


SUPERPOWERFUL BUT SUPERINVISIBLE? WOMEN'S FOOTBALL AND NATION IN PRESIDENTIAL DISCOURSE IN COLOMBIA, 2010-2018

*SUPERPODEROSAS MAS SUPERINVISÍVEIS? O FUTEBOL FEMININO
E A NAÇÃO NO DISCURSO PRESIDENCIAL NA COLÔMBIA, 2010-2018*



*¿SUPERPODEROSAS PERO SUPERINVISIBLES? FÚTBOL FEMENINO
Y NACIÓN EN EL DISCURSO PRESIDENCIAL EN COLOMBIA, 2010-
2018*

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Abstract: This article quantitatively and qualitatively evaluates references to women's football in Colombia in presidential discourse and Twitter posts during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018). Using critical discourse analysis of presidential discourse, it compares representations and messages around the respective Colombian men's and women's national football teams in relation to Santos' national unity project. Although football in Colombia was understood by the Santos government to have powerful unifying and transformative potential, this article questions whether this potential is limited to the male game and the extent to which women's football contributed to Santos' sporting nationalism strategy. Could women's football also represent the "national us" and the "New Colombia" so frequently mentioned in presidential rhetoric?

Keywords: Football. Women. Colombia. Social Media.

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1 INTRODUCTION

2010-2018 saw a footballing renaissance in Colombia that coincided with the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos. The national men's team qualified for the World Cup 2014 in Brazil for the first time since 1998 and turned in their best ever performance, reaching the quarterfinals before losing to the hosts. They also performed creditably in the 2018 World Cup in Russia, and a new generation of heroes, such as Radamel Falcao and James Rodríguez became sporting ambassadors for the nation with their performances in European leagues. The success of the national men's team, and the national pride that it engendered, "regenerated football as a unifying national symbol" (WATSON, 2018, p. 598), and became a key element of President Santos' national unity project related to the peace process with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and discourse of "one sole country" (QUITIÁN, 2014; WATSON, 2018; 2020). Roa Vargas and Salcedo Rodríguez also note that the men's national team was able to revitalize a really identifiable national feeling due it serving as a common meeting place for people, irrespective of regional or class divisions (2014, p. 46)¹.

The national women's team also emerged as a continental force in the same period, qualifying for the 2011 World Cup in Germany and Canada in 2015 where they reached the second round, being runners up in the Copa América in 2010 and 2014 and qualifying for the Olympic Games in 2016. A women's national professional league was created in 2016 and Atlético Huila won the Copa Libertadores in 2018, thus providing opportunities for presidential sporting nationalism discourse about women's football. However, as is often the case in analyses of narratives of sport and nation, the focus has so far concentrated on the role of men's football in official discourse in Colombia. No attention has been focused on if women's football success contributed to Santos' rhetorical strategy, what repeated messages and representations were included, and how this compared to the symbolic value of the men's national team. This perpetuates the absence of investigation into women's sport and nation in Colombia. The study of representations of women's football in Colombia so far has been limited to work on written press and social media responses (MARTÍNEZ MINA; GOELLNER, 2015) and of the panorama of the women's professional league (MARTÍNEZ MINA; GOELLNER; OROZCO RODRÍGUEZ, 2019). This article builds on this work by quantitatively and qualitatively analysing references to women's football in speech and tweets by President Santos. It asks whether the national women's team, often dubbed the *Superpoderosas* (the Superpowerful ones), was empowered in the same way as the men's team to represent a unified nation and be symbolic of a "New Colombia"? Did Colombian women footballers become active agents within the sphere of masculine symbols and representations of the nation that have long dominated narratives of sporting nationalism in the country? Was women's football spoken about in the same way and with the same potential as the men's game? If not, what messages were promoted?

1 Original quote: "la selección colombiana fue capaz de revitalizar un sentimiento nacional realmente identificable debido a que sirvió como elemento de comunión de la gente, sin importar divisiones regionales y de clase".

2 WOMEN'S FOOTBALL AND NATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Although Hobsbawm wrote that “the imagined community seems more real as a team of eleven named people” (1990, p. 143), suggesting that women's football could serve for nation-building projects, football in Latin America has been described as a city without women (SEBRELI, 2005, p. 259). Success for the national men's team has frequently been a fundamental source of national pride and unifying myths that foreground masculine sporting heroes in narratives of national triumphs and characteristics. Teams are regularly described as embodying a style that is representative and recognisable of the nation. Goldblatt argues that “in Latin America, the nation primarily confronted the world as its football team” (2008, p. 266), but it did so with its male team only. The practice of sport and football in particular, at the end of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century became associated with civilising and modernising tendencies, associated with the betterment of the “race”, aimed at producing healthy and strong citizens to defend the nation. Although women across Latin America did also play football at this time, “as sports [had] been defined as essential to building and exhibiting proper masculinity, it constituted a dangerous terrain in terms of its potential to masculinise women” (ELSEY; NADEL, 2019, p. 31). Playing physical sports such as football were claimed to jeopardise women's traditional societal role as mothers and carers. Not only were “women who played [were] seen as violating the norms of respectable behavior” (ELSEY; NADEL, 2019, p. 15), but “women's soccer was seen as a threat, making the game almost antinational” (NADEL, 2014, p. 210). The public sphere of sport, a space where representations and power relationships in society are constructed (RUIZ, 2011a, p. 136), therefore became a hegemonic masculine domain, with football as the most popular sport and therefore the most propitious site for political narratives of sporting nationalism, supported, strengthened and consolidated by print media, radio and television. Women were confined to the private sphere and female athletes devalued or invisibilised as national representatives. Women footballers have not only suffered from this invisibility in the media, but also from stereotyping that casts aspersions over their femininity and sexuality (LÓPEZ DE D'AMICO; BENN, 2016, p. 8). This further problematises their role as national representatives in countries which prize female beauty as a national source of pride and where conservative views of sexuality dominate. An additional problem is that “femininity was used to critique male football, further disconnecting women's football from acceptable sporting practice” (ELSEY; NADEL, 2019, p. 110), meaning that many dismiss women's football as being of a poor standard. Women footballers, therefore, face a number of challenges to overcome. Ruiz suggests that they enter the field as a new agent who must earn the right to participate within it (2011b, p. 35)², and Binello *et al* describe them as a stranger who disrupts the field and who it is necessary to define (2000, p. 34)³. Not only do they have to challenge and overcome existing stereotypes and preconceptions, they have to battle for visibility and space in the media before they can become a potential source of presidential rhetoric extolling their value to the nation.

2 Original quote: “entran en el campo como un nuevo agente que debe ganarse el derecho de participar dentro de él”.

3 Original quote: “un extranjero que perturba el campo y al que es necesario definir”.

The history of women's football in Colombia and representations of the women's game has received very little academic attention. In fact, Vélez, in her study of gender and football goes as far as to say that the silence that surrounds the study of the issue of gender in football has become suspicious in the case of Colombia (2001, p. 40)⁴. Eley and Nadel's important book *Futbolera* (2019) discusses the tour of the Costa Rican Deportivo Femenino to Colombia in 1951 and claims that "Colombia had vibrant women's football in the 1950s and 1960s" (2019, p. 265) but does not provide further details. Calvo provides some information, describing the growth of women's football in Valle del Cauca in the seventies and then the first appearances of a national team ([2015]). This article emerges from research for my PhD thesis, which found evidence of matches between women footballers, sometimes including beauty queens, as part of pre-game entertainment and the general spectacle in the El Dorado years of the Colombian professional league (1948-1953) (WATSON, 2019, p. 56). It also looked at the impact of football-based, mixed-gender Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) methodologies and established that girls and women are increasingly being recognised and involved as being participants in the Colombian "footballsphere" and included more in projects with a transformative and integrative aim.

3 THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOTBALL IN COLOMBIA

It is no surprise that Santos turned to football in order to support his national unity project centred on the peace process with the FARC given its popularity and unifying power in the country. Football has been described as the axis point which condenses support and loyalties from which the nationalist sentiment can be nourished (DÁVILA LADRÓN DE GUEVARA, 1994, p. 23)⁵ in a country which is a nation that is without the symbols, institutions and idols which can crystallize the collective identities which serve as the sediment for nation building (DÁVILA LADRÓN DE GUEVARA; LONDOÑO, 2003, p. 123)⁶. Football is a site of national encounter (LARRAÍN, 2015, p. 194) in a nation that has struggled to reconcile a series of geographical, political, racial and economic oppositions that have fragmented a sense of national unity and often have been expressed in violence. This opinion on football's powers was officialised in the *Poder del Fútbol* (Power of Football) survey carried out by the Colombian Interior Ministry which found that 94% considered football to either be important or very important (COLOMBIA, 2014a, p. 49) and 96% thought that the men's national team was important as a symbol of integration (2014a, p. 58). The study found that 77% believed that the women's national team was important for Colombia (COLOMBIA, 2014a, p. 58). This national understanding meant that football was a propitious site for exploitation for the Santos government. Successes on the field allowed Santos to extol national virtues displayed by the players, make the team metonymic of a new nation looking forward to a peaceful future, and subtly promote his political project. Football could also be deployed as a central tool of SDP projects,

4 Original quote: "El silencio que rodea el estudio del juego de género en el fútbol, se torna sospechoso en el caso de Colombia".

5 Original quote: "el eje condensador de adhesiones y arraigos detrás de los cuales se nutre el sentimiento nacionalista".

6 Original quote: "una nación huérfana de símbolos, instituciones e ídolos que cristalicen las identidades colectivas que sirvan de sedimento en la construcción de nación".

including those in the FARC demobilisation camps after the signing of the peace agreement (WATSON, 2020).

The survey also provided a first attempt to evaluate the participation of women in Colombian football, whether as players, fans or consumers. It highlighted opportunities for football to benefit national coexistence, and several of these opportunities related specifically to women. It found that women share pitches with men throughout the country and women also represent an important percentage of the fan base of professional teams. Women go with their children to matches and these can be shared moments of happiness and enjoyment. The survey concluded that football has stopped being a solely masculine game, and now is an activity shared and enjoyed by the whole family (COLOMBIA, 2014b, p. 17)⁷. It also found that football was important for 58% of women (2014b, p. 21) and that women who were previously distanced from football have now started to play the sport (2014b, p. 27), finding that 12% of women currently play football and 53% played it at school. In addition, 89% of women watched football on television (2014b, p. 28). These results suggest that women's football has potential for being deployed towards social transformation and is a site ripe for potential messages about the nation.

The strategic use of football for national unity was most evident in presidential rhetoric. Santos' director of communications from 2010-2017, Juan Carlos Torres, discussed how football was used in speeches:

I would not say that there was a defined strategy for the use of sport in speeches, but there was an instruction: to make the most of good sports news to inspire through speeches and to generate an atmosphere of unity and of optimism in the country [...] In speeches we sought, due to the instructions of the President and also due to the advice of his communications assessors, to use football as a tool to unite the country. We did it consciously and we used it in many speeches and addresses, especially in the time before, during and after the football World Cup [...] What happened is that we always linked sport and football with the final objective of paz, with the values of unity, of solidarity, of reconciliation, of working as a team (PERSONAL INTERVIEW, 14 December 2017)⁸.

Sport was the central theme of 99 speeches delivered by Santos during his presidency. Football was the principal focus of 35 of these speeches, and was frequently mentioned in many of the other 64. Sport, and football in particular, was also a regular topic of presidential tweets, either those coming from the Santos account (@JuanManSantos) or the official presidency account (@Infopresidencia). My study analysed 1048 tweets about sport during the Santos presidency, 508 of those from the Santos account and 540 from the presidency account. Transcripts of Santos'

7 Original quote: "(3) Las mujeres comparten hoy canchas con los hombres en todo el país, además de que representan un porcentaje importante de la afición y de la hinchada de los equipos profesionales. Acompañan a sus hijos a los juegos y en esta actividad disfrutan con ellos momentos muy felices de la vida. La mujer cambia el mundo y multiplica su impacto social. 4) El fútbol dejó de ser netamente masculino, hoy es una actividad compartida por la familia y despierta muchas alegrías".

8 Original quote: "No diría que hubiera una estrategia definida para el uso del deporte en discursos, pero sí una instrucción: aprovechar las buenas noticias deportivas para inspirar a través de los discursos y para generar un ambiente de unidad y de optimismo en el país [...] En los discursos hemos procurado, por las instrucciones del Presidente y también por consejo de sus asesores de comunicaciones, utilizar el fútbol como un elemento para unificar el país. Lo hemos hecho conscientemente y lo usamos en muchos discursos y alocuciones, sobre todo en la época de preparación para el Mundial de fútbol y después del Mundial del fútbol [...] Lo que pasa es que al deporte y al fútbol lo vinculamos siempre con el logro final de la paz, con los valores de la unidad, de la solidaridad, de la reconciliación, del trabajo en equipo".

speeches (taken from the *Presidencia de la República de Colombia* website) and copies of his tweets were coded and analysed using the NVIVO software package. NVIVO allows a researcher to ask complex questions of such data, such as measuring word or topic frequency, word and theme association, analyse trends, and classify and categorise sources. Each speech or tweet was coded into a series of “nodes”, which corresponded to repeated words, themes or topics. A node can be imagined as a type of “catching point” where all references to the same word or topic can be collected, quantified and analysed. Thus, for example, any reference in speeches or tweets to phrases such as “all Colombians”, “the whole country”, or “all Colombia” would be coded at the same node. Images, hashtags, and the audiovisual content of videos embedded into tweets could also be coded in the same way. This process allowed a quantitative and qualitatively analysis of the content of Santos’ rhetoric, discovering how often determined phrases and topics were mentioned and when, which words and topics were most commonly used, and how certain words and topics appeared in relation to each other. For example, running a query of the coded data could establish how often the nodes of “Men’s national team” and “unity” were mentioned in close proximity and when.

4 SPEECH RESULTS

Charts 1 and 2 below allow us to compare the quantity of references to the men’s national football team and women’s football team in presidential speeches.

Chart 1 – References in speeches to the men’s national team

Node	Number of speeches	Number of references
Men’s national team	60	108
José Pékerman	16	32
Radamel Falcao	14	24
James Rodríguez	11	12
Mario Yepes	4	5
Other players	9	13

Source: research data

Chart 2 – References in speeches to the women’s football

Node	Number of speeches	Number of references
Women’s football	4	9
Maturity	1	1
Strength	1	1
Beauty	1	1
Bravery	1	1
Patriotic sentiment	1	1

Source: research data

Chart 1 shows that the men’s national team was mentioned in 60 of the 99 speeches, with 108 references in total. Key figures were also regularly cited, including

the coach José Pékerman (mentioned in 16 speeches with 32 references), and star players Radamel Falcao (14 speeches and 24 references) and James Rodríguez (11 speeches and 12 mentions). By contrast, chart 2 shows that women's football was only mentioned in 4 speeches, with 9 individual references. None of the players were ever mentioned. As has already been indicated, Santos had plenty of opportunities to praise the achievements of the women's team given their qualification for two World Cups during his presidency (in 2011 and 2015), qualifying for the Olympics in 2016 and excellent results in the Copa América (runners up in 2010 and 2014, 3rd place in 2012). Despite all these notable achievements, and not forgetting performances by the indoor women's teams and junior teams, the women's national team were only mentioned in one speech in the entirety of Santos' presidency. This did not even occur during or after any of the above tournaments, but appeared in a speech in his first year in office on 1 December 2010 at the Sportsman of the Year prizegiving ceremony. Here is the reference:

A second reason for enormous happiness this year were our courageous women football players. They have given the men's team a great lesson! They are a group of pretty young women who have shown a valuable sporting maturity and true sense of patriotism, representing us with excellent results on a global stage. I am entirely convinced that they will do the same again next year in the World Cup in Germany and in the Panamerican Games in Guadalajara, Mexico, as well as in the Olympic Games in London in 2012. I can announce to them that from now I will make space in my government diary to watch them play in these forthcoming championships. They will make us feel so proud (COLOMBIA, 1 Dec. 2010)⁹.

Although Santos jokes about the women's team teaching male footballers a lesson or two, and refers to common "national" characteristics that are also evoked when speaking about the men's team ("courageous", "maturity", "true sense of patriotism"), the phrase that stands out is "pretty young women". The diminutive form is never used when referring to male footballers, and Santos elects to praise the Colombian women footballers' beauty rather than their technical prowess, lapsing into "traditional" ways in which Colombian women represent the nation. Hundreds of beauty contests take place in Colombia each year with the Miss Colombia and Miss Universe contests being front-page news. Bolívar argues that these beauty contests are a potent site for the construction of national imaginaries and embed a sense of how a woman can best represent the nation, saying that the National Beauty Pageant operates as a space of productions of representations of the nation through the attribution of specific values to woman and the social groups that participate in the pageants (BOLÍVAR, 2007, p. 72)¹⁰. The "pretty young women" comment illustrates the problems that women's footballers have in Colombia to be recognised for their talent rather than their physical attractiveness. This complements the conclusions of Martínez Mina and Goellner whose study of the representations

9 Original quote: "Un segundo motivo de enorme felicidad este año fueron nuestras corajudas jugadoras de fútbol. ¡Nos han dado una gran lección a los hombres! Son un grupo de lindas jovencitas que han demostrado una valiosa madurez deportiva y verdadero sentido de patria, representándonos con excelentes resultados a nivel mundial. Estoy plenamente convencido de que así lo volverán a hacer el próximo año, en el Mundial de Alemania y en los Juegos Panamericanos en Guadalajara (México), además de los Juegos Olímpicos de Londres, en el año 2012. Les anuncio que desde ya apartaré un espacio en la agenda de Gobierno para verlas en las respectivas finales. Nos harán sentir tan orgullosos".

10 Original quote: "el Reinado Nacional de Belleza opera como espacio de producción de representaciones de lo nacional a través de la atribución de valores específicos a las mujeres y grupos sociales que participan en ellos".

of Colombian women footballers in the press showed that football played by women generates a series of social reactions, influence on the majority of occasions, by the normalized representation of femininity. Their results led them to conclude that women footballers are questioned about their femininity and their sexuality (2015, p. 41)¹¹. Similarly, the absence of reporting on women's football in the press (MARTÍNEZ MINA; GOELLNER, 2015) is exacerbated by, and also explains, the lack of comment and celebration from the president, which, as figures 1 and 2 show, is vastly inferior to the amount of discourse related to men's football.

Although the above was the only speech in which the women's football team was mentioned, Santos did visit the national women's team before the 2011 World Cup. In comments to the press (press interviews were not included in the coding process), Santos said "All of us Colombians are very proud of you and I want to tell you this with lots of faith and hope. We know that have been progressing step by step, getting better and better and are now in the big leagues" (PRESIDENTE, 31 May 2011)¹². He also appeared alongside two of the players on the Agenda Colombia television show of the Presidency on 6 October 2014 to congratulate them on their runners up position in the Copa América 2014. On this occasion he said "You don't know the importance of what you have done for the country, that pride, that honour for Colombians... that is very important for the self esteem of Colombians" (@infopresidencia, 6 October 2014)¹³. These quotes are more representative of how he speaks of achievements of the male team and the benefits for the country and Colombians. For example, "pride" and "self esteem" are referred to in 40 speeches with 78 mentions, and "hope and optimism" appear in 24 speeches with 46 mentions. Santos also speaks of "All Colombians" and the country being proud of their achievements. What is lacking is any reference to what the women's team symbolises for Colombia, or how they are ambassadors for the nation. There is no reference to unity or peace, for example. The men's national team are linked in close proximity (in the same sentence) to "unity" in 13 speeches with 21 separate mentions, by way of comparison, with the idea of sport's unifying power appearing in 58 speeches with 150 mentions. The most striking example of this is the following except from Santos' speech thanking the men's national team for their efforts in the 2014 World Cup, the first televised speech he had given following his re-election:

From no won, I invite not just all those who supported our proposals but also those who voted for other candidates or did not vote, that they unite towards the consstruction of a just peace, a peace with truth, a peace with reconciliation...a peace with unity. We can achieve EVERYTHING, everything, if we work, like the Colombian National Team, UNITED FOR A COUNTRY!. This is the great lesson that these admirable Colombians gave us, those great sportsmen and great human beings who represented us in the football World Cup (COLOMBIA, 2014c)¹⁴.

11 Original quote: "el fútbol practicado por mujeres genera una serie de reacciones sociales, influenciadas, la mayoría de las veces, por la representación normatizada de feminidad. Los resultados permitieron identificar que las jugadoras son cuestionadas respecto a su feminidad y sexualidad".

12 Original quote: "Todos los colombianos estamos muy orgullosos de ustedes y quiero decirles que tenemos mucha fe y mucha esperanza. Sabemos lo que ustedes han venido haciendo poco a poco, mejorando cada vez más, y ahora están en las grandes ligas".

13 Original quote: "No saben lo importante que representa para el país lo que ustedes han hecho, ese orgullo, ese honor para los colombianos...eso es muy importante para la autoestima del colombiano".

14 Original quote: "Invito desde ahora a los que acompañaron nuestras propuestas – pero también a los que votaron

On the rare occasions when Santos speaks about women's football, it is striking that the theme of national unity is not mentioned, suggesting the women's football team does not have this convening power. It is also worthy of note that the visit to the women's training and invitation of the two players to meet him does not compare well with visits involving the men's team. Santos invited the men's national team to the Casa Nariño, the presidential palace, to receive the national flag as national ambassadors before the World Cups in 2014 and 2018, and the Copa América in 2015. The Under 20 team had a similar honour in 2011. Santos also visited the national team on two occasions in 2011, once in 2012, and once again in 2013, as well as visiting Falcao in hospital before the 2014 World Cup. The national team was also invited to the palace following the 2014 World Cup, as were the men's futsal team on two occasions following triumphs in major tournaments. The women's team not were invited to receive the national flag from the president before their appearances in the Women's World Cup or Copa América, though team representatives were part of the delegation that was presented with the flag before the Olympic Games in 2016. Again, this suggests that the women's team is not accorded the same importance nor are as representative of the nation as their male counterparts.

5 TWITTER RESULTS

I have demonstrated elsewhere how Twitter broadcasts related to the men's national football team became a potent vessel for Santos to create "ambient affiliations" (ZAPPAVIGNA, 2011; 2012) between citizens that aided his national unity project (WATSON, 2020). Regular tweets at the times of national football matches, particularly those around the World Cups of 2014 and 2018, that contained a combination of message, hashtags, images, videos, emojis and GIFs were a potent cocktail that promoted a sense of horizontal comradeship of national togetherness based on the ideational symbol of the men's national team. Did tweets about the women's football team from the @JuanManSantos and @infopresidencia accounts promote a similar message?

Charts 3 and 4 below show the quantity of tweets and references related to the men's national team and the women's national team and women's football in general respectively. Similarly to the results for the speeches, there is a huge disparity in the quantity of tweets and references about the men's national team and players, compared to tweets and references about the women's national team and women's football more generally. The men's national team appears in 381 tweets over the eight years of Santos' presidency, compared to just 17 for the women's team. As the term "superpoderosas" always appears in the national team tweets, there are just 19 tweets about women's football in eight years. Eight of these tweets came from the @JuanManSantos account and eleven from the @infopresidencia account.

por otras opciones o no votaron – a que se unan a la construcción de una paz justa, una paz con verdad, una paz con reconciliación... una paz con unidad. TODO, todo lo podemos lograr si trabajamos – como la Selección Colombia – ¡UNIDOS POR UN PAÍS! Esa es la gran lección que nos dejaron estos colombianos admirables, estos grandes deportistas y grandes seres humanos que nos representaron en el Mundial de Fútbol".

Chart 3 – Results for the tweets about the men’s national team

Node	Number of tweets	Number of references
Men’s national team	381	514
James Rodríguez	54	62
Radamel Falcao	48	58
José Néstor Pékerman	38	46
Juan Cuadrado	10	14
David Ospina	7	7
Other players	58	67

Source: research data

Chart 4 - Results for tweets about women’s football

Node	Number of tweets	Number of references
Women’s national team	17	21
Superpoderosas	4	4
Women’s football	2	2

Source: research data

Santos tended to tweet at least two or three times on match days of the men’s national team, irrespective of whether the match was a friendly, a qualification match for the World Cup or a tournament match. There would usually be a tweet before the game and one after the game, and frequently he would tweet when Colombia scored. This explains the high amount of references to players such as James Rodríguez, Radamel Falcao and Juan Cuadrado in chart 3, as well as those about other players. By contrast, tweets from Santos about the women’s team and their results are few and far between. In October 2013 he congratulated the Under 17 on qualifying for the World Cup, and the futsal team were wished luck in the following month for getting to the final of the World Championships, held in the Colombian city of Barrancabermeja. Santos tweeted three times to congratulate the senior team on their Copa América results in September 2014, and twice during the World Cup in June 2015. His final tweet about women’s football was to congratulate Santa Fe for winning the inaugural women’s professional league in 2017. Santos claims to be a Santa Fe fan and tweeted about the men’s team on 10 occasions during his presidency. Unlike his tweets about men’s football, there is the sense that Santos is not closely following the women’s matches. There are no tweets celebrating the scoring of a goal, the result is never given and there are no mentions of any of the footballers. Unlike their male counterparts, these “superpowerful girls” are seemingly “superinvisible”, deemed unworthy of specific attention or mention. Spectacular occasions such as Daniela Montoya’s brilliant goal in the 2015 World Cup against Mexico, rated as the second best goal of the tournament by FIFA, the 2-0 victory over France in the same tournament, or Catalina Usme’s four goals in a 7-0 thrashing of Uruguay in the 2018 Copa América are ignored and therefore fail to become moments of national celebration and thus are not consecrated as important heroic moments that could enter the cannon of national footballing myths. The only time a women footballer is named in any of the 19 tweets is when Natalia Gaitán appeared in a video before the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio,

with the message “Colombian athletes like @NataliaGaitan3 tell us that playing sports is a way of saying #YesToPeace” (@infopresidencia, 7 July 2016)¹⁵. Notably, in this tweet, Gaitán is an athlete rather than a footballer.

The 2015 World Cup could well have been a launching point for the women's national team and for women's football in the country. Montoya's goal, the win over France and qualifying for the second round were notable achievements, and the team performed very creditably in losses against acknowledged women's football powers England and the USA. However, the amount of tweets and messages contained in them, compared those of the men's team in the 2014 and 2018 World Cups, is striking. Chart 5 below shows a comparison of quantity of tweets in these tournaments:

Chart 5 – Tweets during Women's World Cup in 2015, and Men's World Cups in 2014 and 2018

	@JuanManSantos	@InfoPresidencia	Total
Women's World Cup 2015	2	4	6
Men's World Cup 2014	51	47	98
Men's World Cup 2018	21	31	52

Source: research data

Santos only tweeted twice during the 2015 tournament, before the England match on 17 June and following the defeat against the USA on 22 June. On 17 June he tweeted “Today our @FCFSeleccionCol is flying our flag most high, the superpowerful girls are playing England. Let's win!” (@JuanManSantos, 17 June 2015)¹⁶. Here Santos does make the team symbolic of the nation, being the bearers of the national flag, and are endowed with the “superpowerful” moniker. As Wood comments “instead of football being feminised through their achievements, it instead appears that by representing the nation via football the women on the teams come to acquire traditionally masculine characteristics that enable them to enter the realm of national iconography” (2018, p. 578). The second tweet read “Congratulates to the superpowerful girls of the @FCFSeleccionCol. Memorable performance in the @FIFAWWC getting to the last sixteen stage. We are very proud!” (@JuanManSantos, 22 June 2015)¹⁷. There is little here of a symbolic nature contained in this message nor any real political message, compared to those messages tweeted when the national men's team exited the 2014 World Cup. Two messages from the @infopresidencia account demonstrate the difference in message content: the first reads “We can achieve EVERYTHING, everything, if we work like the National Men's Team, UNITED FOR A COUNTRY! President @JuanManSantos” (@infopresidencia, 5 July 2014)¹⁸, and the second “The National Team united us as a country and showed us the best of Colombians, that talent, that fighting ability. President @JuanManSantos” (@

15 Original tweet: “Atletas colombianos como @NataliaGaitan3 nos cuentan que practicar deportes es una forma de decir #SiALaPaz”.

16 Original tweet: “Hoy nuestra @FCFSeleccionCol lleva a lo más alto nuestra bandera, las superpoderosas enfrentan a Inglaterra. ¡A ganar!”.

17 Original tweet: “Felicitaciones a las superpoderosas de la @FCFSeleccionCol. Memorable actuación en la @FIFAWWC llegando a octavos. ¡Estamos muy orgullosos!”.

18 Original tweet: “TODO, todo lo podemos lograr si trabajamos – como la Selección Colombia - ¡UNIDOS POR UN PAÍS! Pdte @JuanManSantos”.

infopresidencia, 5 July 2014)¹⁹. Both tweets attribute unifying and symbolic powers to the men's team that are not accorded to the women. The message is even more effusive following Colombia's exit in the 2018 World Cup. Picture 1 is an image that Santos tweeted:

Picture 1 – President Santos Twitter



Source: @JuanManSantos, 3 July 2018²⁰.

Suffice is say that the women's team have never received a message that makes them metonymic of the nation nor attributes to them such an impact on the nation as a whole.

Women footballers are also invisibilised when examining the aesthetic component of tweets, a feature that became an increasingly important component of tweets as the Santos communication team grew more adept at using Twitter (WATSON, 2021). Male footballers are frequently pictured in tweets related to the important matches as can be seen in the Picture 2, tweeted before the second round match against England in 2018:

19 Original tweet: "La Selección nos unió como país y nos mostró lo mejor de los colombianos: ese talento, esa capacidad de lucha. Pdte. @JuanManSantos".

20 Translation: "Thank you my National Team! For uniting a country. For demonstrating that we know how to play fair. For making us more patriotic than ever. For inviting us all to be part of the *tricolor*. For allowing us to make history. For giving us the opportunity to hug each other and shout with friends and people we don't know. For giving us reasons to celebrate. For being humble and wearing your heart on your sleeves on the pitch. For making us excited. For bringing us so much happiness. For allowing us to show the flag on every street and every face. For making us feel proud of our country. For making us global. With admiration and respect, Colombia".

Picture 2 – Colombian men's national football team



Source: @infopresidencia, 3 July 2018²¹.

However, women footballers do not appear in similar tweets. Below, Picture 3, is a tweet sent before Colombia's game against the USA in the second round of the Women's World Cup in 2015:

Picture 3 – "Let's go for the victory!"



Source: @infopresidencia, 22 June 2015²².

The colours of the flag are not as striking as the men's image, and the women footballers are absent, replaced by a generic image of a ball hitting the back of the net. The case is similar in a tweet before the *Selección femenina's* first game in the 2016 Olympics, as can be seen in Picture 4:

21 Translation: "Together we are stronger. Nothing is too big for us! United we are going to make history!"

22 Translation: "Superpowerful ones – your goals fill Colombia with happiness! Let's go for the victory!"

Picture 4 - Colombian women's national football team who debut in Rio2016



Source: @infopresidencia, 3 August 2016²³.

In this case, two players, Daniela Montoya and Natalia Gaitán are in the picture, but share the stage with other athletes representing the country in Rio. It is inconceivable that the men's football team would be accompanied by other athletes if they were playing. Regarding the Copa América 2014, Martínez Mina and Goellner concluded that the little visibility that the competition had in terms of appearance in the media evidenced the undervaluing of the women players as representatives of the country, and, simultaneously, the need to grant them greater representativeness and recognition (2015, p. 68)²⁴. The problem, as I have shown, is not limited to representations in the press, but also through presidential discourse and social media. Despite the findings of the *Power of Football* survey in 2014, which, let us remember, found that 77% of Colombians thought that the women's national team was important, this importance was not built on in Santos' rhetoric towards his national unity project.

6 CONCLUSION

It is clear from the results discussed in this article that the Colombian women's national football team was not exploited in the same way as the men's football team by Santos, and that the capacity for women's football to represent the nation and be a symbol of national identity is still extremely limited. Although there were a number of potential opportunities for the national women's team to be rhetorically deployed towards Santos' national unity project and for their successes to be extolled as examples to follow for Colombian citizens and as representative of a unified country, these opportunities were ignored. In the occasions when their successes were celebrated by Santos, their achievements were said to have made the country

23 Translation of the tweet message: "#ColombiaGoldAndPeace The best energy for the Colombian women's national football team who debut today in @rio2016_es". Translation of the image: 'Wednesday 3rd July. We start our path towards glory... Today Colombian athletes will be in Women's Football, Colombian national team (20h Colombian time). Let's go girls!'.

24 Original quote: "la poca visibilidad que la competición tuvo en términos de aparición en los medios de comunicación evidenció la subvaloración de las jugadoras como representantes de país y, simultáneamente, la necesidad de otorgarles mayor representatividad y reconocimiento".

happy and proud, but these moments are few and far between, do not receive the same coverage as the men's team and are not attributed the same symbolic power for unity. Whereas Santos seized any opportunity to link the men's football team with being representative of national unity, the women's team is never associated with such national aims. In the eyes of Santos at least, women's football does not have the convening power of the male game and the women's national team are not as powerful a symbol for the construction of national identity, despite the evidence of the *Power of Football* survey which proved that football in Colombia is no longer just a masculine game. The relative invisibility of women footballers in the press and on the television screens leads them to be absent and invisibilized in presidential speeches and social media broadcasts that "footballize" national discourse and promote ideas of sporting nationalism.

It is worth noting, however, that women athletes do have the potential to represent the nation. Triple jumper Caterine Ibargüen and BMX cyclist Mariana Pajón, for example, were regularly praised as national ambassadors and examples for the nation by Santos. Both were invited to the Casa Nariño by Santos to celebrate their achievements and were regularly mentioned in speeches (IBARGÜEN in 2019 and PAJÓN in 2017). It seems that women have to win in order to achieve this status as a strong source for sporting nationalism. Ibargüen has won gold medals in the Olympics and World Championships and Pajón won Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016. It could be argued that given the similarity in performances of the men's and women's national teams between 2010-2018, until the women's football team wins a major continental or world championship, they will struggle to achieve national recognition and be an appealing and enduring option for presidential narratives of nation. A second round World Cup appearance for the men's team is a more important result than a second round appearance for the women. Unfortunately, women footballers are trapped in a vicious circle; there is a lack of investment in the women's professional game that would help the game to develop, linked to a lack of media attention, which in turn means that private enterprises or official bodies are unwilling to invest. This means that enduring stereotypes, discussed by Martínez Mina and Goellner (2015), about the quality and athleticism of the players, or their femininity and sexuality, cannot be challenged and disproved. As a result, presidents, like Santos, do not see the women's game as a propitious site for appealing to a mass audience for political or popularity goals.

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Resumo: O presente artigo avalia, quantitativa e qualitativamente, referências feitas ao futebol feminino, na Colômbia, nos discursos presidenciais e publicações no Twitter durante a presidência de Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018). Compara representações e mensagens em torno das respectivas equipes nacionais colombianas de futebol masculino e feminino em relação ao projeto de unidade nacional de Santos. Embora o governo de Santos entendesse que o futebol desempenhava, na Colômbia, um potencial e poderoso papel unificador e transformador, este trabalho questiona se esse potencial se limita ao jogo masculino e o quanto o futebol feminino pode ter contribuído para a estratégia de nacionalismo desportivo de Santos. Será que o futebol feminino representaria também o “nós nacional” e a “Nova Colômbia”, tão frequentemente mencionados na retórica presidencial?

Palavras chave: Futebol. Mulheres. Colômbia. Mídias Sociais.

Resumen: Este artículo evalúa cuantitativa y cualitativamente las referencias al fútbol femenino en Colombia en el discurso y tuits presidenciales durante la presidencia de Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018). Empleando el análisis crítico de discursos presidenciales, compara las representaciones y los mensajes en torno a las selecciones de fútbol masculinas y femeninas en relación al proyecto de unidad nacional de Santos. Aunque el gobierno de Santos consideraba que el fútbol tiene un fuerte potencial unificador y transformador, este artículo cuestiona si este potencial se limita al juego masculino, y hasta qué punto el fútbol femenino contribuyó a la estrategia de nacionalismo deportivo de Santos. ¿Pudo el fútbol femenino también representar el “nosotros” nacional y la “Nueva Colombia” tan frecuentemente mencionados en la retórica presidencial?

Palabras clave: Fútbol. Mujeres. Colombia. Medios de Comunicación Sociales.

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