001. This tournament played every four years was, as it still is, the most important title in terms of national teams only after the World Cup and Colombia had won the right to host its 2001 edition. But the conditions that had prompted FIFA authorities from taking the 1986 World Cup from Colombia were still there, albeit with different actors. By then the internal armed conflict had four sets of actors, each with its own subgroups that added to the state of chaos: the leftist guerrillas, including the ELN, FARC, and EPL; the drug traffickers that had split into various smaller operations after the death of the heads of the Medellín and Cali cartels; the extreme-right paramilitary death squads, mainly the AUC; and the Colombian military with the support of the United States. The situation was so unstable and dangerous that the following year after the Copa, in 2002, would become the harshest year in the history of the conflict as discussed in the previous chapter. Within this framework, the months, even days, leading up to the development of the tournament were to witness some of the most explicit transgression from violence into the field of football.

Since 1999, the recently elected president at the time, Andrés Pastrana, had initiated a peace process with the FARC guerrilla, by then the strongest group by far. The failed talks lasted three years, until the end of Pastrana's presidency, and resulted in the illegal armed group controlling a large zone known as el Caguán, where they were able to reorganize and strengthen themselves.¹³⁹ The failure of the process was evidenced by a series of three bombings by the FARC from January through May before the Copa América in 2001. The bombs exploded in Cali, Medellín, and

¹³⁹ Melo, *Historia minima*, 274.

Bogotá—all three host cities for the tournament—and left twelve dead and hundreds injured. The bombs were placed in strategic locations, like popular shopping malls and hotels where the regional organizing committees of the Copa were located, as a way to incite fear and draw more attention.¹⁴⁰ In addition to that and as another attempt to reassert the atmosphere of unease, a number of football players from the club Once Caldas were hit by a car bomb in the hotel they were staying at in Cali.¹⁴¹¹⁴² These series of violent attacks sparked discussion and doubt on the country's ability to host the tournament safely, although the South American Football Confederation (CSF) repeatedly ratified Colombia as the host of that year's Copa.

On June 25th of that year, the vice-president of the Colombian Football Federation (FCF, by its Spanish initials) and the head of the Copa América organizing committee, Hernán Mejía Campuzano, was kidnapped by the FARC near Pereira—another host city and another victim of bombings in the previous months.¹⁴³ It was this event that set off the alarms and made nine out of the ten members of the Federation asked that the country be removed as hosts (Colombia being the only one not to do so).¹⁴⁴ Mejía Campuzano was released only three days in captivity, after the FARC guerrilla had accepted their responsibility in the action. Interestingly, they stated at first that his kidnapping had nothing to do with his position, although they quickly changed the story to

¹⁴⁰ Redacción El Tiempo, “Así se llenó la Copa,” *El Tiempo*, June 27, 2001.

¹⁴¹ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 813.

¹⁴² Redacción El Tiempo, “Así se llenó la Copa,” *El Tiempo*, June 27, 2001.

¹⁴³ *Id.*

¹⁴⁴ The nine members asking for a change of host nation were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

PAZ / CASO MEJÍA OPACÓ ACTO DE LAS FARC

¿Fue un autogol de la guerrilla?

El mensaje de buena voluntad que las Farc lanzaron ayer ante el mundo con la liberación de 242 soldados y policías terminó con un sabor agri dulce por el caso de Hernán Mejía Campuzano, vicepresidente de la Federación Colombiana de Fútbol, cuyo secuestro dejó en vilo la realización de la Copa América en Colombia.

Si tal como todos los indicios lo señalan, las Farc fueron las responsables del secuestro de Mejía, varios políticos y analistas opinan que dicha acción se convirtió a la postre en un autogol del grupo guerrillero.

Ayer, mientras los subversivos brindaban su fiesta de liberación en La Macarena, en el resto del país se escuchaban voces de indignación y de rechazo contra las Farc por haber secuestrado a Mejía, lo que dejó a la deriva el anhelo de realizar el evento deportivo en el país.

Aunque 'Manuel Marulanda', jefe máximo de las Farc, dijo que no tenía información para negar o confirmar la autoría del secuestro, lo cierto es que las consecuencias del plagio del dirigente deportivo, liberado ayer, se robaron el show que estaba predestinado para el regreso a la libertad de los 242 militares.

El presidente del Senado, Mario Uribe, dijo: "Si fueron las Farc, se anotaron un autogol, en la medida en que no solo golpearon el alma y el

sentimiento de los colombianos, que estaban comprometidos con un evento que les iba a generar imagen internacional y ganancias económicas, sino que además la guerrilla puso una nube negra que cubrió la liberación de los soldados y policías, que era un evento esperado por todo el país".

Entre tanto, el analista Daniel García-Peña señaló que el hecho de que las Farc, "a estas alturas, no tengan una idea precisa sobre si fueron o no los autores, refleja que el secuestro como mecanismo de financiación de la guerra ha adquirido una dinámica propia, que no corresponde a los procesos políticos de un movimiento insurgente. Por un lado va la guerra y, por otro, las conciliaciones de carácter político".

Añadió que "las consecuencias del secuestro de Mejía desafortunadamente borrarán los efectos benéficos que podían haberse derivado de la liberación de los soldados".

A su turno, el politólogo Vicente Torrijos, dijo: "En principio no parece que haya una relación entre la agenda revolucionaria de las Farc, el secuestro de Mejía y la Copa América, pero si las Farc fueron las responsables esto las empuja ante los efectos que su acción pueda tener sobre la imagen del país, la convivencia democrática y el interés popular, tan profundamente ligado al fútbol".



EL SECUESTRO de Mejía se robó parte del show que las Farc habían predestinado a la liberación de los militares. AFP

accept the evident: he was targeted for his position of power and as a public figure, particularly at that time of the Copa.¹⁴⁵

The press coverage of this crucial event reveals the close relationship that violence and football had in Colombia, even at the discursive level. During this time, both *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*, the two major newspapers of Colombia with national circulation, decided to put the whole controversy surrounding the tournament in their front pages for five days in a row, from June 27th to July 1st—the day when it was finally decided that the Copa would be played that year in the country. The article in the *El Tiempo* newspaper describing how he was released was titled with a remarkable phrase by Mejía Campuzano: “Free, thanks to football”. The picture that the editors decided to use to complement the text is also telling: he is shown in his house, surrounded by family, and next to a football.¹⁴⁶ On that same issue, the newspaper published a short article with a critical analysis of how strategic was the move of kidnapping the high-profile official for the guerrilla. This one they titled,

“Was it an ‘own-goal’ (*autogol*) by the guerrilla?”. And, again, the image chosen was very significant as it depicts two guerrilla fighters playing with a football (Figure 5).¹⁴⁷ The image was

¹⁴⁵ Redacción El Tiempo, “Fue un autogol de la guerrilla?”, *El Tiempo*, June 29, 2001.

¹⁴⁶ Redacción El Tiempo, “Libre, gracias al fútbol”, *El Tiempo*, June 29, 2001.

¹⁴⁷ Redacción El Tiempo, “Fue un autogol de la guerrilla?”, *El Tiempo*, June 29, 2001.

taken by Agence France-Presse, most likely in one of the guerrilla camps. It can be seen as incongruent (perhaps inappropriate) with the dimensions of the news of a kidnapping: the men, smiling, appear rather inoffensive and enjoying the time, not at all like insurgency members. What does assert effectively is the connection between football and violence, but not in a negative way. Rather, it shows how ‘everyone’ plays football, *even* members of insurgency groups that kill and kidnap.

On that same issue by *El Tiempo* there was another article titled “Pastrana played a separate game” in reference to the actions taken and speeches given by the then president of Colombia. They were, in fact, very explicit actions that were far from what could be strictly considered his presidential duties, especially within such context of violence and chaos. He personally called the president of the CSF, the chancellor of Argentina, and the presidents of Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, and Ecuador in what was labeled as him “captaining” the efforts to maintain the right to host the cup. Furthermore, his words were impressively strong as he stated that taking the Copa América from Colombia would be “the worst of attacks”¹⁴⁸ and insisted on the “international severity” of such a decision.¹⁴⁹ These were actions that were not the president’s direct responsibility but he still undertook in order to secure the development of the tournament: he understood the importance of football as a tool to unite the population and as a source of political and economic capital. It was a great occasion for the public to be distracted with the *Selección*, shifting the frame of the national agenda and giving Pastrana a positive public perception, especially if he was able to ‘bring back’ the Copa. Additionally, there were significant economic benefits at play, including millions of

¹⁴⁸ The word used was “atentado” which literally translates to attack but is extremely relevant to the extent that it is the same specific word used by the government, newspapers, and others to refer to a terrorist or violent attack by armed groups such as the guerrillas, the paramilitary, or others.

¹⁴⁹ Redacción El Tiempo, “Pastrana se jugó un partido aparte”, *El Tiempo*, June 29, 2001.

dollars coming from sponsorships, fans and broadcasting rights. It is no coincidence, then, that in the image above the article Pastrana is shown next to the president of the FCF and of the CSF, behind the actual cup in the foreground.

What all three of these articles have in common is how they intertwined the fields of football and violence, and their discourses, together. The images and titles themselves are the evidence of how the two were built into the other at the time, to the point where it was impossible to talk about one without reference to the other. Football was the single most important issue at hand in the national agenda. At least that's what the editorial decisions, the president's actions, and all other prominent actors seem to suggest. Even at a time when the country was wrapped in extreme dimensions of violence or there were small rays of hope—like the releasing of 242 captive soldiers on June 28th—football was the main concern. However, violence still made the front pages and was present in all football-related articles building up to the Copa. The close relationship between football and violence was evident at the time when Colombia was about to host the most important international sporting event of its history.

This intricate transgression of violence into football was best depicted by *El Espectador's* front page on June 28th, 2001. On it, there were two main articles that dominate. To the left an article discussing the CSF's decision to remove Colombia as host of the Copa América, titled "The Cup is leaving Colombia."¹⁵⁰ Next to it, to the right, the other article read "Today, release in the Macarena" (in reference to the 242 soldiers released) and showed an image that took most of the article's space where a guerrilla fighter plays with a football (Figure 6).¹⁵¹ The editorial decision of using this image on the front cover reveals the 'natural' association that existed in the collective

¹⁵⁰ Redacción El Espectador, "La Copa se va de Colombia," June 28, 2001.

¹⁵¹ Redacción El Espectador, "Hoy, liberación en la Macarena," June 28, 2001.

imaginary between football and its extension to violence (and vice-versa). Crucially, it shows not only this connection, but also how normalized it was—after all, it was considered to be sufficient and appropriate to describe the two main news stories: the retention of the Copa América and the liberation of the kidnapped soldiers. The sport and the violence became almost synonyms. While this was rather an exception than the rule due to the magnitude of the event, it was impossible to separate them. They were two faces of a single, extreme reality.



Figure 6. *El Espectador* front cover. June 28, 2001.¹⁵²

At the end, the Copa América was played successfully during the month of July, 2001. The tournament developed normally without any more instances of violence that were directly related

¹⁵² Redacción El Espectador, “La Copa se va de Colombia,” *El Espectador*, June 28, 2001.

to football. Surprisingly, the cup was won by Colombia's national team in what is until now the biggest and only official title it has ever attained.¹⁵³ *El Tiempo* titled its front page article with a huge "Champions!" and the image of the team's captain raising the trophy.¹⁵⁴ *El Espectador* titled theirs with an equally large "Yes, we could!"¹⁵⁵, perhaps in a hopeful stance towards the crowned players or perhaps with a sense of relief that it had been possible to carry out the tournament without it being an international debacle.

The abundant news coverage of these episodes surrounding the Copa América reveals its importance for the country and its national agenda. This is not the case, however, for all instances of violence, including those where football was a central player. Many went unknown, others can be found relegated to unimportant parts of media coverage, and only a few have been at the center of the public's attention but are quickly lost to the vast number of violent acts. What will later become more apparent with lesser known cases is what the very ignorance of them suggests: there are holes in the public's attention, voids in the history of violence and football. Other events that had strong intersections of the two did not draw quite the attention, much less the swift action of the government. The national agenda seems only to fit the famous, the urban, the rich—the nation, however, is much more than that. Silences are too, like football, an inherent part of the armed conflict.

¹⁵³ Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, 814.

¹⁵⁴ Redacción El Tiempo, "Campeones!", *El Tiempo*, July 30, 2001.

¹⁵⁵ Redacción El Espectador, "Sí se pudo!" July 30, 2001.

When Football Transgressed Violence

There are other instances in which the presence of violence is not derived from football, unlike *hooliganism* where people are violent *because of* football. This is an important issue to be studied as it reveals the degree to which the sport is ingrained to the deepest level of everyday life, even extending to the conflict and its violence. It also pertinent to the national conversation as it is very telling about the degree to which the armed conflict in Colombia transgressed all of these spaces. The examples above illustrate precisely that: football being used as a field in which to stage violent acts as a political weapon and publicity campaign. There is, however, a much profound and unique interlacing of these two fields which the peoples of many regions in the country had to witness or even suffer. This is the transgression of football into the field of violence: when the sport came to be a protagonist in what are considered to be the events of the internal armed conflict. Such interaction had many facets and expressions, some of them far more explicit than others, but mostly following the same pattern of the game being used by the armed groups to further the imposition of their interests. One modality and one group in particular had a prominent place within this transgression. Massacres were the most common form of violence perpetrated by the extreme-right paramilitary death squads (known at the time as the AUC). Although not exclusive to this group, and even not exclusive to instances of massacres, the strongest examples of the explicit and purposeful presence of football in violence can be found in the combination of these two—especially in the early 2000s.

Three examples stand out of the rest. They do not do so because of the number of victims or a particular crudeness that separates them from the other hundreds of instances of violence by all groups. Again, many examples can be found where there were more deaths and forced disappearances, where even the modalities were harsher. What these examples show is the

deliberate incursion of football into the field of violence as armed groups instrumentalized the sport as an extension of their actions. The psychological and collective importance that the game had at the local level even in the remotest parts of Colombia made it an ideal space for groups to fragment entire communities and assert their control.

It was also used as an excuse, a form of manipulation to achieve their purposes. This is what happened on April 19, 2005. In the port city of Buenaventura, some 60 miles east from Cali, football was a given in the neighborhood of Punta del Este. It was such a part of everyday life to the extent that the entrance to the community was itself a (literal) football field. But on that day football served the wrong interests as twelve children and young adults, between the ages of 15 and 22 years old, were deceived with the promise of being paid 200 thousand pesos¹⁵⁶ each for playing a game. As one of the children's mother recounts, most of them had the hope and aspiration of one day becoming professional football player—it was their ticket out of poverty and the promise of greatness.¹⁵⁷ But they never got to play another game. Days later, all twelve bodies appeared in the neighborhood of Las Vegas, near the city's airport, with signs of torture.¹⁵⁸ Their mothers never knew who did it or why they did it, they were simply confronted with the brutal loss of their children and a void that no hope or dream could fill. According to the Fundación Rostros & Huellas (Faces and Traces Foundation—a non-profit organization created by young adults in Buenaventura to promote social and personal wellbeing after violent events¹⁵⁹), the massacre would have been carried out by a paramilitary operation under the sponsorship of the

¹⁵⁶ For reference, that would have been \$84 US dollars adjusted for the conversion rate at the time.

¹⁵⁷ “Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca),” June 5, 2018, in *Y dónde es el partido?*, produced by Andrés Orozco Quintero, <https://www.rtvcpplay.co/series/y-donde-es-el-partido/buenaventura-valle-del-cauca>.

¹⁵⁸ Laura Cerón, “Madres unidas exigieron justicia por la masacre de Punta del Este,” *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, last modified August 30, 2018.

¹⁵⁹ “Sobre nosotros,” Fundación Rostros y Huellas, accessed April 5, 2020. <http://fundacionrostrosyhuellas.org/sobre-nosotros/>

Colombian military during the Seguridad Democrática (Democratic Security) of Álvaro Uribe Vélez's presidency.¹⁶⁰

Years after the events took place, the truth is still to be found. The press at the time reported the events within the larger dimensions of violence in the port city. *El Tiempo* had a small article at the bottom of their front page titled “Death of 12 young intensifies violence in Buenaventura”.¹⁶¹ In the expanded article on page 4, the text recounted the known facts and put their deaths within the larger context of violence, stating it was the second massacre in two months and that there were 127 murders since the beginning of the year (Figure 7).¹⁶² It was, in fact, one more instance within hundreds that composed the daily lives of those that inhabited the impoverished and dangerous Buenaventura: the day after the reporting, two grenades exploded in a kindergarten in the vicinity, killing a five year old child and injuring thirteen others (Figure 8).¹⁶³ Nonetheless, the massacre of the twelve children and young adults in Punta del Este had a unique marker: football had come to violence as an excuse to perpetrate it.

¹⁶⁰ Harold García, “Y dónde es el partido?”, *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*, last modified June 5, 2018.

¹⁶¹ Redacción El Tiempo, “Muerte de 12 jóvenes recrudece violencia en Buenaventura”, *El Tiempo*, April 22, 2005.

¹⁶² Redacción El Tiempo, “Nueva masacre en Buenaventura”, *El Tiempo*, April 22, 2005.

¹⁶³ Redacción El Tiempo, “Buenaventura, un puerto en la encrucijada”, *El Tiempo*, April 23, 2005.

Figure 7. *El Tiempo* front cover. April 22, 2005.¹⁶⁴Figure 8. *El Tiempo* page 4. April 22, 2005.¹⁶⁵

This example elucidates the paradigm shift that took place at around the turn of the century: football was no longer used against famous players and clubs; it was weaponized against society. The intersection of violence and football was no longer an extension of one field onto the other. Rather, it became a tool used by illegal armed groups to threaten communities at risk and to assert their control over that territory. In this sense, the children killed were victims of a manipulation through football that sent a clear message to the entire community: if even children were

¹⁶⁴ Redacción El Tiempo, "Muerte de 12 jóvenes recrudece la violencia en Buenaventura," *El Tiempo*, April 22, 2005. Photo by author.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

assassinated and activities seemingly inoffensive as football were prohibited, the area was no longer under their control, they could not make decisions about their own life, and the penalty for trying to do so was their life. Punta del Este was a strategic territory that offered an entrance to the Buenaventura harbor, a crucial place for Colombia's economy and for drug trafficking, and a vulnerable population that was at risk of being controlled by the leftist guerrillas. The community lost its agency, and by extension their identity, through a violent action that was orchestrated with the sport's power to move people.

Of a very different nature was the transgression of football into violence in the small community of Corocito, Arauca. There, the sport was not the tool for the massacre but the reason for it. In the village the football field was situated right in front of the only church in town and was the center of collective activities—football was at the heart of their collective construction and understanding. The area was in the middle of a harsh dispute for territory between the paramilitary and the guerrillas and, at the time, the people of the Corocito community were being blamed as 'guerrilleros' by the paramilitary for collaborating with the guerrillas. As the mother of one of the victims remembers, they were just used to men and women in uniform; for them there was no distinction between the military, the guerrilla, and the paramilitary. It was part of their everyday life.¹⁶⁶ They no longer asked to which group these uniformed individuals were part of, they simply assumed that all of them meant violence and loss.

On February 8, 2003, at around 10:30 p.m. the paramilitary operation known as the Vencedores de Arauca, part of the AUC, took over the town. During the time they were present, they assassinated two, kidnapped and tortured three, and forcefully disappeared another seven

¹⁶⁶ "Corocito (Arauca)," June 5, 2018, in *Y dónde es el partido?*, produced by Andrés Orozco Quintero, <https://www.rtvplay.co/series/y-donde-es-el-partido/corocito-arauca>.

men. All under the argument that they were helping the guerrillas. No bodies would be left, and it was not until the peace process that ended the AUC in 2006 that the victims' relatives would hear again anything new about the events of that night. Durvis Rincón, sister of one of the victims named Onésimo Tonocolia Macualo, recounts how she found out that her brother had been held captive for 23 days until he was dismembered alive in the process of interrogation and then the remains of his body thrown into a river never to be found.¹⁶⁷ After the massacre, which they all call simply by "the 8th" in reference to the date they can't forget, all the inhabitants of Corocito were forced to move out by the AUC. They did so for three months, after which they began to return to their lands to start all over again.

Beyond the harsh reality of the events and the unbelievable crudeness of its acts, there was one central aspect to the whole violence: football. Onésimo Tonocolia Macualo, as well as most of the other twelve victims of the massacre, was part of the local football team. This was no coincidence and the inhabitants understood this connection clearly. As one of the survivors states, "The idea was clear: fragment the community and end what united us most."¹⁶⁸ In a town where the communal identity and life was mediated by football, the latter became the ideal target of the armed groups. The field of football (both literal and figurative) became the center of violence just as it was the center of the collective. Durvis Rincón talking about why people no longer played football in Corocito stated, "One is aware that it wasn't that one forgot about it, they *made* us forget it." [italics added]¹⁶⁹ The meaning and purpose of the game was reshaped and deconstructed by the events of the massacre, changing the profound relationship that people had with it as a source of communal identity and social interaction. By the time the AUC left, football was the

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

¹⁶⁸ García, "Y dónde es el partido?", last modified June 5, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ "Corocito (Arauca)," June 5, 2018.

memory of those events, the space and action that wore the mark of the violent past. With the years, this process was reversed as the people from Corocito began to reconstruct their own lives in a more peaceful reality until football was able to come back to their daily lives. Nowadays, they commemorate the memory of the lost sons, husbands, and fathers precisely with a football tournament each year on February 8th, each team wearing jerseys with the names of one of the victims.¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, the press at the time reveals another common pattern in Colombia during its armed conflict: silences. On the same day that the massacre of Punta del Este happened, a car bomb exploded in the parking lot of the El Nogal club—a building in north Bogotá that was a hotspot for famous and powerful people to meet and relax. Both *El Espectador*¹⁷¹ and *El Tiempo*¹⁷² used the entire front page to cover the terrorist attack perpetrated by the FARC guerrilla. There was not a single mention in the entire issue about the events that had taken place in the small, distant community of Corocito. This omission is in a way the expression of the absence of the State in rural areas, a chronic failure from which Colombia has greatly suffered. The silence bears witness to the forgotten, to a national agenda that does not count for everyone.

Perhaps the most evident, harsh, and crude example of football in the field of violence can be found in the horror that the inhabitants of El Salado lived in February 2000. In this case the presence of the football was even more explicit than in the previous examples discussed above. The *corregimiento* of El Salado, located in the subregion of Montes de María in the north western part of Colombia, was initially a successful community that had prospered with the industry of tobacco. With the advent of the armed conflict and the formation of the illegal armed groups, the

¹⁷⁰ *Id.*

¹⁷¹ Redacción El Espectador, “Holocausto”, *El Espectador*, February 9, 2003.

¹⁷² Redacción El Tiempo, “Crece tragedia de El Nogal”, *El Tiempo*, February 9, 2003.

area became a stronghold of leftist guerrilla insurrection and control. After being largely dominated by the FARC, it came to be dominated by the ELN during the late 90s up to the turn of the century, when the events took place. By then, the AUC had been created and were escalating into an ever-stronger group that began to dispute the territory with the guerrillas. This fight for control of land between the armed groups resulted in 42 massacres between 1999 and 2001, leaving 354 fatal victims and thousands more displaced.¹⁷³ It was under this context that on February 16th, 2000, 450 paramilitary soldiers advanced towards the El Salado *corregimiento*, killing many on their way. They took over the entire community, which included the municipalities of Ovejas, El Carmen de Bolívar, and Córdoba. Between the 16th and the 21st of that month, the AUC group assassinated 60 people¹⁷⁴ and prompted the forceful displacement of over 4,000 people.¹⁷⁵ Aside from their interest of controlling the territory, the paramilitaries acted against the population because they considered them part of the guerrillas as the zone had been historically dominated by them.

Newspaper coverage of the facts was scarce. *El Tiempo*'s issue of February 19th had a front page article titled "Massacre in Sucre by 'Paras' [paramilitaries] and guerrilla", although it was mostly overshadowed by the main article with an image depicting the famous Barranquilla Carnival, happening at the same time.¹⁷⁶ The article found on page 6 had limited information, stating that until then there had been 25 people assassinated and that the authorities had not been able to reach the place.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, *El Espectador* reported about the fact on their front page but did not do so until the 21st, the last day of the massacre, with a small note on the right

¹⁷³ Gonzalo Sánchez G., Andrés Fernando Suárez, and Tatiana Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado: esa guerra no era nuestra* (Bogotá: Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2009): 9-10.

¹⁷⁴ *Id.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷⁶ Redacción El Tiempo, "Masacre de 'paras' y guerrilla en Sucre," *El Tiempo*, February 19, 2000.

¹⁷⁷ Redacción El Tiempo, "Paras y Farc matan a 25 personas," *El Tiempo*, February 19, 2000.

side, next to the main image of a motorcyclist racing in the National Motocross Championship.¹⁷⁸ The article inside in this case was much more detailed. A whole page was dedicated to the article in which the latest updates were given, the situation was explained, and some testimonies of victims that had to leave their land were given. The two images that dominated depict the three people accompanied by a dog walking on a road with whatever little they could get from their now destroyed homes; the other shows Doña Francia Correa, a survivor, who is picking up what is left of her old sewing machine from the rubble that was once her house. The title, “They messed even with the parrot”—an expression to state that someone fought with or damaged everything—taken from the testimony of Correa, is telling of the dimensions of what took place during those five days in February 2000.¹⁷⁹

What the newspapers surpassingly appeared to ignore was the prominent role of an unexpected—or as it is argued here, almost omnipresent—factor in the events of violence: football. To a certain degree, football was so interwoven with society that its weaponization was at times unremarkable, at least when it affected ordinary citizens and not the national team. The main communal space of the *corregimiento* of El Salado was made up of a church with a micro-football field in front of it, similar to Corocito, Cauca and so many other small villages in Colombia.

The field had been used by armed groups long before the massacre took place. It was there that the guerrilla would summon the entire community to give instructions and ensure cooperation.¹⁸⁰ This region, Montes de María, had been a key guerrilla area for decades. It was a crucial enclave for the first *campesino* movements during the 1970s, whose dynamics and politics

¹⁷⁸ Redacción El Espectador, “Terror de ‘paras’ en Apartado,” *El Espectador*, February 21, 2000.

¹⁷⁹ Redacción El Espectador, “Hasta con el loro se metieron,” *El Espectador*, February 21, 2000.

¹⁸⁰ Sánchez G., Suárez, and T Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado*, 62.

would become part of the strategy of organized guerrillas like the EPL and FARC.¹⁸¹ These social movements demanding better living conditions, and that were grounded in the very communities, offered the guerrillas an easy access point to get the attention and collaboration of the people through the insurgent group's discourse of land redistribution and equality.¹⁸² At that point, the guerrilla tried to get the community's support by filling the institutional voids left by the State. Some individuals did actively collaborate with the armed group, but most of the population of El Salado remained silent, avoiding any involvement in the conflict.¹⁸³ Importantly, the FARC did not disrupt most of the daily activities and communal gatherings in the *corregimiento*, including football. They even capitalized on them: these places of collective significance and symbolism, as mentioned above, were used as the gathering place where coercive, but also appealing, messages were given.¹⁸⁴ At the end, the FARC was neither able to protect nor provide. On the contrary, if the paramilitary onslaught was so crude and relentless it was in part due to the stigma against El Salado, created by FARC's historic presence, of being 'guerrilleros' and supporters of these groups.¹⁸⁵

When the 450 paramilitaries arrived on the 16th, their first action was to group all the inhabitants in the football field.¹⁸⁶ It was there, on the literal field of football, that the Bourdieuan field of football would be fragmented with some of the crudest and worst acts in the massacre. Through the days under the control of the AUC, one by one men would be called up to the center of the football field. There, they would be beaten, tortured, dismembered, and finally shot to death

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸² José I. Gómez Ayola, "El Salado: más allá de la violencia, reconstrucción territorial" (MA diss., Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2018), 67.

¹⁸³ Sánchez G., Suárez, and T Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado*, 35.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 62.

¹⁸⁵ Gómez Ayola, "El Salado", 71.

¹⁸⁶ Sánchez G., Suárez, and T Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado*, 35.

or beheaded. Women were raped, often by more than one man. As if in a carnival, members of the paramilitary group would play instruments like the accordion and the drums. The chaos was furthered by exploding devices that destroyed the houses of people and helicopters that flew by.¹⁸⁷ Although not all the violence and acts were committed in the football field, the latter was the center of the public executions that the rest of the population were forced to watch.

Finally, the crudest and most explicit act of all, when football not only transgressed the violence but also turned into it in itself, took place on that same field. A man was called up and, after being beaten and tortured, his head was cut with a chain saw. Paramilitary soldiers then started to play football with his head. Football became violence in its most literal form. In this case the community was once again forced to watch the entire process.¹⁸⁸ Sadly, this was not the only reported instance of such actions as it had happened in the municipality of San Carlos in eastern Antioquia.¹⁸⁹

The fact that football was symbolically and literally used by the paramilitaries was in part due to the importance it had in the construction of community. As the Grupo de Memoria Histórica explains in their report on the massacre of El Salado, the terror imposed by armed groups changed its meaning when it was set in a public space. The main plaza and the football field were spaces socially and collectively constructed for the development of life and gave a sense of community to those that made use of it.¹⁹⁰ When the AUC used these spaces to perpetrate the worst violence that its inhabitants have ever witnessed, the meaning was changed and the construction of the communal identity was fragmented, which served their interest and allowed them to assert the

¹⁸⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁸⁹ Gonzalo Sánchez G., Martha Nubia Bello, and Marta Inés Villa, *San Carlos: Memorias del éxodo en la guerra* (Bogotá: Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2011): 87.

¹⁹⁰ Sánchez G., Suárez, and T Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado*, 62.

control over the territory. Their choice of the football field as the stage for their violent actions was also because they were responding to its historical stigma as a dissident stage : the presence of the enemy, the collaboration with guerrilla groups. If the FARC assembled people on the communal spaces to gather support, the AUC assembled people on the field to kill. In this way the latter both asserted and destroyed any connections with the former group and left a negative association with the space and its links to the guerrillas. The terror was a staging of the AUC's power and control, and a warning against future collaborations with the insurgency, as the stigma would suggest. According to the Grupo de Memoria Histórica, even the State was (and still is) guilty of judging the population by this stigma, with some institutions and officials even blaming the El Salado population.¹⁹¹

Years after the events of those five days of horror, the community of El Salado remains in the process of rebuilding themselves and retaking their land. In this process, there is a large effort to reconstruct and give new meaning to the same spaces that were once the locations where they lost everything. The wall next to the football field was repainted as a mural¹⁹² and renaming it the “Field of Memory”¹⁹³ as a way to commemorate those that were assassinated and the other victims of the AUC. Regardless, some still are unable to play comfortably in that field because they inevitably remember what happened there, so they opt to play in the close-by football field where the old middle school used to be.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Sánchez G., Suárez, and T Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado*, 13.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁹³ Gómez Ayola, “El Salado”, 121.

¹⁹⁴ Sánchez G., Suárez, and T Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado*, 159.

Football or Violence?

There is no doubt that the fields of violence and football interacted with each other in some of the crudest events of the internal armed conflict. The extent to which this interaction took place and the degree to which they became irreducible from each other varied and must be understood in their relative dimensions. There were indeed many other instances where horrible acts were committed and in which violence tore apart entire communities that are still today trying to understand their past and build a future. Football was not the common pattern in every single event. In the same way, violence was not the natural state of the sport. Many national and international tournaments were played in which only football-related violence appeared. It is also important to distinguish the different uses of football by each set of actors. After all, there was a crucial difference in how the FARC and the AUC approached its presence in El Salado. And these approaches shaped and defined both society's relationship to football and to the specific group that was using it. The weaponization of football was adapted to each group's interest, these decisions reflecting how they used it to make their own inroads. While this is true and the distinction must be made, there is nonetheless a strong connection between the sport and violence, in many cases reaching the level of (quite literal) synonyms.

The study of the two fields and their relationship(s), thus, becomes essential for a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the conflict. One that nuances the importance of the sport and the impact of the violence. It is important as well to do so because the very fact that their interlacing was so profound was what gave, almost a decade later and in the years amounting to that time, the key role of football in the process of peace and reconciliation. This has already been hinted at as communities where football was at the heart of the violence they suffered used the very symbols and objects of the field as a way to reimagine their past. In this case too, the

different sets of actors used football in different ways, which in turn changed how these processes of memory and reconciliation developed. The essential importance of the sport when studying and understanding the armed conflict can also be seen in the process of its own de-escalation and ending.

Chapter 3

Football in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

For better or for worse, though the fields are as far away as could be, friends from the neighborhood or workmates from the factory, the office or the faculty still get together to play for fun until they collapse exhausted, and then winners and losers go off together to drink and smoke and share a good meal.

Eduardo Galeano

Changing Bullets for Balls

The previous chapter established the relationship between football and the armed conflict in Colombia. While it did so almost exclusively in terms of violence and by proposing the field of football as another subject of it, there is a different side of such a relationship in which both are also connected: peace. Football was as much part of peace as it was of violence. That is, just like with the study of the development and experience of the internal armed conflict, to fully comprehend and study the de-escalation and partial end of the conflict attention must be paid to the role of football in this process. Although the conflict is not entirely over, the sport has been present in many ways in multiple key moments that have defined the efforts of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the country.

This presence, yet again, is no coincidence. Because football can be at the center of the construction of the social fabric and the collective identity in Colombia—whether this means local or national—the sport can be essential in its recovery after traumatic events like the violence of

the conflict. In Colombia's case, football was not passively present in this process of recovery and reconciliation, it was instrumentalized in similar symbolic ways as it was for violence, but through time it became a tool to heal and recover from that violence. Therefore, it was consciously instrumentalized by most actors that were part of the conflict as an active path that could be used towards the goal of peace. This presence and use resonated at all levels—from local initiatives to governmental programs. Nonetheless, it was not used or received in the same way in every case; these differences accounted for historical processes and personal experiences that are just as significant as the very use of football. It is thus necessary to consider these instances in which football was instrumentalized in the effort of illuminating a more holistic understanding of the peace process in all its dimensions.

Now, the use of football as a method and space to recover from defining event of violence that have changed the national history is not a phenomenon unique to Colombia. In fact, there are multiple examples around the world, perhaps better known in the world of football and more studied by scholars, that exhibit similar traits of what has happened in the country. A first instance of this can be seen in Liberia, where a double civil war from 1989 until 2004 left a quarter of a million dead and over a million forcefully displaced. There, scholars Joel Rookwood and Clive Palmer (2011) found that football had played an important part in the reconstruction of the country after the war as the sport became a key space for “human contact, engagement and bonding.”¹⁹⁵ In a similar instance in another African country, football in Nigeria has played an important role in creating bridges that allow individuals to see other as more than enemies. In a country that has had intense conflicts due to ethnic differences among the population, youth that follow the sport—

¹⁹⁵ Joel Rookwood and Clive Palmer, “Invasion games in war-torn nations: can football help to build peace”, *Soccer & Society* 12, no. 2 (2011): 184-200.

particularly the English Premier League in this case—have found a space where linguistics, religious, and cultural differences no longer represent deep division, and instead creating a new pluralistic identity around their fandom.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, football has served as a path of rapprochement between two sides in conflicts so complex and protracted as the one between Israel and Palestine. Here, Sam Liebmann and Joel Rookwood (2007) found that football was one of the few spaces that brought Jews and Arabs together in northern Israel.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Tamir Sorek (2007) argues that the Arab team Ittihad Abna' Sakhnin and the Israeli-right team Beitar Jerusalem have created a sportive display of the conflict within the national league. In this context, football fandom “provides an avenue for the booster bases, in dual fashion, to register both their ethnic and nationalist protest, and their quest for acceptance as full citizens of the state of Israel.”¹⁹⁸

Even in European countries similar experiences can be seen, as is the case of the Republic of Ireland. During the religious and political conflict that confronted this country with Northern Ireland, it was their football associations—the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Football Association (IFA), respectively—that held one of the few peaceful communication channels between the two from 1973 until 1980.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, after Northern Ireland signed the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 as a pivotal step towards peace, the IFA started a campaign under the slogan of “Football for All” as a strategy to reduce the sectarian attitudes present in the sport as ramifications of the conflict.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Henry O. Majaro-Majesty, “Ethnicity, conflict and peace-building: effects of European football support in Nigeria”, *Soccer & Society* 12 (2011), no. 2: 201-211.

¹⁹⁷ Sam Liebmann, and Joel Rookwood, “Football for Peace? Bringing Jews and Arabs Together in Northern Israel”, *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* 1 (2007), no. 1: 11–18.

¹⁹⁸ Tamir Sorek, “Soccer Fandom and Citizenship in Israel,” *Middle East Report* (2007), no. 245: 20-25.

¹⁹⁹ Cormac Moore, “Football unity during the Northern Ireland Troubles?”, *Soccer & Society* 18 (2017), no. 5–6: 663–678.

²⁰⁰ Alan Bairner, “Sport, the Northern Ireland peace process, and the politics of identity”, *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 5 (2013), no. 4: 220-229.

There are also closer instances of the involvement of football in resisting violence, peace building, and remembrance. Brazil, Argentina, and Chile evidence this in the Latin American context in their experiences under and after the respective dictatorships. In the case of Brazil, football became a space to shape political dialogue as the dictatorship (1964-1985) reinforced its control of power by creating public and discursive campaigns that related the national team's successes with the government's administration. On the other hand, other actors were able to create a message of resistance. This was the case of Botafogo player Afonsinho, who used his position as a famous player to display 'deviant' behavior against the military government through symbolic, unmilitary aspects—he had a long hair and beard—as well as more practical decisions—he refused to play for ideological reasons multiple times.²⁰¹ In a similar way, professional football was used as the stage for resistance in Argentina when the country hosted the 1978 FIFA World Cup in the middle of the dictatorship (1976-1983). In the months leading to the event and during it, human rights activists mounted a campaign using the slogan “Yes to Football, No to Torture!” According to Felix Jimenez Botta (2018), when the campaign caught the public's attention, it forced nations like West Germany to withdraw support from the military junta and receive Argentinian refugees; it was also a very important movement in calling the world's attention towards the human rights abuses of the dictatorship.²⁰² Finally, in Chile, like in Colombia, the field of football was transgressed by violence when the military dictatorship under Pinochet (1973-1990) when the government used the national stadium as a primary site for holding and torturing political prisoners. Almost half a century after the coup, in 2018, two players from the Universidad de Chile

²⁰¹ Euclides de Freitas Couto, “Football, Control and Resistance in the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the 1970s”, *The International Journey of the History of Sport* 31 (2014), no. 10: 1267-1277.

²⁰² Felix A. Jimenez Botta, “The Foreign Policy of State Terrorism: the Military Juntas in Chile and Argentina and the Latin American Refugee Crisis of the 1970s”, *Contemporary European History* 27 (2018), no. 4: (627-650).

club used the symbolic power of football as a tool for remembrance. Before they played an official match in front of thousands of attendants and in national television, they took two flower bouquets honoring the victims to the northern stands of the stadium—these are now known as “Live Tribune” (‘Tribuna Viva’) and are always left empty as a way to remember what happened there.²⁰³

The examples above are only a few of many examples around the globe where football has been a space, an instrument, and a field for peacebuilding and reconciliation. In this sense, the case of Colombia is neither unique nor extreme. Quite the opposite: it is one more exhibit in the case for the power of the sport as a unifying force. However, the instances where this happened in Colombia were within a unique framework and contingent to specific circumstances that make it a valuable subject of study. As illustrated above by the historical comparative exercise, the nature, forms, and dimensions through which this profound relationship is expressed is varied. In Colombia it can be traced all the way to local, independent initiatives as simple as the very act of playing with a ball in public spaces. But it can also be found being used in a systematic, purposeful way by politicians and the government creating nation-wide programs and its instrumentalization for political, albeit peacebuilding, interests. What all of these instances do have in common is a general re-symbolization and reshaping of the Bourdieuan field of football—with all its objects, actors, and representations. In this sense, the symbols, the spaces, and the act of playing football were used in ways that favored the reconstruction of communal identities in the effort to recover from the internal armed conflict that so often subjected the sport. This is, actively using the dialogue created by football to resist, deescalate, and reconcile from violence. It is also the

²⁰³ Redacción deportes, “Jugadores de la U de Chile rinden homenaje a las víctimas de la dictadura”, *El Espectador*, September 11, 2018.

implementation of football in the awareness of its potential to move and unify people as a way to construct a nation under enduring peace.

I will focus upon three of the most prominent processes where this happened. While not comprehensive, they do illustrate large trends of this phenomenon and encompass bigger ideas of what the role of football in the armed conflict has been more recently, and perhaps will continue to be. The first one deals with the aforementioned local initiatives, which began independently long before violence even began deescalating and were often parallel to the conflict itself. The second considers more systematic programs created by different NGOs and government agencies. These were mostly carried out at the local level, but sometimes grew to be involved in the professional football world. Finally, Juan Manuel Santos' presidency (2010-2018) and his use of football during this time offer one of the most recent and evident examples of the instrumentation of the sport within the public sphere.

“Come on, *parce!*”

The Comuna 13 is one of many poor neighborhoods that developed around the city of Medellín, a business powerhouse of Colombia and the home of around 2.2 million people. These communes, or *comunas*, developed on the limits of the city, on the steep mountain sides facing the eastern side of Medellín. They have historically been impoverished areas with a long record of violence. This stems from the armed conflict as the neighborhood has been controlled by narco gangs—illegal groups that are either local or controlled and influenced by larger criminal gangs formed after the disbanding of the paramilitaries or by guerrillas like FARC or ELN. In the

Comuna 13, widely held to be one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Colombia, the levels of violence were so prominent that the police would only enter heavily armored or not even at all. After all, it is informally known as the birthplace of many of Pablo Escobar's hitmen.²⁰⁴

When the conflict was close to reaching its maximum intensity in the early years of the millennium, the situation was of such dimensions that entire communities—including the Comuna 13—were forbidden from going to other neighborhoods or going out at night. Whether it was through implicit orders and prohibitions or by implicit fear instilled through terrorist actions, the reality was that collective bonds and communal spaces were forcefully taken from people's identity and daily lives. Nonetheless, a group of young adults found the courage to defy these circumstances through an activity very close to them: football. As presented in the "General Report" of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica, one of the individuals remembers the moment where the decision was made:

So we said: Come on, *parce*²⁰⁵, let's organize a tournament at night! And we agreed on it with other juvenile groups from other areas, with community entities, and so we had support, for example, from other neighborhoods and other groups brought a women's and a men's team and we created the tournament. (...) It worked very well, the entire time people went, the field was full, the stands were full. So people moved and there was a very usual transit, there wasn't that silence of fear but there was noise from people walking and the teams returning to the neighborhoods, and people too because we would play them music at full volume.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Philip Cook, Elaina Mack, and Manuel Manrique, "Protecting young children from violence in Colombia: Linking caregiver empathy with community child rights indicators as a pathway for peace in Medellín's Comuna 13", *Journal of Peace Psychology* 23 (2017), no. 1: 38-45.

²⁰⁵ This is a common term used by people in the region of Antioquia, known throughout Colombia as *paisas*, and is roughly synonymous in use to colloquial expressions like 'dude,' 'man,' or 'bro'.

²⁰⁶ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 375.

In this sense, football became the instrument through which multiple communities came together. In the act of playing it, they created an atmosphere of life and enjoyment, something that went directly against of the directives given by the armed groups controlling the area.

People went out on the streets at night as an active, conscious act of resistance against violence. They did so organized by a clear demographic—juvenile groups—and by the lightness of an activity that created an ambiance of joy and implied the assertion of life through physical exercise—a game. But not just any game, it was football. The convergence of these factors offers a plausible explanation for its effectiveness. First, it creates the image of young people “just playing,” as opposed to adult leaders meeting to create a rebellious plan. Second, the simplicity of the game made it very easy to convene a tournament that gathered many people and communities around it as it requires very little to play. And third, the prevalence of its practice in Colombians’ lives and the degree to which it is imbued in their identity creates an accessible and easy space to attract people regardless of circumstances. Sadly, this practice of indirect disobedience and resistance could not continue as violence sharpened as the year 2002—the worst in the conflict’s history—came by; the ball had to stop rolling.²⁰⁷ When football became the space to construct community, to construct a fabric and a structure that was beyond the control of the paramilitary groups in power, then it became dangerous and subversive. Any form of social enjoyment and interaction was seen as a threat against the armed group’s imposition, particularly when it was so simple and popular as football.

The events described above are one example of how the game was used to construct some of the few spaces for resistance and peace during the conflict. In this case, its use took place while armed groups were still active. While this is not always the case, it is a strong instance that begins

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 376.

to illustrate a phenomenon that is echoed in many other recorded examples across the country. Not all communities resorted to football as a key tool that would allow them to recover from the trauma and pain of war. For those that did, it was a crucial step in reconstructing public spaces, returning to peaceful, “normal” life, and in remembering what happened while honoring those lost. There were local initiatives that sparked all around the country, particularly in some of the most affected communities. These embody and demonstrate the importance that football has had, like with violence, in defining identities, communities, and people’s understanding of their realities.

This is the case of El Salado, a community that has suffered some of the worst acts of violence during the conflict, including the massacre of 2000 discussed in Chapter 3. After four days in which 60 people were killed, the line between football and violence was entirely blurred. The *corregimiento* and its residents had largely lost the social fabric that constructed any collective identity and its public spaces contained the physical and symbolic traces of what had happened. Through their actions, the paramilitaries inscribed marks of violence onto the football field as they committed the massacre, contesting the meaning that had been forged there through time by the participants of the community.²⁰⁸

Years after the armed groups left, 21 women created the United Women of El Salado Association (Asociación de Mujeres Unidas de El Salado) in 2003. They funded the group’s activities by selling milk from the two cows they owned; with time they were able to expand into a larger cattle business with the help of donations.²⁰⁹ They were one of the most important promoters to bring back the religious festivities of the Virgen del Rosario, but they didn’t do so until 2005. Then, in 2006, they chose football as the central scene of their actions, a significant

²⁰⁸ Gómez Ayola, “El Salado: más allá de la violencia”, 121.

²⁰⁹ Centro de Memoria Histórica, El Salado, Montes de María: tierra de luchas y contrastes (Bogotá: La caja de herramientas, 2018): 216.

decision considering that they chose to devote their hard-earned limited resources specifically to the game and its field. That year, they brought together a group of children and young adults and involved them in painting a mural on the wall that faced the micro-football field. On it, they wrote, “We were displaced by violence, don’t let indifference displace us”.²¹⁰ They sent a clear message that was a call to action, a call to resume, like with the religious festivities, important activities that made up the culture and identity of the community. Amongst those football held an important place.



Figure 9. El Salado former football team.²¹¹

These women understood the place that the sport had and the symbolic importance that placing a message like that in that specific place could have. Its symbolic power was furthered by

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 217. The original phrase is “Nos desplazó la violencia, que no nos desplace la indiferencia.”

²¹¹ Gonzalo Sánchez G., Andrés Fernando Suárez, and Tatiana Rincón, *La masacre de El Salado: esa guerra no era nuestra* (Bogotá: Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2009).

the fact that they involved the youth in the process: having new generations that represent the future of the community to start reconstructing those places at the heart of the collective was a statement of peace and endurance. Additionally, the field is now called the Field of Memory (Campo de la Memoria),²¹² another reinforcement of the field of football, including its objects and spaces, as a cornerstone of the new life that El Salado was creating after the violence.

When the inhabitants of El Salado came back to their land two years after being forcefully displaced, their town did not look like the place they once knew as their home. One former resident who returned recalls the moment when she went back saying: “When I came back, I said ‘oh lord, this is not my town, I’m in the middle of a jungle,’ the church was indistinguishable and the football field was too, and we had been there four days, and I cried, but I said ‘we have to fight, we have to get back our town... [...] we can’t let it go.’”²¹³ The efforts to inhabit and use the field again were in themselves an act of recovery and of rebuilding their life that was lost. It was a process of remembrance that honored the victims and continuously contributed to the building of peace and a new life. The micro-football field was not the only place where this process occurred, just like the atrocities committed during the massacre were not always there. The Casa del Pueblo (town hall) and other public spaces were also re-symbolized through new names, commemorative murals, and other traditional rituals (religious and laic alike) in those spaces that served similar purposes. The point here is that, amongst those places and actions that were perceived as central to the community, football continued to hold a privileged place in the collective understanding of what it meant to recover and reconstruct from death and conflict. As evidenced by the testimony of the resident quoted above, the field was also a central space in the memory of what constituted

²¹² *Id.*

²¹³ Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *BASTA YA!*, 74.

her community. And so was the church, not diminishing the importance of football but precisely elevating it to the same level as other historically important institutions like religion. The football field, however, was a key locus of collective understanding because defining events, like the FARC's coercive message and the AUC's massacre, took place there.

Another remarkable initiative worth addressing is by the Zharenka Ethno-educative Institute (Institución Etnoeducativa Zharenka) in the municipality of San Juan del Cesar, in the northern department of La Guajira. This is a school founded in 2011 as an alternative to traditional education—largely absent in the area due to lack of resources. It focuses on providing a holistic education that highlights indigenous Wiwa culture and forms integral students that represent the future of the community. Aside from the regular classes, students are engaged in activities like traditional Wiwa dancing, knitting, and rituals—and football.²¹⁴ San Juan del Cesar is in northern Colombia, close to the Caribbean Sea and, more importantly, on the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta—a mountain chain that has been historically inhabited by indigenous populations and that became an important strategic area for armed groups in the conflict.²¹⁵ With the evolution of the conflict and both paramilitaries and the FARC looking to expand their territories of influence, many indigenous populations found themselves trapped in the middle. The AUC controlled Valleudpar, a nearby cattle town, and a unit of the FARC controlled the higher slopes of the mountain chain.

The fight for control over the disputed territory became the main source of the violence that many indigenous groups experienced. This is illustrated by the case of the Kankuamo

²¹⁴ Institución Etnoeducativa Internado Zharenka, “Descripción,” Facebook, June 20, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/pg/Instituci%C3%B3n-Etnoeducativa-Internado-zhareka-303045439875365/about/?ref=page_internal.

²¹⁵ The Economist Intelligence Unit, “The Americas: The elusive god of peace; Colombia's conflicts”, *The Economist*, September 18, 2004, 44-45.

population, another indigenous group that inhabits the Sierra Nevada. Its elected governor, Jaime Arias, explains that, “55% of the murders since 1986 were committed by paramilitaries, 29% by the FARC and the rest by criminals.”²¹⁶ This state of ambivalence between the imposition of the two groups and the constant threat of violence is echoed in the word of José Esneider Malo, a teacher and coordinator at the Zharenka Ethno-educative Institute. He recounts how when he was a child, if one went up the mountain, one was immediately labeled as ‘para’ and became a target; the opposite was also true, coming down the mountain automatically implied one’s collaboration with the guerrilla.²¹⁷

Furthermore, indigenous populations were not only the subjects of violent actions but were also forced to participate in committing those actions mostly through children recruitment—another of many crimes against humanity committed in Colombia’s armed conflict. Malo remembers in particular one method that both paramilitaries and guerrilla groups used to recruit others like him: football. Through the game, members of the illegal groups would win the trust of children and convince them to join them.²¹⁸

Decades later, as violence deescalated, many communities that had been isolated from each other began to restructure a network of inter-communal cooperation. The Zharenka Institute played an important role in rebuilding bonds between the community of San Juan del Cesar and the Wiwa indigenous group with which most of their students identify as being part of. This active process of recovery and peacebuilding is centered around an annual football tournament organized by Esneider Malo. It is made up of two matches, the first one being played up in the mountains, in the

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

²¹⁷ “Atshintujkua (Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta),” June 5, 2018, in *Y dónde es el partido?*, produced by Andrés Orozco Quintero, <https://www.rtvcpplay.co/series/y-donde-es-el-partido/atshintujkua-sierra-nevada-santa-marta>

²¹⁸ “Atshintujkua (Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta),” 2018, Orozco Quintero.

sacred (and officially protected) territory of the Wiwa, and the second in the school's campus. The two locations are used as a symbolic gesture of recognizing the other's territory and place of existence, an act of geographic and cultural recognition of the other group they are playing against. According to its main promoter, Malo, football becomes a space for sharing and integration; it instills in students "love for their territory and love for their culture." The activity is well received by the students, who realize its importance and enjoy it. One of them says that, "It is worth walking, getting there tired to play a match. It is worth integrating ourselves. Regardless if we get there tired, we have a happy moment."²¹⁹



Figure 10. Field used for the Indigenous Wiwa Championship.²²⁰

The football tournament is embedded into the Wiwa spirituality as players that go up the mountain to play the match must follow the traditional rituals of entering their sacred territory, including bringing an offering for the Madre Sierra (Mother Mountain), making football even more

²¹⁹ *Id.*

²²⁰ "Atshintujkua (Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta)," 2018, Orozco Quintero.

symbolic in its function as a creator and facilitator of bonds. But before being embedded, it had to first challenge it: according to Wiwa spirituality, football was forbidden because it was perceived as “kicking” the Madre Sierra. However, the elders understood its potential use and popularity for the community so they now see it as a space to express many virtues. Héctor Eduardo Mindiola, the leader of the Zharenka Institute and an important figure amongst the indigenous group, elaborates lucidly on this: “The sport takes us to learn who we are, what we want, and what we can do for our community.”²²¹ Such understanding of football illustrates its importance in the process of recovering from years of a life conditioned by violence. Once again, the involvement of the younger demographic is an interesting factor. It not only responds to the physical demands of playing, but it could also be argued that it reflects an interest of the adults, who experienced the horrors of war, to reconstruct a peaceful life and teach the future generations a different perception of their reality and their interaction with the community.

Taken together, these three examples show an evolution in the use of football as a space and a tool for peacebuilding, remembrance, and recovery. There is a progression from the use of football as a subversive act simply by playing it; to giving new meanings to its objects and spaces by painting murals and using them; to its instrumentalization as an educating process as its regular practice becomes the act through which the other is recognized and the social fabric is recreated. The increasing degree to which the communities in the examples presented use their agency to employ and shape football to their purposes is, in a larger perspective, the representation of the trend that has dominated the relationship of the sport with the conflict since the early 2000s. It is a pluralistic process that expresses in different forms according to the circumstances, all with a ball and a field as a common denominator. And this is exactly the point: the repeated use of the

²²¹ “Atshintujkua (Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta),” 2018, Orozco Quintero.

sport within the frameworks of local initiatives trying to separate their communities from violence and its implications attests its importance. From singular instances of resistance, to permanent symbolic marks of remembrance, including the actual playing of the game, the field of football became the medium through which to express a desire for peace and reconciliation. These and many other examples not mentioned²²² are part of a larger trend at the most basic level that is key to understating the role of football in Colombia's internal armed conflict and its ramifications.

Football as a Program

Impromptu matches, annual tournaments, and symbolic uses of fields all made up part of local initiatives to use football for peace. And while these were the most basic expressions, perhaps the first and often independent, its use did not stop there. There have also been many programs and initiatives that went beyond a single community. These are mostly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or government programs, and they have usually had very similar missions and characteristics as the examples discussed in the previous section. Also, they have similarly used multiple components from the field of football to reach these goals. From symbolic gestures to instrumentalizing its objects and actors, these programs have integrated the sport in a purposeful manner as part of larger exercises of autonomy and recovery. Nonetheless, many have had a larger scope in trying to systematically implement football in spaces of reconciliation, having presence in hundreds of municipalities.

²²² Other communities, corregimientos, or municipalities that show instances of how football was instrumentalized in relation to the conflict are: El Tambo, Timbiquí (Cauca); La India (Santander); Bocas del Yi (Vaupés); San Carlos, Ituango (Antioquia); Macayepo (Bolívar).

Such is the case of the ‘Golombiao.’ A program that gets its name from the combination of the words “Gol” and “Colombia.”²²³ It is one of the oldest programs with a national scope in operation. From its very name it embodies the intersection between football and nation—between goals and peace, between the exercise of sport and the exercise of life. It began based on the initiative ‘Football for Peace’ in the city of Medellín, which started in 1996 during a period where criminality and the presence of armed groups was so pervasive that people could not move from one neighborhood to another or be outside at night. The original idea was simple: “The excuse and the ‘hook’ was football. So, here in the city of Medellín,” explains John Baos, one of the founders, “we began convincing the guys in power, in command, so that they would allow those that were not part of the conflict (or even if they were in the conflict), to start making pacts of non-aggression through football.”²²⁴ The idea began with 16 teams, one from each of the *comunas* of the city, playing a tournament. It was a success to the point that even members of armed groups, namely the paramilitary, started to change bullets for balls, some metaphorically and temporarily, others literally as they demobilized and found in football a space to rejoin their communities. Former AUC member, Arley Herrera, tells how “There were neighborhoods that we got into firing bullets (‘dándonos bala’)...thanks to the opportunity of mobilizing we made the decision of instead playing, and continue with football, which is a good entertainment. I changed and it’s ok.” He was one of the 3,000 people that ended up participating when the initiative grew to over 650 teams. The model of the program was so successful that it was exported to countries in Europe, Africa, and South America.²²⁵

²²³ “En Colombia el fútbol construye la paz en medio del conflicto,” Unicef, accessed February 9, 2020, <https://www.unicef.es/noticia/en-colombia-el-futbol-construye-la-paz-en-medio-del-conflicto>.

²²⁴ “Un caso de estudio: el Golombiao,” BBC Mundo, November 3, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/specials/newsid_4401000/4401038.stm

²²⁵ *Id.*

With time, formal organizations became involved and, in 2003, Golombiao was officially created. It received support and funding from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Presidential Program ‘Young Colombia’ (Colombia Joven). Today, the program is described by UNICEF as, “a modified version of football based on the values of non-violence, peaceful coexistence, gender equity and ethnic diversity.” Furthermore, “Young people playing Golombiao engage in ‘on the field’ and ‘off the field’ activities where they learn how to identify problems and achieve conflict resolution in a peaceful manner. Through this process, young people become actors of their own development.”²²⁶ In this sense, the Golombiao is a functional adaptation of the game that suits the needs of each community and recognizes its particular circumstances. It is, then, an even more explicit use of football for the purposes of peacebuilding.

The program targets children between the ages of 8 and 18 and works through one-day events where participants gather with an adviser—who plays the role of what would otherwise be a referee—and decide upon the rules of the match they will play and through which they will work on one or more of the seven guiding principles. Rules that apply for every single game include that girls (who must make up half of each team) must score the first goal of each team and, after that, the goals must be scored altering boy-girl-boy.²²⁷ The rules are also sensitive to the demographic and the municipality they are playing on. For instance, when the Golombiao program went to the indigenous Awn group in Nariño, the match focused specifically on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and taking care of oneself and others. In other cases, it can be focused on non-violence, care for the environment, freedom of expression, or active participation—the other

²²⁶ Olga Lucia Zuluaga, Frederick Spielberg and Jorge Garzón, “Golombiao,” in *Evaluation of UNICEF programmes to protect children in emergencies: Colombia country case study*, UNICEF (2013): 364.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 367.

guiding principles of the program.²²⁸ Before and after the match is played, there are complimentary activities that are designed to raise awareness of people's reality and to empower them to take control of their lives and construct a prosperous future.

Newspaper coverage through the years has reflected this optimism with the program. The first news story published by *El Tiempo* in March, 2004 in which the Golombiao was mentioned was titled "Goals Against Violence." After the rules were explained, the article recollected the testimony of some of those that participated in Apartadó (Antioquia). For example, 25-year-old Amanda tells that, "the best part of the project is precisely to prove oneself against men. All my life there has been the idea that women can't play football. With the project, this is challenged and everything becomes more tolerant."²²⁹ The last article published on the program, on the other hand, dates from October, 2018. Titled "A Thousand Vulnerable Youngsters will 'Play for Life'," the piece continued to talk positively about Golombiao and gave an impressive statistic: in the Cali *comunas*, where the program was working at the time, it was claimed that Golombiao has played a significant role in reducing violent deaths (in the context of gangs) by almost 50%.²³⁰ Finally, an article published by *El Espectador* in September, 2016, echoes the larger goals of the Golombiao. Under the title of "How a Ball can Transform Lives," the article quotes Adriana Barbón, coordinator of the program, saying that, "It is not about athleticism, it is about the transformation of the self."²³¹ What this newspaper coverage suggests is the popularity and acceptance that the program has received across many sectors of the nation. Not having any political affiliation, being active over 15 years under three different presidents, and having been created by the people that

²²⁸ *Id.*

²²⁹ Andres Garibello, "Goles contra la violencia," *El Tiempo*, March 26, 2004.

²³⁰ Redacción Cali, "Mil jóvenes vulnerables 'se la jugarán por la vida'," *El Tiempo*, October 12, 2018.

²³¹ Redacción Educación, "Cómo un balón puede transformar vidas," *El Espectador*, September 7, 2016.

play it, Golombiao is an initiative that, unlike others addressed later, enjoys the support of the general population.

In an interdisciplinary article, Ricardo Duarte Bajiña (2017) makes the argument of how the structure and purpose of the Golombiao closely resembles the central tenets of the field of bioethics. Dialogue, autonomy, negotiations, deliberation, inclusion, and coexistence are all important tools and processes that are central to bioethics and that Duarte Bajiña finds in the activities of the program.²³² He summarizes its importance and influence by saying that, “Golombiao can be considered a sports tool aiming at promoting social organization processes to empower the population to learn through reflection and awareness how to tackle their issues, while striving to build their community solidarity.”²³³ This is a strong synthesis of how football is used in this case for peace and reconciliation. And it has been an effective one: over 200,000 young people, most from the most affected regions, have participated in it.²³⁴ Additionally, the program has started to integrate these independent experiences into national ones by organizing national tournaments, the first of which was on November 2011. They have also made national indigenous tournaments since 2014.²³⁵

The Golombiao has also enjoyed direct support from former president Juan Manuel Santos. He made sure to be present at the inauguration of the program’s edition in the Suba neighborhood in Bogotá on September 25th, 2013. As *El Espectador* reported, he used the opportunity to condemn recent violent events between fan groups. Two days before the program was set to start,

²³² Ricardo Duarte Bajiña, “Transforming soccer to achieve solidarity: ‘Golombiao’ in Colombia,” *Soccer & Society* 18 (2017), no. 2-3: 368-373.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 371.

²³⁴ Zuluaga, Spielberg and Garzón, “Golombiao,” 371.

²³⁵ “Iniciaron los juegos del primer torneo nacional de Golombiao,” UNICEF Colombia, November 23, 2011, <https://www.unicef.org/colombia/comunicados-prensa/iniciaron-los-juegos-del-primer-torneo-nacional-de-golombiao>.

a fan of Atletico Nacional from Medellín was killed by four men who were part of the *barra brava* of Millonarios from Bogotá. The events took place in the same neighborhood, Suba, in which the Golombiao was about to begin.²³⁶ Santos further assured that “football isn’t at fault for the violence” and instead the nation should, on the one hand, “stimulate football and on the other condemn violence.”²³⁷ Although Santos’ use and involvement in football will be the subject of discussion below, his commitment to the project shows its importance and, more prominently, an understanding of the power that the sport has had—and can have—in the long process towards peace. More recently, the programs seems to have been relegated entirely to UNICEF’s supervision as its official webpage²³⁸ is no longer available and all recent information of it is coming from the NGO’s website. Perhaps it is the result of policy changes with the new government; no official statement was made on the issue.

Through the years, there have been many initiatives similar to Golombiao.²³⁹ They are usually programs that create spaces through football to raise awareness and offer the tools that can empower people towards the possibility of peace and reconciliation. These have acted as independent organizations, finding support and funds in international NGOs, foreign governments, and the Colombian government itself. In 2010, however, a new organization was founded with a different approach. Gol y Paz is a recent project that, instead of creating parallel projects to other initiatives, has the mission to communicate and integrate the existing programs in a joint effort to expand football’s influence in the country.²⁴⁰ It was inspired by the same program as Golombiao,

²³⁶ Redacción Bogotá, “Asesinan a hinchas de Nacional en Bogotá,” *El Espectador*, September 24, 2013.

²³⁷ Redacción El Espectador, “Por delincuentes disfrazados de hinchas no se sacrificará campeonato: Santos,” *El Espectador*, September 26, 2013.

²³⁸ www.colombiajoven.gov.co/golombiao

²³⁹ Other examples of organizations and initiatives that have been created since 2000 include: Tiempo de Juego, Futbol con Corazon, Fundacion Crecer Jugando, Fundacion Futbol para el Futuro, and Fundación Talentos: En la Jugada.

²⁴⁰ “Quiénes Somos,” Gol y Paz, accessed February 10, 2020, <http://www.golypaz.com/quienes-somos/>.

“Fútbol por la Paz,” created in the city of Medellín in 1996 after the death of football idol Andrés Escobar.²⁴¹ Made up of ten distinct organizations that work with football, the Fútbol y Paz Network—the central axis of Gol y Paz—connects these programs and offers a space for dialogue. This includes virtual and in-person activities, physical education training, and a similar base set of values and purposes that allows these organizations to act in conjunction as part of a larger societal movement than individual projects. Although each organization works with its own methodology and process, they all do so in resonance of a shared vision and mission. Through this network, they have been able to reach 17 departments, 44 municipalities, and over 17 thousand participants.²⁴²

The project has received wide support, now being funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank, UNICEF, and the German government.²⁴³ There has also been important support from the world of professional football, with intuitions as important as LaLiga—the Spanish first division followed worldwide by millions of fans—providing training seminars and equipment for the fomentation of football in its social role.²⁴⁴ It has also won global recognition, particularly the World Football Summit’s Best Social Responsibility Project in 2017. This was a recognition they won above other organizations from Spain, Germany, Sweden, India, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, France, and the United States.²⁴⁵ This is, to a certain degree, a culmination and recognition of the process that I have described in this work. If this initiative has been so effective and popular it is due to the importance of football for

²⁴¹ Redacción El Espectador, “Fútbol por la paz,” *El Espectador*, June 27, 2017.

²⁴² “Quiénes Somos,” Gol y Paz, accessed February 10, 2020, <http://www.golypaz.com/quienes-somos/>.

²⁴³ “En Colombia: Jugando fútbol por la paz,” United Nations Development Program, accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/es/home/ourwork/sustainable-development/successstories/playing_soccer_forpeaceincolombia1.html.

²⁴⁴ “LaLiga colabora con el 'Proyecto Gol y Paz Colombia’,” Fundación LaLiga, April 4, 2018, <https://www.laliga.com/noticias/laliga-colabora-con-el-proyecto-gol-y-paz-colombia>.

²⁴⁵ Redacción El Espectador, “Gol y Paz: Mejor Proyecto de Responsabilidad Social del Año en el mundo,” *El Espectador*, October 17, 2017.

people's lives and their understanding of the conflict. The weaponization of the sport, first to serve the interest of the actors perpetrating the violence and then for the objectives of those looking for recovery, was successful because the sport was so ingrained into people's lives. The achievements represented by this award bear witness to this importance and the effectiveness of the instrumentalization of football in the country.

This new phase of enlarged use of the sport adopts the local interest and necessity of finding spaces where peace is a possibility. The exercise of playing football—its objects, its symbols, its rituals, and its practice—is, by no coincidence, the place where thousands of Colombians have converged and found an answer to such necessities. Its continuous use and the repeated instances of people resorting to it, shows that it has allowed them to process the experiences of violence that they went through and gives people the tools that empower them and help them rebuild a sense of community, with implications to the construction of their very identity. The testimonies of those that have been part of these initiatives reflect this empowerment. Some that are representative of what this instrumentation of football has meant for the communities come from the women that participated in a national workshop on football for transformation for women organized by 'Gol y Paz' every year. For instance, Diana Carolina Moran, resident of Pasto, Nariño, stated that after the workshop she thought that, "Football is evolution, transformation, and I feel capable of developing many more projects." Another, Yenny Paola Mahecha, said, "Football knits community and constructs a shared vision of the world." Yet another woman, Lucy Yesenia Leon, said, "In this sport I found minutes of calm in the middle of the hard [violent] situation that we lived in." Other women that have been directly impacted by the conflict share a similar view. "I am a victim of forced displacement along with my two children, my husband and one of my brothers. I have survived the explosion of an anti-personnel mine; life has tested me in very hard

situations,” said Jessica Andrea Borrero, “but its hits haven’t managed to take away from me the desire of playing football, the sport that has become a message of overcoming and prevention.”²⁴⁶ Football was, and continues to be, a key space where the individual recovers her ability to express and develop in a context of peace after the trauma of war.

Nonetheless, there is one more example that has been brought up to the national attention and that takes football’s role in the process of reconciliation to new dimensions. In this case, it was no longer a matter of only the direct victims from a specific region or municipality that was able to bond through its practice. La Paz Fútbol Club is one of the strongest expressions of these interactions as it integrates victims and perpetrators together in the field of football, this time not as a recreational activity but as a professional career. Felix Mora, a lawyer specialized in human rights and the executive director of the ‘Fútbol y Paz’ Foundation, was the responsible for its creation. The project of having a professional football team made up by ex-guerrilla fighters, other members of illegal armed groups, and victims began in 2014. Mora explains how the idea really began in 2012, when the peace dialogues between the government and the FARC became public. When the possibility that civil society could contribute to the political negotiation became apparent, Mora prompted the creation of the team.²⁴⁷ But it wasn’t until 2016, when the peace agreement with the FARC guerrilla was signed in Havana and approved by the Colombian congress that the necessary doors were opened to officially create it in September, 2017.²⁴⁸ It is now officially recognized by Coldeportes—now the Ministry of Sport and the national authority

²⁴⁶ Mujeres salvando vidas, Taller nacional femenino de fútbol para la transformación social, Fundación Gol y Paz, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/GolyPazco/>

²⁴⁷ Jose David Escobar Moreno, “La Paz Fútbol Club, el equipo de las Farc y víctimas del conflict,” *El Espectador*, April 20, 2017.

²⁴⁸ Juan Gabriel Bocanegra, “La Paz F.C.: cuando el fútbol se la juega por la reconciliación en Colombia,” *The Latin American Post*, June 6, 2019.

for sports—and is part of the capital’s amateur league, the Liga de Bogotá.²⁴⁹ Additionally, its organization includes a men’s, a women’s, and an under-20 team.²⁵⁰

According to the official profile of the team on Facebook, La Paz FC, “symbolizes the historic end of the conflict and the arrival of peace in Colombia.”²⁵¹ This message of hope and change is echoed by its founder, Mora, who believes that “football has a transforming power. Not only because it changes the lives of young people, but also their social and family environment, and we have as an objective the prevention of forced recruitment, through the personal commitment that only sports give.”²⁵² On another interview, he elaborated on why football has such a deep impact in Colombians’ life: “Colombians are mad about football; it’s an important motor to unite people,” he says. “That’s the beautiful thing about it and we believe it can be an important tool in Colombia’s reconciliation.”²⁵³ These quotes resonate together in the common understanding of football as an important field in the reconstruction of the nation. However, the project as Mora envisioned it did not go uncontested. Many actors external to the creation of the team criticized the idea of giving a professional team to those that were criminals for so many years.

The project originated as a professional football team that would enter to the second division, but these plans faced stark opposition from many of the directives of the organization controlling professional football in Colombia. It even had opposition from external actors like politicians, including the ex-president Álvaro Uribe Vélez who disregarded the team in a pejorative

²⁴⁹ “La Paz F.C.,” Liga de Fútbol de Bogotá D.C., accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.futbolbogotano.com/la-paz/>.

²⁵⁰ Bocanegra, “La Paz F.C.,” 2019.

²⁵¹ “Infomación,” La Paz Fútbol Club, Facebook, June 2, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/clubdeportivolapazfc/about/?ref=page_internal.

²⁵² Bocanegra, “La Paz F.C.,” 2019.

²⁵³ Carl Wroswick, “Colombia’s FARC guerillas turn to football as route back into society,” *The Guardian*, October 11, 2017.

manner as being the FARC's team—a common perception amongst the public opinion.²⁵⁴ Mora, however, is quick in clarifying that point: “Let me be clear, this is not a FARC team,” he says. “This team, La Paz FC, will include ex-FARC fighters and anyone considered a victim of the conflict. They will be on the same team fighting for a common goal.”²⁵⁵ By 2018, this was true: former members of the paramilitaries and the guerrillas played alongside, trained by ex-military José Luis Tangarife Arcila, who was left quadriplegic for two years after almost losing his life to a landmine explosion.²⁵⁶ Still, the strong reaction against its formation and, in particular, its professionalization shows how the instrumentalization of football was not always well received. This is especially the case when it is perceived as coming from a political or ideological group with a past like the FARC. Not all efforts of using football for the post-conflict were tied back to the guerrilla or exposed as pro-guerrilla propaganda. But the creation of La Paz F.C. in collaboration with the high officials of the FARC was not beyond the stigma and opposition that some sectors of Colombian society carried against them. Regardless of the pushback it has received from many leaders within professional football, the team has gone on to become a symbol of reconciliation and dialogue around the world. They have made worldwide news lines and were invited to the Normandy Forum for Peace in France, where 5 Nobel Peace Prize winners were present along with delegates from over 130 countries.²⁵⁷

The ample support that La Paz FC has received from a variety of important organizations and world leaders, and its success in conveying a powerful message of peace suggests, in the first

²⁵⁴ Wroswick, “Colombia’s FARC guerillas turn to football,” 2017.

²⁵⁵ *Id.*

²⁵⁶ Redacción El Tiempo, “Exmilitar víctima de una mina ahora es DT de exguerrilleros y exparas,” *El Tiempo*, August 28, 2018.

²⁵⁷ Andreina Flores, “Francia: Normandía acoge un partido de fútbol por la paz en Colombia,” *Radio France International*, June 5, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/es/americas/20190603-francia-normandia-acoge-un-partido-de-futbol-por-la-paz-en-colombia>.

place, the willingness of those Colombians most directly involved in the conflict to look for an alternative to violence and conflict in a significant project that gives new meanings to their lives. Second, it suggests that there is a real progression towards a potential peace in a country where bullets are being changed for balls. Lastly, it demonstrates football's power to act as a unifying thread in both of these conclusions. The national and international recognition of this team is, by extension, an acknowledgment of the sport as a legitimate and effective method through which peace, reconciliation, and prosperity can be built. However, this statement must be nuanced since not all processes using football are seen as legitimate by all the population. The pushback against the creation of this team evidences that the instrumentalization was not a single, homogenous process expressed in multiple instances. Instead, football was used as an instrument that was available to anyone, but not everyone was so successful in using it. Furthermore, while football has certainly taken important steps to create and facilitate reconciliation, it is not beyond the political and historical marks that the conflict has left. The instrument of football, like reconciliation, is a plurality of processes that have followed an evolution of increased use and attention. Some cases with more success than others.

Football as a Policy

On August 7, 2014, President Juan Manuel Santos was inaugurated for his second term as president. He beat his main contender, Oscar Iván Zuluaga, by a small margin in an election process marked by deep polarization and centered around the ongoing peace talks in Havana with the FARC guerrilla. Santos won under the promise of achieving an agreement that would lead to

a prosperous and enduring peace. And he focused his inaugural speech precisely on that: he framed it as Colombia's chance to think big and imagine a better future. To convey this message, he insisted: "Look at James Rodríguez, who this morning received in Spain the Golden Boot to the top goalscorer of the World Cup!²⁵⁸ Look at our Selección or at Falcao! (...) What an example! What an example they give us!"²⁵⁹

These references to football idols James and Falcao, and to the men's national team came within the first two and a half minutes of his 40-minute speech. They were not only a rhetorical device to engage the audience, but an explicit expression of what then became a systematic trend that instrumentalized football through the use of its symbols, its discourse, and its actors for political ends—particularly for the peace talks with the FARC guerrilla. In this context, the use of football references embodies ideals of hope, hard work, and the possibility of a different reality to the violence that most have normalized and incorporated. There is an awareness that its (calculated) use is a path that cuts into the emotions of people—it is touching on a defining aspect of their identities and their understating of nation, as discussed above.

This was a calculation born of Santos's first term in office. Two years after assuming the presidency in 2010, Santos told the world that dialogues had been established with the FARC in Norway on August 27, 2012.²⁶⁰ From then on, most of the national agenda was centered about this: Santos had to convince a disillusioned and wounded Colombian people that peace through dialogue with the oldest guerrilla group in the world was possible. In addition to that, the

²⁵⁸ Trophy given to the player with the most goals scored during the tournament of the World Cup. It is a great honor within the world of football and this was the first time in history that a Colombian won it.

²⁵⁹ "Palabras del Presidente Juan Manuel Santos en su posesión para el período presidencial 2014-2018," Presidencia de la República, August 7, 2014, http://wp.presidencia.gov.co/Noticias/2014/Agosto/Paginas/20140807_04-Palabras-del-Presidente-Juan-Manuel-Santos-en-su-posesion-para-el-periodo-presidencial-2014-2018.aspx.

²⁶⁰ "Cronología," Misión de la ONU en Colombia, accessed February 11, 2020, <https://unmc.unmissions.org/cronologia-0>.

opposition to the government, led by ex-president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, began a campaign against the peace process, tapping into the general population's fears and judgements. In face of a steep slope towards peace—not only to convince the FARC of disbanding, but also to convince Colombians of accepting it—Juan Manuel Santos found a space that could help him in the process. He exploited the influence and significance of football, and he did so in a systematic way.

While the biggest expression of the intersection of his politics with football came in the events surrounding and during the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, discussed in detail further down, from the very onset of his presidency Santos began to change football's image and got involved in many of its decisions. In fact, he directly intervened in the decision process of assigning the Argentinian Nestor José Pekerman as the coach of the national team in early 2012. After Hernán Darío Gomez was fired in the middle of 2012, Santos asked the Colombian Football Federation to hire an international coach²⁶¹ and gave his approval of Pekerman before he was hired.²⁶² That was the turning point after which the Selección had an abrupt change in its performance and image locally and globally. Furthermore, his government implemented multiple policies, amongst which the Plan Decenal de Seguridad, Comodidad y Convivencia 2014–2024 stands out as a more progressive effort than that of any previous government to tackle criminal and paramilitary involvement in football clubs, as well as fan violence in and around stadiums.²⁶³

Nonetheless, Alejandro Villanueva, one of the leaders of the academic team that promoted and drafted this policy considers that, “The limitation of this public policy is that it had a very

²⁶¹ Neither Santos nor anyone else has given a specific reason as to why he asked specifically for an international coach. There is, however and especially at the time (2011), a common perception amongst Colombians that all the national coaches were too unprofessional and could not appropriately handle the discipline needed for the Selección to succeed. There is also a common collective idea that what is international, imported, is inherently better than the national.

²⁶² Peter J. Watson, “Colombia's Political Football: President Santos' National Unity Project and the 2014 Football World Cup,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 37 (2018), no. 5: 598-612.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 602.

good impulse, and it stayed there. That is to say, since the process of implementation, no more resources or money was destined to it,” showing the interest of the government but not its sustainability.²⁶⁴ Additionally, Santos’ understanding of the importance of sport—not only football—was reflected by his consistent support to Coldeportes, an institution that, according to official government budgets, saw its budget triple from 700 billion Colombian pesos in 2011 to 2.6 trillion in 2017.²⁶⁵ This process of incentivizing and funding sport as a pathway to social progress culminated in the establishment of a Ministry of Sport as Congress approved Santos’ proposal on November 21, 2018.²⁶⁶ This process is best expressed by the ex-president’s own words during a sports gala celebrated shortly after he took office. He said, “Either we change football or football is over for us!”²⁶⁷ Meaning that violence in football, including criminal activities that existed within it, had to be stopped, but he was cautious not to blame the sport itself for it.

The presence of football in all its dimensions did not stop there. In his interactions with the public audience, even in official presidential appliances, the sport repeatedly appeared as a common place that was referenced by Juan Manuel Santos in connection to his political interests and, especially, to the pursuit of the achievement of the peace process. A very common expression of this relationship was by using the symbolic objects of football, amongst which the team’s jersey is perhaps the most important. The jersey showcases the colors of the team and always has the badge on it. Wearing it is an explicit statement of the membership and affiliation to any given team and becomes a marker of those that make up the in-group. This is something that ex-president used

²⁶⁴ Personal communication, August 21, 2019.

²⁶⁵ “Información Contable y Financiera: Presupuesto,” Coldeportes, accessed February 11, 2020, https://www.coldeportes.gov.co/control_rendicion_cuentas/informacion_contable_financiera/presupuesto&download=Y.

²⁶⁶ Redacción El Tiempo, “El Senado aprobó creación de Ministerio del Deporte”, *El Tiempo*, November 22, 2018. However, it only went into effect under the new president Ivan Duque’s administration.

²⁶⁷ Redacción El Espectador, “‘¡O cambiamos al fútbol o se nos acaba el fútbol!’, advirtió el Presidente Santos”, *El Espectador*, December 1, 2010.

in his favor. Throughout his eight years in power, he appeared multiple times wearing the jersey of the Selección, the *national* team. This sometimes happened in un-official instances, like when he published photos with his family together watching a game of the Selección.²⁶⁸ This was a strong message of unity and bonding around football and its representatives of the country, relating core values like family, happiness, and community with the sport. There have also been more significant instances in which he wore the shirt during official presidential presentations and speeches. The was the case when he invited the entire Under-20 team to the presidential palace in 2011, days before the country hosted the FIFA U-20 World Cup. At the time, early in his term, this football-directed discourse was not necessarily tied to peace. At the time he said, “I want to wish you [the team] the best. You have prepared well, you have held our *tricolor* [in reference to the national team], and I am sure you will continue to do so during the World Cup.”²⁶⁹ A similar case took place two weeks later when, in a speech in the coffee-growing area of the country, he came out wearing the shirt and asked with humor for the players to score early in the game.²⁷⁰

As years went by and his presidency—like the national agenda—began revolving around the central issue of the peace process, the use of the national team’s jersey became even more politicized. After being elected president for his second term in mid-June 2014, Santos’ first official speech once the election results were confirmed showed the president speaking from the official podium, wearing the jersey and asking for Pekerman’s contract to be renewed after praising the achievements of the team in the 2014 World Cup—the best performance in the Selección’s history. In the video, symbolic aspects that relate to the nation—like the figure of the president,

²⁶⁸ Juan Manuel Santos (@JuanManSantos), “Hoy gritamos GOL! Vamos Colombia! #UnidosPorUnPaís,” Twitter, June 14, 2014.

²⁶⁹ Redacción El Espectador, “‘Presidente Juan Manuel Santos le entregó la bandera a la Selección Colombia Sub-20’,” *El Espectador*, July 22, 2011.

²⁷⁰ “Presidente Santos viste la camiseta de Colombia y pide goles al inicio,” Colombia.com, August 13, 2011.

the national anthem, and clips of Colombia's culture—were juxtaposed with the symbols and the discourse of football.²⁷¹ The very decision to have the sport as the main subject of his first public speech after being elected is very telling about his perception of nationalism and football being intrinsically connected. Finally, in a Twitter post from October 2015 (Figure 11), the president uploaded to his official account a photo in which he is showing the back of the national team's jersey that he is wearing. On it, the number '10'—the number that James Rodríguez, amongst the most famous and loved players of the team, wears and the number that is traditionally given to the team's best player—is stamped below where the name would normally go. But in this case, instead of a name there is a phrase that reads, "I play it for peace".²⁷² This is one of the most explicit examples where Santos combines symbols and discourses normally found in the field of football with an invitation to support the peace process. The powerful message is made stronger by appealing to people's love and interest in the sport.

²⁷¹ "Alocución del Presidente Juan Manuel Santos de agradecimiento a la Selección Colombia de Fútbol," Presidencia de la República - Colombia, Youtube, July 5, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZFxoRjVUY0>.

²⁷² Juan Manuel Santos (@JuanManSantos), "Mi camiseta para hoy! #VamosColombia 2-0," Twitter, October 8, 2015.



Figure 11. Tweet by President Juan Manuel Santos²⁷³

Twitter is, perhaps, the medium through which the ex-president has insisted most upon that association. He has used the social network as a dialogical space to reassert the convergence of nations and football in the interest of peace. And this, in turn, was most evident during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. On the day of the debut of the Selección, returning to the international tournament after a 16-year absence, Santos posted eight Tweets, all of them supporting the national team and most of them relating it back to supporting the peace talks he was leading. Complementing photos depicting him wearing the jersey and celebrating the match with his

²⁷³ Juan Manuel Santos (@JuanManSantos), “Mi camiseta para hoy! #VamosColombia 2-0,” Twitter, October 8, 2015.

family, he used hashtags like “#UnidosPorUnPaís,” “#VamosColombia,” and “#TodosPorLaPaz” (United for a country; Let’s go Colombia; Everyone for peace, respectively).²⁷⁴ The president capitalized upon the overwhelming emotions of people that united around the national team to promote his interests—also political—in achieving a sustainable peace. Even if he did so in a delicate or implicit manner, the message conveyed relates the two in a way where they cannot be separated. In his last post on that day, after a decisive 3-0 win over Greece, he congratulated Jorge Luis Pinto, the coach of Costa Rica at the time, for winning his first match and stated that he was “Another Colombian that shined in the World Cup.”²⁷⁵

The following day, June 15, 2014, was the final election day to decide who would be the president for the next four years—with the peace process at risk of being halted if his opposition won. At 9:30 a.m., just one and a half hours after voting centers were opened, Santos posted another Tweet in which Pinto is shown with his palm facing the camera and the word “peace” written on it. He captioned it with “Yesterday you won, the national team won, and today peace wins!”²⁷⁶ However sincere the president’s intentions to congratulate the coach, there is no doubt that the timing offered a unique opportunity to influence the emotions of the voters one last time before they cast their ballots. And, yet again, football was instrumentalized in a strategy to persuade Colombians of what the ‘right’ decision was. Football was in the best interest of the nation, just like peace. The key, according to political scientist Andrés Dávila, is how Santos uses football, without exaggeration or obvious manipulation. “In that sense, Santos was very skillful in 2014 because he did it [instrumentalized football for his political purposes], but he did it

²⁷⁴ Juan Manuel Santos (@JuanManSantos), “Colombia unida jamás será vencida! #VamosColombia #TodosPorLaPaz,” Twitter, June 14, 2014.

²⁷⁵ Juan Manuel Santos (@JuanManSantos), “Otro colombiano que se luce en el mundial. Felicitaciones al profesor Jorge Luis Pinto por la victoria de la selección de Costa Rica,” Twitter, June 14, 2014.

²⁷⁶ Juan Manuel Santos (@JuanManSantos), “Gracias al profe Jorge Luis Pinto por el mensaje. Ayer ganó ud, ganó la Selección, ganó Colombia y hoy gana la paz!” Twitter, June 15, 2014.

respecting...I mean, it wasn't an obvious thing. But it was there, the message was there.”²⁷⁷ What this meant, in turn, was that there was little pushback from any sector of the population, in relation to football. His critics contested his politics from many angles and perspectives—particularly accusing him of handing over the country to the FARC and leaving their crimes unpunished—but not his instrumentalization of football.

Finally, as Peter Watson (2018) explains, many professional football players joined Juan Manuel Santos' efforts to use football as an instrument for the promotion of peace. Through publications, their presence, and other action, many players used their influence to “construct nation.” For instance, James Rodriguez wrote an open letter in which he invited all Colombians to reject violence and argued for the peace process as a necessary solution. Additionally, other important famous players like Carlos Bacca, Luis Perea and Juan Cuadrado participated in or served as the face of many programs that were funded and driven by the government to implement football in the national process of reconciliation and efforts for recovery.²⁷⁸ The president also made multiple public appearances with José Pekerman, often at events where the coach was being honored with distinctions for his contributions to the country. These were the examples that, according to Santos, should be followed by all Colombians. As he stated in a public speech once, he believed that:

We can achieve everything, everything, if we work like the National Colombian football team, united for a country. This is the great lesson that these admirable Colombians have left us, these great sportsmen, great human beings, who represented us in the World Cup [...] Because the National team united us as a

²⁷⁷ Personal communication, August 20, 2019.

²⁷⁸ Watson, “Colombia's Political Football,” 607.

country, and they showed us the best of Colombians: that talent, that capacity to fight, that determination [...] This is Colombia! In this way we are going to win that other great match that we are playing, that of peace with social prosperity!²⁷⁹

Such an explicit use of the national team and the symbolism surrounding football was not only unique during Santos' administration because of its characteristics, but also because of its effectiveness. César Gaviria was one of the first that tried to relate football to national affairs, attempting to capitalize on the achievements of the 1993-1994 national team. He gave the Cruz de Boyacá, the highest distinction that a civilian in Colombia can receive, to the entire national team and staff after they won 5-0 against Argentina to qualify for the 1994 World Cup in the United States. During the Cup, the then president flew in a Colombian Air Force plane a total of 28 hours in five days to visit four times and personally encourage the players— “the reflection of the nation”—to do well in what became a disastrous tournament performance.²⁸⁰ And later, in 2001, President Andrés Pastrana also got involved with football to pursue his political interests, even using the office's influence to ensure the development of the Copa América in 2001 as discussed above.

However, these examples were nowhere near as effective as Santos's uses for football. Watson (2018) argues that this was largely due to the political climate of the time. Even if the Selección had similar successes and engaged the public's imagination towards the same objective, people's perspective of politics, the state of the internal conflict, and approaches of previous presidents towards the illegal armed groups made it impossible for them to harness the power and influence of football. This led to what he labeled as the “footballisation of society.”²⁸¹ This is not

²⁷⁹ Watson, “Colombia's Political Football,” 607-608.

²⁸⁰ José Clopatofsky, “La Selección fue un reflejo del país,” June 27, 1994.

²⁸¹ Watson, “Colombia's Political Football,” 606.

to say that Santos was the creator of football's importance in Colombia; as I have explored throughout this work, the instrumentalization of football as a resourceful tool to achieve one's objectives has been frequently used by a plurality of actors. What was significant about the ex-president's political use of football was that it was not an obvious manipulation of the figures and successes of football as in previous cases. Rather it was a larger social use of the sport in which Santos promoted football through its actors, objects, and discourses as a model for collective life—thus, footballising the nation. Santos was able to do what he did because of the way that football had previously been weaponized. He sought to restore it, and the nation, to something peaceful. It was from the previous uses of football, and the importance it got from these, that Santos built on to use it as a powerful instrument for peace.

Juan Manuel Santos and his administration's use of football surpassed any previous efforts to use football for political ends. In this case, the sport played a role at least in the social promotion of the peace process and the perception that people had about it—at least that's what Santos's action would seem to suggest. But not all voices agree with this position, like Arturo Charria, director of the Center of Memory, Peace and Reconciliation. He thinks that Santos did not actually use football, "he did wear the jersey, went to the games, congratulated the players, but he did not use it generally. There was a positive state of mind, but that's it."²⁸² Similarly, journalist María Jimena Duzán, who followed closely the peace dialogues in Havana, Cuba, doesn't believe that there was an intentional use of football.²⁸³

On the other side of the dialogue, other opinions firmly believe that this was a conscious use of football that served the ex-president's objectives. Sociologist Alejandro Villanueva is

²⁸² Personal communication, August 9, 2019.

²⁸³ Personal communication, August 21, 2019.

amongst them. He argues that Juan Manuel Santos “instrumentalized sport, and football in particular, during his 8 years [of presidency] to legitimate or delegitimize different political, economic, and legal processes.”²⁸⁴ In the same terms, Alejandro Villaneuva, part of the National Center for Historic Memory, describes how “Santos used football to legitimate the peace process with the guerilla. He ‘sold’ the project of peace as a comparison to the success of the Selección.”²⁸⁵ Finally, Camilo Villamizar, high school history teacher, recognizes that the president “was able to give a ‘turn’ to football and see it as a unifying element. And in the peace process he did use football. I remember he created a very simple campaign to promote the demobilization of the guerrilleros that consisted of going to the jungle where the camps were, and they simply threw footballs from the sky, and they did the campaign: ‘look, demobilize, you could be watching the game from home’.”²⁸⁶ It could also be argued that it had deeper effects, actually impacting people’s lives through his policies—even if they were not explicit—that encouraged and envisaged sport as a crucial aspect of the country’s progress. It was at the intersection between football and peace that the sport played its most important role in the armed conflict at the national level. And this process germinated from the very definition of what nation meant for Colombians. In the face of loss and grief, of a pervasive violence that conditioned the lives of Colombians, football emerged as a unifying force on which the collective conception of nationhood could converge. Neither loss in its subjectivity nor football in its passive expression as entertainment sufficed as unifying elements on their own; it was in the active use of football as an instrument for the reconciliation of the shared loss that the nation could be (re)constructed around them.

²⁸⁴ Personal communication, August 21, 2019.

²⁸⁵ Personal communication, August 16, 2019.

²⁸⁶ Personal communication, August 9, 2019.

Conclusion

I play therefore I am: a style of play is a way of being that reveals the unique profile of each community and affirms its right to be different. Tell me how you play and I will tell you who you are.

Eduardo Galeano

Why football?

From 2000 to 2016 the relationship between football and the internal armed conflict in Colombia changed. It was no longer a matter of a pervasive violence that spilled over into football because the conflict affected all aspects of Colombians' life. The sport was not just a passive set of actors and spaces that received violence from the overwhelming circumstances of the country in which it originated and developed. At the turn of the century, this intersection had begun to be more active and explicit as football was used by illegal armed groups as part of the violent acts they perpetrated. But as the circumstances of the conflict changed and the war began to de-escalate—the precise moment of this depending on the area of the country—victims and perpetrators alike continued to make a conscious use of the game in their processes of recovery and reconstruction of their lives, and for their efforts of what, for them, meant reconciliation. In turn, this shift towards a functional implementation of football by the actors of the armed conflict changed the meaning of the sport itself and resulted in it occupying a definitional place in many Colombians' understandings of their experiences of war and peace.

The effectiveness and importance of this instrumentalization of football stems, on the one hand, from its popularity and widespread presence as a public space of gathering in most parts of Colombia, and, on the other, from its power as a driving force in the construction of collective identities and the social fabric. In this regard, the importance of football in defining people's perceptions of nationhood cannot be disregarded. While arguably superficial and often exclusive of many groups or individuals, the general consensus has football as one of the very few elements that unify Colombians and as a prominent source in the collective imaginary of what it means to be Colombian. A seminal moment for this relationship can be found in the successes of the national team, the *Selección*, during the early 1990s; particularly, the 5-0 win against Argentina in 1993. This becomes a foundational moment in which the *Selección* becomes the 'national pride' and the juncture where people converge as a nation. Looking at football as a national symbol and a source of identity is important to both understand how it was instrumentalized and sometimes weaponized as a tool of agency, and why it was so effective, sometimes as a matter of healing.

The first part of this process was the instrumentalization of football by the illegal armed actors as a tool to perpetrate their violent acts. This contrasted with previous instances of the football field and game being used by groups, namely the guerrillas, as a space to build alliances and gather support from the communities. To better frame these uses, it is useful to think of football as a social field according to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields through which football has a set of spaces: its fields, its discourse, its objects and actors—the ball, those that play it (at a professional and amateur level)—and its symbols—jerseys, badges, colors. These were used in different combinations and forms by armed groups as a medium to impose their interests and contest important meanings, like that of collective identity, that were ascribed and reinforced through the game. In this sense, the condition of the football as a communal space that was

important for the sociability and inter-personal bonds of people in a given community—whether national, regional, or local—made it a target that could be exploited as a mechanism to contest those constructions, in turn terrorizing its members into submission. But this was expressed in many ways: leftist guerrillas committed terrorist attacks against famous figures or events of professional football as a publicity campaign to draw attention to their cause, but also used football fields in rural areas as places of reunion to ensure (and coerce) the cooperation of the community. Paramilitaries, on the contrary, repeatedly weaponized football in the process of perpetrating massacres in rural areas; they used the fields and the sport's appeal to people to magnify the damage to the community by contesting the social and identitary constructions around it, thus extending the submission of the community to the armed groups' control. The differences between these uses clarify the different interests that these groups had: communist guerrillas were created and fought against political intuitions for the *campesino*; paramilitaries originated and acted as a response against that. But it also clarifies their essential agreement that football was important in the development of the social fabric and, as such, could be used as a tool to interact—violently or peacefully—with the communities.

The process of the instrumentalization of football continued to change with the conflict. As armed groups and the violence that they inflicted de-escalated, football was used once again as a mechanism, but this time for peace and recovery. The same spaces, objects, actors, and symbols that were used before as an extension of war were then used as tools that offered the opportunity to recover and reconstruct the damages or lost social fabric and collective identities. Local initiatives that did so started as early as the mid-2000s. Through commemorative tournaments, inter-communal games, and new symbolizations of the spaces where football took place, individual communities found in football a tool to recover what was taken by the conflict. They

did so on their own, without the presence of the State or any other institution—just like they were before the conflict and how they suffered it. Other more formalized programs began exploiting the resources that football offered to empower communities, incentivize reconciliation, and give victims and perpetrators alike a space to recover from the scars left of the conflict and find the motivation to build a ‘normal’ life. Some of these were very well received, receiving wide support from all sectors and understood to be apolitical efforts to improve society. Others, like La Paz Fútbol Club, which originated at the heart of the FARC, were unable to convince political and historical positions that were reluctant to include the insurgent group in the prospects of the national reconciliation; they received a strong pushback from sectors criticizing this use of football as illegitimate propaganda. Efforts of reconciliation, like the instrumentalization of football, were thus expressed in different ways and at different rates with disparate results; the marks left by the war have not yet disappeared entirely and some groups are regarded as not being a legitimate part of the reconciliation after the conflict—or capable of using football legitimately, for that matter. Finally, football was also instrumentalized by Juan Manuel Santos’s government in order to legitimize the peace process with the FARC, and as a model and space for the social development of the nation. Although some contest it, it is argued that he capitalized on the successes of the *Selección* during his presidency, especially in the 2014 World Cup. Santos repeatedly alluded to the values of the game and its players and used important symbols like the team’s jersey and football’s discourse to promote his political agenda and influence the social change that he was trying to create. His was the most effective political instrumentalization of football as he seems to have realized the value that a calculated use of its parts made the sport a useful tool in the de-escalation of the conflict, precisely because of how the sport had been used during the conflict and the meaning it had gotten from those uses.

The role(s) of football in the recent history of Colombia's armed conflict was a unique moment of change in how the sport was perceived and approached. What was particular about this process was the use of football as an instrument in people's lives and in actors' actions as they related to violence. It was the conscious implementation of it as a mechanism to extend and express one's agency, sometimes contesting or limiting other's use of football. At first, it became a prominent method of violence, then a useful tool for peace. These uses and even weaponizations of football were not homogenous; they existed in plurality and interaction, with processes that were at times complimentary, at other contradictory. In this sense, not everyone's use of football was as effective, perceived as legitimate, or even possible. Each of these expressions reflected and elucidated the place and role of the different actors within the war and the national context, revealing larger discrepancies and social inequalities that were central to both the origin and subsequent de-escalation of the armed conflict. The evolution of football with the conflict in the almost two decades since the early 2000s defined how many people experienced those years and understood the reality of the community, region, and nation they inhabited.

In turn, this resulted in the reshaping of football as its meaning fluctuated. By playing such a role in the conflict, football was ingrained into people's perception of violence, peace, identity, and nationhood. This made the sport go beyond an athletic and entertaining activity that, due to its popularity, was touched by the national framework of violence, drugs, and political manipulation. Its followers also found in it identitary constructions that exceeded the affiliation with a single club, even leading them into violence. It allowed them to be part of the social fabric and figure themselves as subjects of inter-personal bonds, part of a collective network of meaning. Football thereby became a political tool and a determining factor in the construction of national identity and the Colombians' understandings of violence and peace. The intersection of football and

violence existed between its actors and their interests, between their bullets and balls. Multiple, diverse, particular, and disparate, the instrumentalizations of football became a reflection of individual and groups' places and evolution in the conflict, elucidating attitudes and situations that were external to football but were expressed through it.

Extra time: Grapefruits, Loss and Redemption

The story of football and the conflict in Colombian history is not that of a single match that could be won or lost. It was many matches. Some were played many years ago, some are still being played. Simultaneous, parallel and contradictory, some games are played in glorious stadiums with thousands of spectators, and others are played on dirt marked by war. Sometimes the game was the violence itself. Many bullets were fired, many lives were lost, many goals were scored. The ball kept rolling, each time being kicked in a different direction, each time with disparate results. A win here. A loss there. Football came to bear the marks of the war, as well as its incomplete ending. Some matches remain unresolved, in extra time.

John Julián Cruz Hernández was born in the *corregimiento* of Bocas del Yí, close to the town of Mitú in the southern department of Vaupés. John remembers how, when he was just a kid, he loved playing football so much that he used to play with grapefruits because he couldn't afford a real ball. When the FARC arrived at the area in 1985, John's mother, like many others, forbade him from playing football: they understood that the innocent kicking of grapefruits could mean their children would be taken and recruited by the insurgent group. Through communal activities,

like football, the FARC would establish relationships with the kids to convince them to join the armed fight.

John's mother was right to worry. When the guerrilla forcefully took control of the *corregimiento*, the entire community was stigmatized as being collaborators of the insurgent group, even labeled by the government as a "red zone" (denoting the active presence of the guerrilla). John recalls how, "if anyone went [to Mitú] from Bocas del Yí, [people would say]: 'Oh no, you're from Bocas del Yí? Oh, how scary, you guys are workers, collaborators of that people [the FARC].'"²⁸⁷ But the community could not leave the area, under the threat of being killed if they did so.

Thus, the community carried on with their lives under the surveillance of the guerrilla, but not without loss: according to the local school principal, Luís Fernando Rojas Arroyave, between 50 and 80 people from the community, especially minors, were recruited by the FARC. "Naively, thinking that you're going to get something in life for your family, you abandon it. For instance, they took many boys from here and they have yet to come back," John says, "I am the only one that has returned." He left his town on December 23rd, in the middle of the Christmas celebrations, when he was about to turn 14 years old. "I didn't want to go," he recalls, "I didn't know what I was doing."²⁸⁸

John spent 12 years as a member of the FARC. During that time, he traveled through five departments, getting further and further away from his land and his family. One day, tired of the false promises and desperate to see his family, he fled the guerrilla to return home. "I couldn't speak," he says, remembering the reunion with his family, "I hugged my mom and my dad. And,

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

of course, the happiness.” But coming back from the insurgent group, he was labeled as a *guerrillero* and wasn’t immediately received in the community. With time, things have changed. “Now people trust me more. Now people don’t say ‘You were one of them,’ now everything is normal.” John made his way to become a local leader, organizing cultural events and leading one of the central events that gather the community: football. Sadly, his story does not end there, he also carries his brother’s experiences with him:

This is the great story of my brother. He went looking for me, with the intention of getting me out of an armed group. He joined the group [the FARC]. He tried searching for me, but he didn’t find me. At the end he fled with a girl who was his romantic partner and he turned himself in to the army. We were precisely gathered with him [after he came back] and all the family, and my niece said that the police were coming. They weren’t policemen. They were guerrilla fighters. I came up to them and they didn’t say a word. They said: “it’s not with you, it’s with your brother. We want to speak with your brother.” They didn’t come to give us anything, they came to kill him. Sure, because he had escaped. [My brother] was desperate due to the fear of them coming at any moment to kill him. And he. He decided to hang himself. There [pointing to a house], where we were born.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 12 John Cruz (left) playing football on the field he helped create.

For many years, the communities of Mitú have gathered for an annual football tournament where local, both women and men's, teams face each other in an exercise of socializing and collective bonding. Although the Bocas del Yí community was stigmatized as being collaborators of the FARC, they kept going and participating. The tournament implies a significant economic investment for the people of Bocas del Yí because they have to find the resources to pay for the transportation and the referee fees, which, while small, are much more than what they could usually afford. But they make the effort and go every year, an act suggestive of the importance of football for the community. It was precisely through these spaces that they “began from zero” and were able to change the perceived image they had in the region. This importance also extends to the

safety of the children, as reflected in school principal Luis Fernando Rojas's words, who believes that the sport "does help. It helps in making the children stay here. Yes, it has helped, for sure."²⁹⁰

John is now the vice-captain of the local football team. He recounts with pride how he worked with other members of the community for many days to adapt the terrain and make what is now the community's football field. It is there where, every Wednesday at 2:00 pm, the local team plays against the school's team. The field, however, is not in the best conditions, and John is clear about what they ask the government for: "Hopefully they could fix this field. Not for us, but for the children that come after us. Because one day they will also play with us. As leaders we've always asked that from the government."²⁹¹

They continue to wait. The FARC remained in control of the area until 2012. They have been gone for some time now, but the community is not entirely free from danger. They are aware that a dissident guerrilla group, which did not accept nor made part of the 2016 Peace Accords between Santos's government and the FARC, is interested in returning to the area and taking control of it. For now, they are at peace and they continue to play football as they recover from conflict, . "We are improving. Slowly, but we're getting there," John says, "And we still have a lot to work for. But we must do it for the people."²⁹²

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ "Bocas del Yí (Mitú, Vaupés)," June 5, 2018, in *Y dónde es el partido?*, produced by Andrés Orozco Quintero, <https://www.rtvcpplay.co/series/y-donde-es-el-partido/bocas-del-yi-mitu-vaupes>

²⁹² *Ibid.*

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Guardian*, October 11, 2017

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University - University Park Campus	August 2016 – May 2020
Anthropology B.A., History B.A., French and Francophone Studies B.A. Schreyer Honors College; Paterno Fellows Program Thesis: “Between Bullets and Balls: The Role of Football in the Recent History of Colombia’s Armed Conflict”	
Colegio Los Nogales – Bogotá D.C., Colombia	August 2008 – June 2016

AWARDS/CERTIFICATES

• Rock Ethics Institute Undergraduate Fellowship	November 2019 - Present
• Liberal Arts Paterno Fellow	2018 - Present
• Freshman President’s Award	April 2017
• WSET Level 2 Award in Wines	February 2020

WORK EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant	November 2019 - Present
<i>Children, Media, and Conflict Zones Initiative – Rock Ethics Institute</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked under supervision of Dr. Yael Warshel in the Journalism Project within the Initiative. Wrote analytic and critical literature reviews of over 25 published academic articles in the field; tasked with writing literature review for an article to be published. In charge of interviewing one subject for the study and collaboration with fellow assistants. 	
Teaching Assistant	Spring 2020
<i>Anthropology 444 Primitive Warfare – Penn State Anthropology Department</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked under the supervision of Dr. Luke Glowacki. Supported instructor with test administration, curriculum development and assignment grading; responsible for the new course format with alternating lectures and seminars. Lead weekly seminar during one class period each week. 	
French Study Abroad Department Representative	Fall 2019
<i>Penn State French and Francophone Studies Department</i>	State College, PA
Retail Sales Representative	August 2017 - Present
<i>Your Cigar Den – Cigar Bar</i>	State College, PA
Busser	November 2016 – August 2017
<i>Penn State Food Services – Pollock Commons</i>	State College, PA

INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Venezuelan Student Organization (VSO)	2018 – 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan Pais Connect PSU 2020 – Academic Sub-Secretary 	
Colombian American Student Association (CASA)	2017 - 2020
Ours to Change Society Non-profit Organization	2017 - 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treasurer – 2018-2019 	
Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society	2016 - 2020
Phi Alpha Theta History National Honor Society; Lambda Alpha Anthropology Honor Society	2019 - 2020

ADDITIONAL SKILLS AND INTERESTS

- Fluent in English and Spanish, Advanced in French
- Proficient in Microsoft Excel/PowerPoint/Word. Advanced in Word Press and SPSS.
- Interests in international politics, literature, soccer, skydiving.