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***Women's Club Football in Brazil and Colombia:  
A Critical Analysis of Players, Media and Institutions***

**Mark Daniel Biram**

**December 2021**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the  
requirements for award of the degree of PhD Hispanic Studies in the  
Faculty of Arts**

**Supervisors:**

Prof. Matthew Brown, Dr. Edward King & Dr. Rachel Randall

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## Abstract

This thesis foregrounds the everyday experiences and perspectives of women footballers in Brazil and Colombia across three contrasting settings. Using a mixed methodological approach it places the discourse and representations of the media and football governing bodies in dialogue with the perspective of players. The thesis begins by analysing a wide-ranging survey which highlights commonalities and differences experienced by players across the South American continent. Shaped by responses to the first chapter, the following chapter shows how the agency of players influences mass media output. Similarly, the third chapter on football governing bodies argues that traditional institutional analysis does not give sufficient weight to outside influences and societal changes more generally. Based on a nine-month ethnography during which I visited three clubs for a period of three months each, this thesis problematises many of the gendered assumptions propagated by the media and football governing bodies going on to make a series of recommendations on how to consolidate the clear growth potential of the women's game in the region. The clubs chosen for ethnography are contrasting examples which present distinct symbolic challenges to the status-quo. In Brazil a contrast is made between Iranduba, a club where the women's team commands two-thirds of the budget, and Santos FC, where the growth of women's football is significantly encumbered by what I call *banal patriarchy* – everyday representations which normalise male hegemony within the club. A middle ground between the polar opposite Brazilian cases is found in the third ethnographic chapter based in Neiva, Colombia, where the experiences of Atlético Huila Women are investigated. The Huila chapter probes claims made about the “professionalisation” of the newly-formed women's league’ and also considers the intersectional barriers which Colombian women players face.

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**Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

***Ethical Issues***

This research underwent full ethical review and was approved in August 2018 by the UoB Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee. Permission documents were produced first in English for review and subsequently in Spanish and Portuguese for those participating. These were handed out to everyone who participated at any stage of the research and were accompanied by a full oral explanation.

**SIGNED:** **DATE: 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

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## **Glossary of Terms**

**ACOLFUTPRO** – The organisation representing all professional footballers in Colombia.

Colombian Division of FIFPRO

**CBF** - Brazilian Football Confederation (Confederação Brasileira de Futebol)

**Clubes de Camisa** – Brazilian term for the best-known and most popular clubs

**CONMEBOL** - The South American Football Confederation is the continental governing body of football in South America, and it is one of FIFA's six continental confederations

**DIFUTBOL** - La División Aficionada del Fútbol Colombiano (Amateur Division of Colombian Football)

**DIMAYOR** - División Mayor del Fútbol Profesional Colombiano (Division of Colombian Professional Football)

**FCF** - La Federación Colombiana de Fútbol (Colombian Football Federation)

**FIFA** - Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Association Football)

**FIFPRO** - Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels (International Federation of Professional Footballers)

**Marronismo** – The practice of retaining players using illegal incentives/pay during the amateur era in South America

**Obrigatoriedade** – CONMEBOL policy obligating teams to open a women's team in order to be eligible to compete in the men's Copa Libertadores

# Women's Club Football in Brazil and Colombia: A Critical Analysis Of Players, Media and Institutions

## Introduction

On 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Atlético Huila confirmed their non-participation in the Colombian Women's League in October 2020 (Diaz, 2020). To those unfamiliar with the inner workings of women's football in the country this decision was perplexing to say the least. Founder members of the Colombian Professional Women's League in 2017, Atlético Huila finished runners-up (2017), champions (2018) and finally defeated quarter-finalists (2019). They represented Colombia twice at the continental championship the Copa Libertadores, becoming the first Colombian winners of the competition in Manaus in 2018 (Bermúdez, 2019; Buitrago, 2020). By any reckoning, their three-year existence brought an unparalleled level of success in Colombian women's football that ought to have been widely celebrated both at national and continental level. Contrary to what the evidence above would suggest, the news that the women's team was to be 'discontinued' or 'temporarily shelved' in a bid to control the club's dire finances came as little surprise to me having spent three months with the club in Neiva in early 2019. Outright hostility towards women's football from the club's board was manifest. The resolutely gendered attitudes of decision-makers in South American football meant that, regardless of incredible success and widespread interest from the public, there remains a deep discomfort about women playing a game which is still considered socially masculine<sup>1</sup>. Elsey and Nadel argue (2019, p.2) that sport has historically been used in Latin America 'to naturalise gender differences in society more broadly'. Seen in this light,

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<sup>1</sup> The women's team were greeted by thousands of locals when they brought the Copa Libertadores trophy home to Neiva.

the accomplishments of Atlético Huila Women must have been seen to de-naturalise perceptions of gender difference in Colombia. Rather than expand a clearly successful project, it was brought to an abrupt end with the women's team disbanded.

In the same month of June 2020 in Manaus, another of the three clubs I visited, Iranduba Esporte Clube suddenly announced an enormous shortfall in funding due to their sponsors reneging on a sponsorship deal – a sum of money a small club needs in order to survive. In order to remedy this situation, the club needed to raise \$900,000 Brazilian Reais in a matter of days to stave off bankruptcy. They announced that they had started an online *Vaquinha* (similar to Crowdfunding), whereby members of the public could make donations in order to save the club (Globoesporte.com, 2020). In a matter of days they had gone from being an alternative model which prioritised women's football over men's football to a club no longer financially viable. Iranduba, at that time, held national attendance records for Brazilian Women's Football, even outstripping the attendances of several top-division male clubs on three or four occasions (Padin, 2017). They had reached the semi-finals of the national championship and were considered a model for growing women's football.<sup>2</sup> Having had the immense privilege of carrying out ten months of ethnographic fieldwork at close quarters with both clubs, the resultant financial shortfalls felt entirely in keeping with players' worst fears about the fragile economic basis upon which women's football operates. Players were used to short, casualised contracts and always felt their existence was day-to-day rather than secure. In order to complete its commitments during the 2019 and 2020 seasons, Iranduba had to enter into a partnership with another rival club 3B, whose owner then became responsible for Iranduba's debt in the short-term. The longer-term future of the Iranduba project remains unclear as of December 2021.

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<sup>2</sup> As per the social and economic order in the country, Brazil's 'centre' is actually in the South and South East of the country.

From the three clubs I visited, this left only Santos FC, one of the largest clubs in Brazil, still operating with reasonable comfort. Whilst it could be argued that there were a number of contingent factors behind the fall of these two previously significant players in South American women's football, my feeling was that structural disadvantages and a clear lack of support and policy directed towards smaller clubs meant the chronicle of a death foretold. It confirmed many of the worst suspicions I had about the threadbare infrastructure underpinning women's club football in South America. Moreover, it justified my decision to focus on the day-to-day travails of club footballers, provincial teams rather than wealthier clubs from the economic centre, and the decision to focus largely on the role of football's governing bodies (clubs, federations and confederations) over the heavy focus on the media that has characterised the scholarly literature on the topic so far. The media in a broader sense is also included in my analysis, but taking a step away from top-down analysis to try to account for the agency of other actors (in this case the players) in the shifting digital media environment.

Women's club football in South America appears riddled with contradictions. On one hand, in many countries record attendances (AS.com, 2017; Lima, 2017; SoyReferee.com, 2020) and television viewing figures (Economist, 2019) evidence the immense commercial potential of the women's game, on the other, (largely male) institutional figures have suggested that continuing with the women's league is commercially not viable. The income generated by women's football is relatively low, but then with clubs refusing to charge fans to watch women's football in most cases, it is impossible for the women's game to generate income. In terms of representation, traditional discourses about *marimachas* (Oxford, 2019; Oxford & Spaaij, 2019) remain prevalent, and yet very few women players are openly lesbian. The media is complicit in perpetuating this as they choose to highlight different narratives. Alongside the *marimacha* discourse discussed by Oxford (2019), new narratives

of athletic femininity have begun to emerge. This thesis seeks to examine how the traditional media and elite discourses interact with narratives from players themselves. Moreover, in the final ethnographic chapters (4,5 & 6) it goes beyond the selective strategic (mis-)representations of the women's game to produce a thick description of the reality at the three clubs in this study.

### **Why Brazil and Colombia?**

Clearly, women's football finds itself at an important moment of development across the continent. This is clearly linked to a cultural moment which has seen widespread activism from movements like #niunamenos (Elsley, 2018). The fact that Brazil has long been the only country from the Global South with a top ten position in the FIFA rankings for the women's game gives the lie to the many trials and tribulations and institutional neglect faced by the country's players. Whilst women's football is more established in Brazil than elsewhere on the continent, the country remains a key battleground in developing women's football in the Global South.

Colombia, meanwhile, provides a fascinating case study, given the country's marketised football federation DIMAYOR claims their women's league is the only professional women's league on the continent. This claim is contentious and is regularly disputed by ACOLFUTPRO, the official organisation representing Colombian women footballers, among others. At the time of embarking upon this doctorate project, the league had just been launched in 2017, albeit with uncertainty vis-à-vis to what degree the federation and clubs would make good on promises of professionalisation (Elsley & Nadel, 2019, p.258). Colombia had regularly been competitive at international tournaments prior to the formation of the league (Mina et al., 2019) – begging numerous questions as to which factors are in fact influential in engendering a culture conducive to success.

The first chapter sets out the chasm in the development of women's football among the members of the South American confederation CONMEBOL. Since the inception of the continental club championship the Women's Copa Libertadores, the domination of Brazil has been relatively clear – Brazilian clubs have won ten out of thirteen editions. Mirroring this, Brazil has won seven out of eight editions of the Women's Copa America. Indeed, in spite of threadbare support from their national federation, the Brazilian women's team reached both World and Olympic finals competing against nations with significantly better infrastructure and formalised opportunities for women to play the game (Goellner, 2005a, 2021). Similarly, significant achievements by Colombian Women players pre-date institutional advances in their country. For example, the club's leading amateur club Formas Íntimas reached the final of the Women's Copa Libertadores prior to any advances vis-à-vis professionalisation. Similarly, the Colombian Women's national team defeated one of the world's leading teams France and reached the last sixteen of the Women's World Cup in 2015 before the creation of the Colombian Women's League by Colombia's professional football federation DIMAYOR (Biram & Mina, 2021). In light of this, the hypothesis for this thesis is that bottom-up mobilisation – from players, smaller independent clubs and enthusiastic activists and sympathisers – is propelling the growth of women's football on the continent rather than often cumbersome institutions which are slow to adapt to a rapidly changing gender order. The tensions between federations and players foreground much of this thesis.

### **Why Santos FC, Iranduba and Atlético Huila? (Chapters 4, 5 & 6)**

A long period of institutional inertia has given way to forced change as (con)federations aim to show compliance with global policy prescriptions vis-à-vis gender equality (FIFA, 2016, 2018). Increasingly the model for women's club football in Latin America in many cases mirrors the European model whereby it is being incorporated into larger clubs. This ties women's football, in many cases, into the same relationship of dependency upon men's

football that characterises the current UK panorama (Dunn & Welford, 2014, 2017), which at present generates the majority of the income.<sup>3</sup> Following this model, where licensing depends upon the availability of infrastructure that generally only exists at larger clubs, these clubs are comfortably able to cover the turnover of a female team using a tiny percentage of overall turnover from the ‘male’ club, as and when the political will to do so exists within clubs. This ‘will’ has only increased in the Latin American context with the onset of *obligatoriedade* – the policy which requires teams to open a women’s division in order to continue competing in the lucrative male Copa Libertadores. Nonetheless, closer scrutiny of the situation shows that many of the main players at the time of the policy being enacted were not, in fact, these large clubs that the policy was aimed at. For this reason, this thesis considers one club tied to the country’s masculinised country of football trope (Santos FC) against two other indicative cases, Atlético Huila of Colombia (where a men’s top division club existed at the time of the research but where the club is better known for the achievements of the women) and Iranduba of Manaus (a club where women’s football is unambiguously the main part of the club).

Each of these three clubs, then, has been affected in different ways by the policy. At Santos FC, the policy almost guarantees the existence of a women’s team, as the size of the club dictates they would not countenance losing the chance of competing in the lucrative (male) Copa Libertadores. At Atlético Huila, a club which has only once participated in the lesser Copa Sudamericana, the policy was met with ambivalence, doing nothing to dissuade the club hierarchy from outright disbanding the women’s team in 2019. At Iranduba, a smaller independent club, the arrival of monied clubs from the country’s footballing and economic ‘centre’ has meant an immediate struggle to survive. The following section sets out

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<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to pinpoint the exact starting points of women’s football within the larger clubs. Nonetheless, the traditional polideportivo structure of many clubs means women’s football has been a fixture for a significant period – sometimes even defying the prohibition of women’s football (see Elsey & Nadel, 2019, p.109)



some of the particularities which makes the three clubs well suited to a comparative study and also well suited to analysing the impact of policy prescriptions on women's football from the perspective of women players.

### *Santos FC*

Santos FC is one of the traditional *clubes de camisa* in Brazil. It is the best-known club in the municipality of Santos, São Paulo state<sup>4</sup>. Its identity is inextricably linked to the wider Brazilian football national identity. The club was founded in 1912 but owes much of its fame and cachet on a global scale to a golden generation of players in the 1960s including Mengálvio, Coutinho, Pepe and best known Pelé. With these strong links to the country's masculinised footballing identity in mind, women playing for Santos FC represents a crucial symbolic incursion into a highly contested space. Indeed, women's football at Santos FC temporarily ceased between 2012 and 2014 with the president of that time citing financial difficulties, despite managing to triple Neymar's exorbitant salary (Goldblatt, 2014). Santos FC Women won the first two editions of the Women's Copa Libertadores in 2009 and 2010, hosting the first edition at the club's traditional Vila Belmiro home. The Vila Belmiro stadium is rich in history but is considered to be dilapidated by the club hierarchy. For this reason, there is serious debate at the club over whether to base its games 100 kilometres away in São Paulo. The women's team, however, is most readily linked with the Vila Belmiro stadium in Santos as much of the women's team's history has taken place there, including victory in the first ever Women's Copa Libertadores tournament held there in 2009. Santos FC, then, provides a crucial battleground for women contesting a space in an area inextricably linked to masculinity in the country's social imaginary. Moreover, it is an

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<sup>4</sup> Santos FC is the best known club – but despite claims to the contrary the city has other clubs such as Portuguesa Santista, which also have long-standing links with women's football.

indicative case for establishing how larger clubs with a vested interest in competing in the male Copa Libertadores are reacting to the policy of *obligatoriedade*.

### ***Atlético Huila***

The club is based in Neiva, which is the capital city of the province of Huila. It is located in the valley of the Magdalena River around six hours by road from Bogotá in south central Colombia. Atlético Huila does not make the same symbolic claims as Santos, nor does it have any obvious link to the country's football identity. The club was only formed in 1990 and thus does not and never has belonged to the elite of Colombian football. Since 1990 the men's team has spent a number of seasons in the second division (where it remains as of 2021) but twice overachieved finishing runners-up in the Colombian First Division. The club began the refurbishment on Estadio Guillermo Plazas Alcid (the city's municipal stadium) in 2015. This remains in the early stages and has caused considerable controversy owing to four fatalities and ten serious injuries which occurred (El Tiempo, 2017). Moreover, much of the (public) money set aside for the refurbishment has not been accounted for. When complete the stadium will have a capacity of 25,000 but at present only 2,000 spectators can safely attend each game. Citing financial difficulties the women's team has been discontinued and the refurbishment of the stadium has been temporarily suspended.

In spite of this, the women's team surprisingly rose to prominence when the women's professional league started in 2017 as the women's operation benefitted from an outside benefactor, local businessman Diego Perdomo, who funded a team competitive at continental level from 2017 to 2019. The lack of football tradition in the city of Neiva means that there is not the same accumulated social capital in the men's team. As a result, at the peak of the women's team's success, both attendances (around 2,000 spectators for home games) and social media followings (30,000 followers on Twitter and Instagram) reached parity with those of the men's team. For these reasons, Huila lies somewhere between the two Brazilian

case studies insofar as the women's team exists alongside (or perhaps better said is imagined by the club's hierarchy as an addendum to) a relatively established male team, but without any of the symbolic and cultural capital of Santos FC.

### *Esporte Clube Iranduba da Amazônia*

Esporte Clube Iranduba da Amazônia more commonly known as simply Iranduba was formed in the city of Manaus in 2011 with both a men's and a women's team. Early on it became clear to the club hierarchy that it would be considerably less costly and thus more realistic to plough much of its budget into the women's team. For this reason, it is important to note that institutionally the rise of Iranduba was coincidental rather than planned. As of December 2018 club president Amarildo Dutra has prioritised the women's team. The club participates in many youth categories from under-15s upwards. The club became particularly popular between 2017 and 2019 when it twice reached the latter stages of the Brazilian Women's National Championship and broke Brazilian attendance records for women's football. Moreover the women's team has won the Amazonian championship six times.

Iranduba is the smallest municipality in the metropolitan region of Manaus in the North West of Brazil with 48,296 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2019a). Around a fifth of the Rio Negro sustainable development area, inaugurated in 2008, is found in this area, however it remains an underprivileged area relative to the rest of Greater Manaus with particularly low average salaries and GDP per capita within the metropolitan region (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2019a).

For the final club, I wanted to choose one which operates outside the model which imagines women's football as an addendum to an established (male) club. In the case of Brazil, there are a number of clubs which are either solely known as hubs of women's football – like Sociedade Esportiva Kindermann -- or that have a women's team which is arguably more prominent on the national scene than its men's team – like São Jose or

Ferroviária. Any of the aforementioned would have made an excellent case study to complement Huila and Santos. I decided to choose this particular club as it challenges not only the model of women's football as a sub-division of the larger (male) club, but it also constitutes the most sustained challenge to Brazil's footballing centre of Rio and São Paulo states in women's football. Wishing to look at a club which challenges the footballing centre of the country, in some sense, owes much to my belief that the footballing centre reflects the wider socio-economic configuration of the country. There are examples of clubs from the North East, like Tiradentes, who have fleetingly challenged the hegemony of the centre, however Iranduba of Manaus has done this for a period of years. For that reason, along with the considerable support the club has generated in Manaus, Amazonas, I chose Iranduba as a fascinating anomaly where women's football is the central most important feature of a club as my third case-study.

### **Research Questions**

In light of this, the research questions to be investigated are as follows:

How do participants exert their own agency when dialoguing with institutional and mediatic representations of/ discourses about women's football?

How do players themselves view the way in which women's football is represented by traditional media? (Chapter 1 – Surveying the Field)

How do players feel about the way in which club football is organised?

How do they negotiate their relationship with men's football?

How is the agency of players reconfigured and represented by traditional mass media?  
(Chapter 2 - Media Representations of Brazilian and Colombian Club Football)

How does the policy of *obligatoriedade* challenge and/or reinforce the current position of women's football as an appendage of the men's game? (Chapter 3 - Institutional Perspectives of Women's Club Football)

How do players' day-to-day lived experiences compare with media and institutional discourses? (Chapters 4, 5 & 6– Club Ethnographies)

### **Literature Review**

This thesis uses a mixed methodological approach to answer the research questions set out above. In doing so, it engages with a number of wider debates and theoretical strands which have been honed and developed within overlapping waves of critical sports studies. The following sections set out studies which have directly or indirectly influenced the approach to this thesis.

#### ***Early Studies of Sport and Leisure***

The study of play, per se, began with the seminal *Homo Ludens* (1955, originally published in Dutch in 1938) by Johan Huizinga. Huizinga argued that the human fascination with play is intrinsically linked with the creation of societies, arts and ultimately some sense of community. This, perhaps inadvertently, provides a pertinent starting point insofar as it hints at how the communitarian aspects of sport would later contribute to shifting the balance of power away from centralised government and elites, by means of societies and civic engagement. This is precisely the argument made in the case of twentieth-century Chile by Elsey (2011) in *Citizens and Sportsmen*. Elsey (2011) shows how amateur football ushered in a marked increase in working-class civic involvement and logical resistance to the authority of elites. Relatedly Elsey also argues that by the 1960s this participation meant a certain degree of visibility for women's sport. Returning to *Homo Ludens*, in other ways its ethos belongs to a bygone era where 'play is connected with no material interest, and no profit can

be gained from it' (Huizinga, 1955, p.10). It is crucial to conceptualise modern-day sport in ways which take into account the considerable material and symbolic interests vested in it.

Underlining the importance of the text, Huizinga makes another remark which seems prescient in the way sport has been framed further down the line. He continues to state that 'play creates order – play demands order absolute and supreme' (Huizinga, 1955, p.10). This strand of thought is taken up by the early pioneers of sports research. For example, Eric Dunning and Norbert Elias (1986) envisioned sport and leisure as serving in a function in some kind of civilising process in modern industrial society. These early interpretations, then, are clearly rooted in rather paternalistic and gendered understandings of the function of sport. They reflect a top-down view of the meanings which should be attributed to sport. This does not mean, of course, that they are entirely irrelevant as these types of understandings may be useful for gleaning an understanding of the conservative *modus operandi* of football's governing bodies, covered in Chapter 3 of this thesis. They shed light on the ways gatekeepers and decision-makers may feel threatened by the rise of women's football. Women's football clearly has the power to de-stabilise gender binaries and a matrix of power which is never fixed and always open to contestation (Wood, 2018). It can be extrapolated from Elias and Dunning (1986) that football is seen by many as a site for the (re)production of a certain type of hegemonic masculinity. They argue that football allows a certain amount of controlled aggression – a characteristic historically linked to masculinity. This masculinised understanding of the meaning of the game would later be taken up, with different cultural nuances, by a number of the pioneers of critical sports studies in Latin America.

### ***Critical Sports Studies in/about Latin America***

As per other continents, the realisation of the social significance of sports came late. Prior to academic incursions, journalistic production on sport in general and football in particular were voluminous in quantity. In some cases they were clearly influential in the consolidation of masculinised national identity narratives in Latin America. As the importance of football has even become part of discourses of the nation in ways that did not happen elsewhere, one of the primary tasks has been dispelling some of the mythology underpinning these narratives. One such text, *O Negro No Futebol Brasileiro* (1947) by journalist Mário Filho incorporated Afro-Brazilians into Brazilian identity, but at the same time was guilty of essentialising them in ways that drew on nineteenth-century ideas of scientific racism. Moreover, for the interests of this thesis, this part-history part-literary contribution went towards marking football discursively as a socially masculine activity meaning women who played the game in the early days were either heavily criticised and/or ridiculed (Wood, 2018; Bonfim, 2019). This was formalised by the prohibition of women from 1941 to 1979 in Brazil (Franzini, 2005a; Goellner, 2005b; Elsey & Nadel, 2019). Whilst the importance of links between sport and national identity were only acknowledged later, it could be argued *O Negro No Futebol Brasileiro* was every bit as influential as *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933) by Gilberto Freyre in promoting the idea of Brazil was a racial democracy with unique sensuousness, physicality and individuality derived from its ethnic mix.

The first academic wave of sports studies came much later with the edited collection *Universo de Futebol* (1982a) presided over by the Brazilian academic Roberto Da Matta. Da Matta noted both the gaping lacuna in the literature, given football's obvious importance to national identity tropes and crucially set about attacking prevailing highbrow dismissive attitudes from both the right and the left which had previously eschewed the need for an academic approach to the study of sport. This followed another Da Matta text *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis* (1979) in trying to set out a 'sociology of the Brazilian dilemma' as Da

Matta then saw it. Da Matta correctly pointed to the importance of football as a symbolic ritual which could be used to understand fundamental concepts such as social hierarchy, *malandragem* and the carnivalesque. *Universo de Futebol* contained other texts of import to this thesis, which I shall return to later. The time it took for this foundational text to be expanded upon speaks to the strength of stigma attached to approaching sports, or by extension other areas of popular culture, in academic circles. Similarly, the justificatory tone of the text speaks to the extent to which the mere inclusion of sport and popular/mass culture at the time swam against a tide of academic conservatism.

In the case of Argentina a key text ‘Masculinity and football: the formation of national identity in Argentina’ by Eduardo Archetti (1994) appeared as a chapter in a collection edited by Richard Giulianotti and Jean Williams, two influential figures in the study of men’s and women’s football respectively in the European context. This was followed by Archetti’s monograph *Masculinities: Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina* (1999) which also opened up a range of debates about the links between football and (gendered) national identity. As Wood (2018) notes, there is an incredible gender blindness about these early works, especially given that Archetti dedicated considerable effort to the study of masculinity. The implications for femininity and for women were long ignored. Archetti (1994), slightly different from the ordering function Dunning (1986) set out, saw tango and football as arenas for national male identities to develop in opposition to the ordering tendencies of society found in school, military service and work. In his words ‘free zones (such as football) were spaces for mixing, for the appearance of hybrids, for (male) sexuality and for the exaltation of bodily performances. In modern societies sports, games and dance provide privileged loci for the analysis of freedom and cultural creativity. Seen this way tango and football can thus be conceptualised as a threat to official ideologies’ (1999, p.18). If football can be said to have, at times, threatened official ideology, at the same time,



on a more informal level, it clearly buttressed and expanded existing gender binaries. At the same time, historical work has shown how women adopting a physically active lifestyle in the first half of the twentieth century threw up a considerable challenge to male hegemony (Anderson, 2009, 2015). Moreover the work of Patricia Anderson is also suggestive of the heavily contradictory discourse surrounding women's sport which are central to this thesis.

The second wave, pertinent in particular to the media chapter in this thesis, generally comes from sociologists and builds upon the work on masculinity by Archetti. This is exemplified by the voluminous work of Pablo Alabarces. Alabarces considers the power relations in society which buttress masculinised identity tropes. The mass media, in particular monopolies like Clarín and Globo are seen as '*máquinas culturales*' which construct a masculinised national identity and then commodify it (Alabarces, 2002a). In Brazil, this line of research is continued by Helal, whose published doctorate thesis *Passes e impasses: futebol e cultura de massa no Brasil* (1997) portends the mass commodification of football in the past twenty years. These contributions, which centre the sports-media complex, underline the vast imbalances in agency women players face. The mass media are clearly an important pillar underpinning the social masculinity of football. This explains, to some degree, why the pernicious role of the media has been a central theme in recent research globally (Mourão & Morel, 2008; Santos & Medeiros, 2012; Rial, 2013a; Silva, 2015; Pfister, 2015a; Mina & Goellner, 2015b, 2015a; Ravel & Gareau, 2016a; Goellner & Kessler, 2018a).

Beyond this tendency, a number of historians have been equally influential in shaping the thrust of contemporary studies. It follows that if football's governing bodies and governments have enough power to marginalise women's football for generations then, appropriate affirmative action, they could equally effect a raft of positive changes. For example, as set out in the pioneering work *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America* by Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel, another important actor to add to these

narratives are institutions more broadly. Schools, football clubs, local associations, and national federations are all implicated in the omission of women's football from national identity narratives. This has meant that women's football has been characterised by false starts or as they have it 'brief periods of effervescence followed by long periods of apparent inactivity' (Else & Nadel, 2019, p.245).

### *Gender Turn in Sports Studies*

From the early pioneers of sports literature like Dunning and Elias to the first wave of sports researchers in Latin America, then, the central focus has been the multiple ways in which sport buttresses and foments what Connell (2005) labelled hegemonic masculinity. As noted by Goldblatt (2016, p.9) Baron Pierre de Coubertin founded the Olympics as 'the solemn and period exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base and female applause as a reward'. This conceptualisation of the meaning of sport hinges upon the contingent social constructions of masculinity and femininity in a given period – and a growing gender awareness.

A text symptomatic of the way the Latin American left conceptualises the game is *El Fútbol de Sol a Sombra* (1995) by Eduardo Galeano. He locates football as an arena of demotic anti-elitism and anti-imperialism. Notwithstanding the over-romanticised nature of this view, more important for this study is the male-dominated narrative that emerges from the outset. His opening titles begin with *el jugador, el arquero, el delantero, el ídolo, el director, el árbitro and el mundial*. The first feminine mention in the book is of *las fuerzas ocultas*, referring to corruption, and *la pelota*, with a description of how 'she' (the ball)...*exige que la acaricien, que la besen, que la duermen en el pecho, la pelota...es orgullosa* (1995, p.15) and to remove any doubt later the title *los dueños de la pelota*. Academic literature has seen some engagement with the phallogocentric lexicon of the game.

Recent research has shown how women's sport starts on an unequal footing as a result of asymmetrical gender marking, a process by which the male version is legitimised as the unmarked category against the female marked version. Sports and gender specialists Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993, p.127) argue that 'gender marking women's athletics renders it the other, derivative, and by implication, inferior.' This consistent gender marking has been picked up in a number of studies considering the media representations of women's football (Salvini & Marchi Júnior, 2013b; Cashman & Raymond, 2014; Mina & Goellner, 2015b). This is bolstered by the presence of masculine generics which I overheard on the training grounds – for example, *el Mister* to refer to authority figures, or using *los jugadores* when just one male player participates in a training session.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the particularities of football also offer some opportunities to de-stabilise gender norms. For example, whilst Wood (2018, p.575) argues that the use of the name *Marta* is a gendered marker of her status as a woman, the idiosyncratic naming conventions of Brazilian football also offer possibilities to undermine the feminisation of players. For example, as players told me on numerous occasions, *Formiga* (translated as *ant* in English) focuses entirely on the athletic performance of the player rather than emphasise her femininity or feminise her. It describes the way the player unselfishly works for the good of the collective in the same ways ants would work in a colony.<sup>5</sup>

As elsewhere in the world women's football in Latin America suffers by being a marked category – that is to say women's football as opposed to merely football. This means

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<sup>5</sup> *Formiga* has the record for appearances in the Brazilian Women's National team. She has starred at seven World Cups and every Women's Olympic tournament since 1996. The player's real name is *Miraildes Maciel Mota*. However as with *Pelé* (*Edson Arantes do Nascimento*) the public is far more familiar with the nickname. Women players in Brazil appear to be designated by the same chaotic and idiosyncratic mix of: nicknames (*Koki* or *Chú* vs *Dunga* or *Kaká*), diminutive first names (*Andressinha* or *Debinha* vs *Ronaldinho* or *Jairzinho*), first names (*Marta* or *Cristiane* vs *Romário* or *Neymar*) first name and surname (*Gabi Nunes* or *Andressa Alves* vs *Thiago Silva* or *Roberto Carlos*) or a mix of nickname and diminutive (*Pretinha* vs *Formiguinha*) as male players.

the consistent usage of *fútbol femenino/futebol feminino* as opposed to the unmarked *fútbol/futebol*. Moreover, in the case of South America the marked version includes the adjectival judgement *femenino/feminino* (translated literally as feminine), whereas alternative versions (which are not commonly used in any case) sound even worse to most of the players I interviewed. The great majority of players felt *fútbol de mujeres/futebol de mulheres* to sound even more like a subordinate category. Running counter to this, there is an increasing body of work on football which is conscious of the links between language and the sporting male hegemony, which for that very reason is resolutely gender aware (for example Dubois, 2018). In the context of Brazil and Colombia, the linguistic struggle cannot be separated from the generally polarised political environment. In both countries there has been a notable stigmatisation of so-called ‘gender ideology’ (Muelle, 2017; Wasser & Lins França, 2020; Borba, 2021) as a kickback against a notable wave of social progress exemplified by the strength of the #NiUnaMenos movement (Else, 2018).

Given the social significance afforded to sport, this locates women playing as particularly significant. In this vein, Messner (1988) considers the female athlete as ‘contested ideological terrain’ placing prevailing notions of sporting masculinity into dialogue with newly emerging discourses of sporting femininity. Responding to this, an emerging body of literature has come to consider how sportswomen perceive and represent themselves on social media (Thorpe et al., 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a). In this vein in the Latin American context, Garton & Hijós (2017) consider to what degree sportswomen conform with the recent shift in media discourse towards athletic femininity. In Chapter 2 on the representations of media, this thesis considers traffic in the other direction – that is to say, to what extent does the media have to take account of the discourse and narratives of players?

In Colombia, much of the analysis around the Colombian professional league has come from Claudia Mina Martínez, who has considered many of the particularities of the

Colombian case, from the extreme market rubric of its federation to the gulf between the achievements of the country's players and the level of commitment to the national team shown by its federation (Mina & Goellner, 2015a; Mina et al., 2018, 2019). Mina Martinez uses a mixed methodological approach analysing media representations and juxtaposing this with interview material with players.

In conclusion, from a literature focussed almost solely on masculinity, there has been a decided tilt towards the study of women's sport. This shift of focus towards women in the literature is neatly encapsulated and acknowledged by the presentation title of second-wave pioneer Pablo Alabarces. At the Level-Playing Field event organised by David Wood, held in four South American cities during 2018 and 2019, Alabarces made a presentation 'Desde las masculinidades hacia el campo nivelado (from masculinities to a level-playing field)' as an acknowledgement of the shifting terrain.

### ***The (Semi-)Professionalisation of Women's Sports***

As the opening chapter of this thesis later argues, it is important not to generalise about the position of women's football across the continent. However, in both Brazil and Colombia, it seems pertinent to discuss a state of semi-professionalisation (Garton et al., 2021a).

It is beyond the scope of this literature review to cover many of the current trends in the voluminous literature globally on the, in many cases, incipient experiences of the professionalisation of women's sport. Nonetheless, the following section picks out some of the studies which have, in some sense, influenced and helped to shape the structure and the methodology employed in the chapters of this thesis.

This thesis builds upon a considerable body of work which evidences how women's experiences of elite sport have consistently been characterised by discrimination and oppression (Lenskyj, 1986, 1987, 1990, 1992, 2013). Moreover, there is clear evidence that

discrimination has occurred at the intersection of race, ethnicity and social class. In spite of these continued struggles it is clear that women's sports in general have broken with the hegemony which meant it was long perceived to be the exclusive domain of men (Williams & Hess, 2015). Historical work is addressing these assumptions, showing clearly that there is a considerable gulf between the perception that sport was created by men for men (Messner & Sabo, 1990) and the complex realities and histories which clearly evidence that women were involved in the creation and growth of sports from the beginning (Guttman, 1991; Elsey & Nadel, 2019; Goellner, 2021).

Contributions on/about the Global South have correctly noted that until now the history of women's sport privileges middle-class women from the global North (Saavedra, 2003a; Engh, 2010; Nauright, 2014). This thesis makes a clear break with this, adopting an intersectional approach which brings out other crucial facets of discrimination. In this vein, Bowes & Culvin (2021, p.4) argue that whilst the glass ceiling preventing women's participation has now been lifted, it sits at different heights for different women depending upon the aforementioned intersectional factors. They argue that heteronormatively feminine women and those from the middle-class and above receive significantly more positive media attention and that moreover barriers to participation are less for them. This is reflected across a range of sports and international contexts where professionalisation is on the agenda but at best partially complete (Taylor et al., 2019, 2020; Garton et al., 2021a).

An increasing body of literature suggests that social media is becoming a new site of struggle where women's football battles for legitimisation (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012, 2013, 2015; Coche, 2016; Garton & Hijós, 2017). Nonetheless, this occurs on an extremely unequal footing as individual players often struggle against the full force of the industrial-scale media-sports complex which buttresses male hegemony (Curran, 2002; Rowe, 2013, 2015). This social media environment has opened up new opportunities to interact with fans and to

build new strategic relationships as is suggested in this thesis. In this vein, Twitter has been identified as the main forum for these interactions to take place (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013; Coche, 2016; Hayes & Blaszk, 2018). Clearly, whilst social media clearly has potential for women players to raise their profile, it also brings the attendant problems of online abuse (Lavoie & Calhoun, 2014) particularly in the context of a history of the oppression and discrimination women's sport faces. Almost all the players I interviewed during fieldwork highlighted the frequency with which they receive abusive communication – so clearly the flipside of social media's potential must also be considered. Research taking into account the growing voices of sportswomen appears particularly pertinent bearing in mind the extent their voices have largely been excluded from conversations about the transition from amateurism to professionalism in the past (Taylor et al., 2020). This suggests that an ethnographic approach is appropriate, so as not only to include the voices of women players but to make them central to the narrative. Moreover, it ensures a deeper picture of the everyday life of women footballers, outside of the powerful but clearly inaccurate and reductionist discourse of the sports/media complex. The following section outlines some key ethnographic works that have been produced in the Latin American context.

### ***Latin American Sports Ethnography***

The final strand of research to which this thesis contributes is that of Sports Ethnography in Latin America. The first sports ethnography of note came from a female researcher. The Brazilian Simoni Lahud Guedes wrote the first Masters' thesis on football entitled *O futebol brasileiro: instituição zero* (1977). This was followed by 'Subúrbio: celeiro de craques' (1982) a contribution to the Da Matta edited collection *Universo de Futebol* mentioned earlier. The chapter draws on interviews and participant observation with Rio de Janeiro male factory workers aiming to tease out the social meanings they attribute to football. It could be confidently speculated that the presence of Guedes as a woman researcher had a significant

impact on the data she collected. Almost four decades later, the same gender factor is present in reverse for my study as will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology section.

Guedes' pioneering ethnography helped inspire future waves of ethnography which would focus largely on (male) collective identities and violence. Two indicative examples are the work of Veronica Moreira (2008, 2010, 2017) and José Garriga Zucal (2007). Moreira stepped into the violent world of Argentina's *barras bravas* – the most active and violent fan groups – and Garriga Zucal goes a step further considering the links between these groups and the hierarchies of clubs. The Colombian literature is also heavily influenced by earlier waves of research which focus heavily on masculinity (Villanueva, 2013; Qutián, 2016; Villanueva & Gómez, 2018). These works helped inform my own work insofar as they attempt to give a voice to a perspective not represented by mass media.

As with other areas of sports research, recent times have seen a shift towards considering the experiences of women. This is most notable in the Brazilian context where a wide-ranging body of research looks to redress the historical imbalance. For example, Da Silveira and Stigger (2013) skilfully analyse how women futsal players in Porto Alegre both transgress and reproduce hegemonic norms. In the case of crowd ethnography, the Brazilian literature has begun investigating female fan culture (da Costa, 2007; Campos, 2010; Martins, 2017). Women's fan culture appears to be a particularly fruitful avenue for future research on women's sport. The precarity players face in their everyday existence suggests an intersectional approach is necessary. Players suffer not only on account of their gender, but also at the intersections of social class and race.

In the Latin American context, there are two significant ethnographic contributions. Firstly, Branz (2012) relates his experiences as the coach of a women's team in La Plata. His focus is on how the players are objectified and thus their athletic performance is overlooked. Moreover, Branz notes that when the players' training is arbitrarily moved to a pay-to-play



five-a-side facility, only those with resources are able to continue. It is clear that, increasingly, the privatisation of public space is affecting who has access to play, and that in turn will affect the demographic of who plays the game at club and national level.

The second pioneering work comes from Gabriela Garton who uses her own experience as goalkeeper for UAI Urquiza to consider the significance of being a woman footballer in 21<sup>st</sup> century Argentina (Garton, 2019). This contribution reveals the discursive myth of the professionalisation of women's football propagated by football institutions and the media by exploring the reality on the ground, which is characterised by players' struggle to make a living from the game. Garton uses this experience to analyse the current semi-professional state of women's football and the struggle for a space in the country's sporting imaginary (Garton et al., 2021a; Moreira & Garton, 2021). This semi-professional transitional period forms the backdrop to this thesis in both Brazil and Colombia.

### **Chapter Outlines**

This thesis uses a mixed methodological approach in order to produce a holistic and nuanced account of the state of women's club football in Brazil and Colombia. The thesis begins with quantitative survey data which helped to identify the (interrelated) areas of analysis that the thesis goes on to explore. For example, it establishes the need for the second chapter (concerning media coverage of women's football) to consider the agency of players as well as the power of mass media. Similarly, players' answers in the first chapter suggested a need to account for change as well as continuity within football institutions (in the third chapter). Finally, the survey provides a range of data which fed into the line of questioning and the type of participant observation carried out during the ethnographic chapters (4, 5 & 6). The following section sets out the chapter outlines in further detail.

Chapter 1 uses an opinion-based survey which was carried out in Manaus, Brazil in November & December 2018 with 103 players from eight of the twelve teams competing at the *Copa Libertadores Femenina* of that year. The chapter takes a dual approach firstly asking closed questions to players around their satisfaction with the organization of women's football on a national and continental level. Following most of the questions, players were then given an opportunity to provide anonymised remarks around each of the questions. This juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative data feeds into the following chapters by providing hypotheses to test both when analysing the digital media environment and institutional policies vis-à-vis women's football using distinct methodologies. Furthermore, the qualitative data is used to hone lines of questioning and analysis for ethnographic chapters 4, 5 & 6. The data collected is from players based in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru respectively.

Chapter 2 considers two media stories generated from the social media accounts of Colombian player YorelÍ Rincón. Firstly, Rincón kisses her teammate and partner on the team bus after winning the *Copa Libertadores* in Manaus, and secondly she records a video explaining how Huila players will not receive any prize monies or bonuses for winning the competition. The first story is largely ignored for a number of reasons, whereas the second story is re-signified and re-packaged to present the player as greedy and belligerent. The chapter employs and sometimes problematises the theory of Argentine semiologist and media theorist Eliseo Verón. The chapter calls into question top-down assumptions about how the media covers women's football. This is done using a framework which consider different phases of circulation. Verón defines these according to scale and where the interactions takes place. The chapter recognises players' agency as Rincón's activity triggers a positive resolution for the players, but it also acknowledges the uneven power relations which are merely reconfigured rather than dramatically altered in the digital era.

Chapter 3 considers a range of institutional theory to explain changes and continuity within the institutional polity. It uses the flagship policy of the Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL), colloquially referred to locally as *obrigatoriedade/obligatoriedad*, along with material taken from interviews with a number of key institutional figures in both Brazil and Colombia to explain how the gradual professionalisation of women's football is understood, elaborated and legislated for in Brazil and Colombia. In both cases the differences in national context are taken into account. It is argued that the development model being pursued by CONMEBOL is flawed insofar as it ignores the role of independent women's football clubs, instead encouraging the concentration of wealth and talent within a small number of clubs where male hegemony is hard to dislodge. Moreover, it argues that the conservative approach of institutions impinges significantly on the day-to-day existence of women's players. This is put to the test in the remainder of the thesis. In the final chapters (4, 5 & 6) nine-months of ethnographic fieldwork spent in Manaus and Santos in Brazil and Neiva in Colombia test how the institutional environment impacts women players on the ground. In these chapters the everyday experiences of women's footballers are foregrounded.

Chapter 4 considers the experiences of women players at Iranduba Esporte Clube in Manaus. Iranduba is an atypical case, particularly in the era of *obrigatoriedade* with the larger traditional male clubs coming to the fore as described in detail in Chapter 3. It is a club where the women's team commands a larger portion of the budget than the men's team. Moreover, the women's team has a much larger following as they are able to compete at the highest level in ways that men's teams from Manaus and the North West of the country have been unable to do historically. For this reason, this chapter argues that from the periphery of the deeply masculinised country of football the possibility of a women's team taking centre stage proffers a profound symbolic challenge to male hegemony. Whilst in recent times the club has run into serious financial difficulties, a concerted spell of three years challenging the

Rio and São Paulo giants proved that another development model would be possible were there to be sufficient political will to implement one.

Chapter 5 contrasts with the case of Iranduba considering the experiences of women players at Santos FC, perhaps the country's best-known club internationally on account of Pelé. Santos FC is well resourced financially, but the situation at Iranduba where the women's team takes centre stage could not be more distant. I argue that the equal incorporation of women's football into Santos FC is significantly encumbered by an invisible and deeply rooted 'banal patriarchy' which pervades every level of the club. The invented tradition of Santos means that women's football is always considered an appendage to the main part of the club by its hierarchy. Nonetheless, even within a club such as Santos, gradual inroads are being made, with improved conditions and the achievements of women's players being recognised. Rather than decide between the two models in Chapters 4 & 5, it is argued that progress can be achieved in both environments as long as the fundamental differences between them are taken into account by policymakers and other involved actors.

Finally, Chapter 6 considers the experiences of women's players at Atlético Huila Women. Huila is another unusual case insofar as the women's team, once again, were significant achievers in comparison to the men's team. An outside benefactor funds Atlético Huila Women on a year-round basis (much longer than other clubs in the country), allowing the club to compete on a continental level without spending any of its own budget in effect. This arrangement works well until the women's club becomes so successful that it is no longer conscionable to the club hierarchy. This chapter uses an intersectional analysis to explain how players are discriminated against from multiple angles. Moreover, in dialogue with the institutional chapter I argue that a considerable gulf remains between the promises of a professional women's league from Colombian federation DIMAYOR and the lived reality on the ground for Colombian women players.

## Methodology

This thesis draws together a range of methodologies to address the research questions in a holistic way creating a nuanced picture of the issues facing women footballers. For example, the first chapter is intentionally broad in scope centring players' main concerns and using them to set the agenda for the rest of the thesis. This chapter, by design aims to highlight the vastly differing panoramas in each country. Moreover, by using an anonymous survey to begin, it is more likely players will be candid about delicate areas which they consider particularly problematic (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.8). The questions reflect my hypothesis that the academic literature on contemporary women's football has focussed disproportionately on the role of the media. Prior to carrying out the survey, I felt it was likely that players would rightfully highlight institutional shortcomings as a major barrier to the growth of the women's game. More specifically a lack of women within football institutions means that clubs and federations, at regional, national and continental level have tended to pay lip-service to the notional gender equality set out in FIFA statutes (FIFA, 2016) rather than attempt to enact it.

Moreover, players' observations from the first chapter would shape the way the thesis problematises the prevailing assumptions of verticality in how the media works contributing to the literature rooted in the mutual circuits of influence theorised by Martín Barbero (1983). Players' observations corroborated this suggesting the role of the media ought to be particularly aware of the extent to which mainstream media coverage is now influenced by interactions with a range of actors on digital media. In this regard, one particular instance where the social media activity of a player was emphasised over the football played at a tournament itself is used as an indicative case of this. To frame this analysis a body of work heavily influenced by Martín Barbero from media and communications scholar Eliseo Verón in particular his seminal work *La Semiosis Social* (1987) is used.

The following sections consider the rationale for using distinct methodologies for each chapter. In doing so, it will explain how these methodologies complement and feed into one another, ultimately facilitating a more nuanced approach to the ethnographic study of the three different clubs in this thesis.

### **Survey Methodology (Chapter 1)**

Taking advantage of teams from each country being congregated in one city for the CONMEBOL Women's Copa Libertadores 2018 event held in Manaus, Brazil in November and December 2018, I used convenience sampling to collect data from a diverse range of players based in different settings. Convenience sampling essentially involves drawing sample data from a target group who are close at hand at a given time (De Vaus, 2013; Fowler Jr, 2013). The tournament was comprised of 12 teams in total: 10 national league champions (one from each member of CONMEBOL – the South American football confederation), the host team (CE Iranduba of Manaus) and the defending continental champions, Audax Osasco (formerly Corinthians-Audax, from São Paulo)<sup>6</sup>. It is worth noting that the logistical advantage of having each team in the same place at a tournament to carry out the survey also comes with a potential disadvantage. This is that each team involved in the study is representative of the highest achieving teams (and often the best conditions available) in each country, and thus the best-case scenario of player conditions is presented rather than a more representative middling team.

All surveys were self-administered via group administration, whereby the rest of the club delegation left me for half an hour to first explain the survey to players and then allowed them time to carry the survey out. Group administration normally results in a higher rate of

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<sup>6</sup> Corinthians-Audax was an agreement between two clubs – Corinthians and Audax Osasco – which allowed Corinthians to fulfil the requirement of having a women's team for the purpose of the Copa Libertadores and Audax to compete at national level in the top division.

response (Fowler Jr, 2013, p.65) though it was made clear to players that participation was entirely voluntary and on that basis numerous players chose not to participate.

The survey was elaborated using simple short words in order to ensure a consistent meaning to all respondents and to minimise any possibilities for ambiguity (Fowler Jr, 2013; Sapsford, 2006). Ethical approval was granted and piloting was carried out in Bristol prior to fieldwork and questions were adapted according to feedback and suggestions offered by native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese respectively. Once again, it is fair to note that those piloting were academics who were unaware of the lived realities of women footballers, particularly in the countries where the sport is least established, and thus due dispensation for how the questions would be read by those players is also problematic. This became apparent during fieldwork when it became clear that answers to certain questions were skewed by the wording in subtle ways. For example, there is a significant difference in asking if the gender of a team manager is important or asking whether players would prefer a female manager. In the first question players naturally said that competence was the more important factor, whereas in the second instance players often did actually say that they preferred a female manager. These possibilities for the survey to mis-represent views justifies the decision to carry out larger scale ethnographic research which allows these subtle nuances to be identified more easily.

The survey largely respects the conventions of survey research insofar as the majority of questions were of a closed nature, in order to guarantee the comparability of data from which to draw meaningful conclusions (Fowler Jr, 2013, p.93). Considering the dearth of information available on the subject matter, I added five open questions, the responses to which I would pursue during the ethnographic part of my research (set out in the following chapters). The results section juxtaposes quantitative results to questions scaled from 0 to 10

as described with the open answers to supplementary questions and the theoretical framework as set out below.

In recent years there has been considerable tension between players and their respective national federations, including around the time that the survey was conducted. In Brazil, a number of players resigned from national team duty when the first-ever female coach Emily Lima was dismissed from the job in 2017 on spurious grounds (Pires, 2017). In Colombia, multiple allegations of sexual harassment have been reported (Alvarado, 2019; Pinochet, 2019). In Chile and Argentina players have formed a union to represent their interests after their respective federations left the women's national teams inactive for prolonged periods. This is highly significant insofar as it influenced my decision to use self-administered procedures for this part of the research. It is well-documented that this method can be preferable to carrying out direct face-to-face interviews on socially delicate topics as protagonists do not have to talk about traumatic experiences with a stranger or to admit directly to socially undesirable or negatively valued characteristics or behaviour. Conversely, data has consistently indicated that sensitive but significant information is more frequently offered in self-administered modes than when the interviewer directly asks the question. (Fowler Jr, 2013, p.63). In this sense the survey methodology complemented the ethnographic material by offering more candid answers which allowed me to hone lines of questioning used later in more detailed interviews.

There were a total of 103 respondents from the seven teams (two Brazilian and one each from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) involved in this part of the research. Prior to being handed the surveys players were asked to fill in the survey alone, and to discuss any feelings or thoughts thrown up by questions after handing their survey in. With a mixture of jest and thoughtfulness the players debated particular questions with greater intensity – for example the suggestion of mixed gender football. These players came from a potential pool



of 154 players (22 in each squad) who were at the tournament in question. At the time of carrying out the surveys, the squads from Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru contained only national players, whereas those from Brazil, Colombia and Chile contained a number of foreign players, most notably, though not exclusively, from Argentina and Venezuela. The multinational presence in some teams is significant insofar as it means the realities of their respective home nations inevitably contribute to some of the open questions. Of the 154 players targeted, 32 declined to participate and 19 were not available at the time when my visits were carried out. Owing to availability and the tight schedules of players at the tournament, it was only possible to carry out the survey with players from eight of the twelve teams. Nonetheless, the completion rate of the survey was around 66% of the players at the tournament, constituting a significant representative sample. Players were informed that findings would be made available to them upon request upon completion of the thesis.

### **Media Theory (Chapter 2)**

This chapter engages with and problematises media theory which tends to be dismissive of the role of the internet in the changing the nature and scope of media representation. It engages in particular the prolific and influential output of Argentine semiologist Eliseo Verón (1982, 1997, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Verón was a semiotician, sociologist and anthropologist of considerable importance, particular in the cultures in which much of his work on the media and mediatisation was produced in the French and Spanish-speaking world. Verón's model of mediatisation considers traditional media and internet-based media as two distinct systems which often interact separately. Moreover, Verón considered the internet, rather than a paradigm shift, merely to represent '*una mutación en las condiciones de circulación de los fenómenos mediáticos* (a mutation in the conditions of circulation of mediatic phenomena (Verón, 2013, p.429). However, it appears clear that the internet in general and social media in particular, in their contemporary form, have effected profound changes upon the way

traditional media operate (Scolari, 2015). It is argued in Chapter 2 that a lacuna in the current literature, particularly in the area of women's sports, is the way that journalistic practices are shaped, more than ever, by stories emerging online. Evening television news audiences have more than halved in a twenty-year period in the USA and Western Europe and sales of print-copy newspapers have more than halved in a similar period (Kamarck & Gabriele, 2015). The data for Latin America shows comparable shifts which have caused various publications to cease publishing altogether or to migrate to internet forms and adapt to the preferences and consumption patterns of an online audience (Suenzo et al., 2020). This phenomenon has been described as digital convergence (Dwyer, 2010; Turow, 2011). This has engendered intense debate about the democratising (or otherwise) potential of social media, with optimistic interpretations hailing the transformative potential of a many-to-many model of communication, supposedly empowering previously disenfranchised groups (Shirky, 2011). Conversely, bleaker interpretations sustain that the transition to online media has brought increased manipulation with concerted targeted advertising based around certain demographics (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Bradshaw & Howard, 2018).

Instances where different media actors dialogue with each other – for example when social media posts are incorporated into newspaper journalism or radio broadcasts – have been referred to as hypermediations by an eclectic range of media scholars (Carey, 2007; Park et al., 2010; Palmer, 2012; Verón, 2014b; Scolari, 2015; Zayas, 2020). Generally within this body of theory – when mediatic systems collide – there are multiple interactions which vary in scale, intensity and reach (Verón, 2013; Scolari, 2015). In theory, in favour of recognising the mutual circuits of influence (Martín-Barbero, 1983) at play in the creation and dissemination of meaning, the emergence of hypermediation theories, have in some measure contributed to narrowing the very debates they seek to encourage.

It is clear that media outlets now depend to some degree upon social media providers like Facebook and Twitter to direct traffic to them. In spite of this dependence, in a sporting context there is widespread consensus that traditional media remain the key shapers of opinion (Messner et al., 2010; Cooky et al., 2010; Goldblatt, 2019). Nonetheless, that is not to say that the agency of other actors - in this case women football players – should not be accounted for.

There are a multitude of interactions between what Verón understands as the same mediatic systems – for example, the radio commenting upon the latest newspapers or television programmes or social media users commenting on one another's content. These interactions within the same media system are referred to in *La Semiosis Social* as intra-systemic (Verón, 2013). On the other hand, the relationships between two distinct systems are categorised as inter-systemic (Verón, 2013) to take note of the way meaning often mutates and distorts on a scale which is quantitatively and qualitatively unprecedented. Verón's work considers firstly the status of enunciators, secondly the type of intervention (whether it is further production or the reception of the previous discourse, or both) and finally the reach and capacity to construct collectives. This approach has been insightful in bringing linguistics and semiotics into dialogue with more traditional approaches to media studies. Nonetheless, at the present conjuncture, the fundamental question is – how can we conceptualise contemporary circuits of mediatic influence which operate intra and intersystemically in multiple directions through time and space? Clearly, this type of analysis will, by definition, only constitute the unique interpretation of the researcher subjectively constructing interactions considered of fundamental importance. As Verón acknowledges in much of his work, our analysis ought not aspire to exhaustivity. It inevitably only produces vignettes of a far larger panorama as a complement to other theoretical frames (Verón, 1987, 2013, 2014b). The ethnographic chapters of the thesis (4, 5 & 6) tend to this need by offering

the ‘thick detail’ (Geertz, 1973) of the day-to-day existence of women footballers which problematise many of the assumptions and discursive tropes perpetuated and disseminated by the mass media.

The trajectory of two Instagram posts from Yoreli Rincón will be examined in terms of how they are received, reconfigured and (re)presented by traditional media. The data for this study, then, is taken from a time period spanning from the Instagram posts made by Yoreli Rincón on 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018, in the immediate aftermath of Atlético Huila Women’s Copa Libertadores triumph, through to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018 when in the aftermath of Huila’s victory, the President of one of the club’s rivals Gabriel Camargo of Deportivo Tolima, made derogatory remarks about women’s football. In addition to the visual and textual analysis, analysis draws upon empirical data gathered in a period of ethnographic research during three months in Neiva with Atlético Huila women from February to May 2019, and during the three-week Women’s Copa Libertadores tournament in Manaus in November and December 2018.

### **Institutional Analysis (Chapter 3)**

In line with players’ responses in Chapter 1, this chapter goes on to analyse the workings of football institutions (namely national federations and the continental football body CONMEBOL). It considers the balance between structure and agency, and how this provokes both ruptures and continuities in institutional cultures. This is analysed with reference to institutional theory which is moving away from more conservative conceptualisations which emphasise stability and internal factors to consider a variety of influences.

To account for the considerable influence of global policy on Brazil and Colombia, the notion of institutional isomorphism described by Di Maggio & Powell in their seminal *The Iron Cage Revisited* (1983) is considered. In particular, coercive isomorphism, refers to ‘the formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon

which they are dependent and on the cultural expectations of society within which organisations function'. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.151). The mechanisms of institutional isomorphism, particularly coercive and mimetic, appear to explain the policies and change that followed FIFA's inclusion of gender equality, along with a partial convergence found in official discourse. The South American confederation CONMEBOL and national federations depend on FIFA for funding on many occasions and for that reason have a vested interest in at least appearing to be in alignment with global developments. In this way, the inclusion of gender equality within FIFA statutes has had clearly discernible effects on policy within CONMEBOL, the Brazilian Football Federation and DIMAYOR, the responsible Colombian body. Women's football is emerging within a highly professionalised market-driven institutional environment, against a backdrop of over a century of male domination. At first glance at least, the institutional environment appears characterised by strong transnational dependencies, with regional and national federations accountable to continental federations, and continental federations ultimately accountable to FIFA.

Nonetheless, isomorphisms, either coercive or mimetic, appear inadequate to account entirely for the distinct way these discourses are received, re-hashed and elaborated at a local level. Placing an excessive importance on stable structural elements, the notion of institutional isomorphism is limited as it clearly neglects cultural factors (Lowndes, 2010). Moreover, it does not sufficiently account for the agency of individuals in influencing collective action (Peters, 2019). The progress of gender equality is highly uneven globally and the role of culture locally must not be underplayed in any explanation of this. Sport in general and football in particular, provide a particularly privileged window to observe 'how gender power relations play out and how the power of one gender over another is manifested, resisted, contested, accepted or transformed over time' (Louro, 1997, p.6).

For this reason, the agency of the various actors is accounted for drawing upon discursive institutionalism (DI) as theorised by Vivien Schmidt (2008, 2010). DI is a flexible body of theory better suited to taking account of the broad range of social, cultural and political factors influencing the formulation and enactment of public policy. By questioning the supposed neutrality traditionally attributed to embedded institutional values, it becomes clear they are often better understood as contested concepts subject to constant change (Lowndes, 2010). Whilst Di Maggio & Powell (1983) emphasise the power of institutions to homogenise the behaviour of actors towards a uniform institutional culture the discursive institutionalist approach engages in a more rigorous and nuanced manner with the structure-agency divide. It explains the dynamics of change by suggesting actors in different institutional contexts with powerful new ideas may, in certain circumstances, overcome the considerable entrenched interests, institutional obstacles and cultural impediments which usually stand in the way of substantive change. In discursive institutionalism the efficacy of new ideas hinges upon how well they chime with a gamut of ideational factors such as ideology, collective beliefs, values, norms, worldviews and identities (Schmidt, 2008; Lowndes, 2010; Peters, 2019). Moreover, discursive institutionalism is also historically rooted, considering how the rhetoric of institutions is often epistemologically rooted in (or inherently limited by) the ideological wider political paradigm which has developed within a culture over time.

Identities are shifting discursive formations which imply inclusion and exclusion. In the UK, where historically clubs have been privately owned, this has been characterised as a transition from a family-type business model to stock-floating limited companies (Conn, 1997; Giulianotti, 2002). The neoliberal turn in Latin American football is well documented, particularly in the Brazilian case (Hirata, 2011; Haag Ribeiro, 2013). The growth of women's football, in the cases of Brazil, Colombia and more globally, is occurring against a

background of transition. The traditional socially owned club model has come into increasing tension with a neo-liberal vision privileging the growth of the club's brands and a rationalisation which revolves around maximising revenue stream (Gasparetto, 2013a, 2013b; Gonçalves & Carvalho, 2006). This has provoked structural changes within the hierarchy of clubs, which have stymied democratic traditions and moved the clubs towards more corporatised models (Rodrigues & Silva, 2009). Whilst purportedly representative and accountable in some way to the nation and its people, not even national federations have been exempt from this relentless commodification – for example Brazil has become increasingly close with Nike in recent years to the point where the organisation allegedly even got involved in team selection (Alvito, 2007; Goldblatt, 2014). This background detailing the commercialisation of the game more generally explains at least discursive ubiquity of women's leagues being held to account as commercially unviable. Thrust into the competitive marketplace under a logic of gender equality, the narrative of commercial failure, of course, neglects to take into account the multitude of factors which disadvantage women's football. It is hard to conceive of any other commercial enterprise which would be judged a failure despite never being promoted – therein lies another paradox of women's football. The women's game is systematically hampered by a relentless logic of negative comparison with the considerable advantages accrued through over a century of largely unchallenged male sporting hegemony. It is also increasingly tied into a relationship of dependency with men's football. This is perfectly captured in the case of the UK, in the article title 'Big brother's little sister: the ideological construction of the women's super league' (Woodhouse et al., 2019). The article suggests that the women's league is deliberately marketed as a sub-category of the men's leagues. Investigation of the Colombian professional women's league suggests parallels, along with data which casts serious doubts on whether it can credibly be considered professional at all (Mina et al., 2019). In the case of Brazil, overviews of Brazilian

women's football touch upon institutional governance without any sustained critique (Anjos et al., 2017; Noronha, 2012; Sardinha, 2017). In summary, any discussion on the institutional governance of the women's game needs to be clearly contextualised within the market-driven logic in which it emerges and must take into account the extent to which it is 'othered' against men's football, which key decision makers continue to see as the hegemonic practice (Louro, 1997, p.30).

Chapter 3 draws upon a series of semi-structured interviews carried out in Spanish and Portuguese with significant institutional figures undertaken across a range of sites between September 2018 and June 2019. This is complemented by months of ethnographic participant observation which focused largely on players, but inevitably included key institutional figures at different points. The interviews were carried out in Manaus, Santos, Neiva with club directors of Iranduba, Santos and Atlético Huila and in Bogotá, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and finally Rio de Janeiro with institutional figures from DIMAYOR, the CBF and finally CONMEBOL. The interviews probed institutional attitudes to the women's game and discussed key moments and policies which have been enacted after the 2016 FIFA incorporation of gender equality into its statutes. These include leagues which have been created, policies of inclusion or gender equality and finally the social attitudes and representations of women's football at institutional level. Interviews each lasted between 40 minutes and an hour. As mentioned above these were semi-structured to cover themes of overarching interest to the thesis but also allow themes to emerge over the course of the discussions.

For the interviews of figures at each of the three clubs involved in my study (Santos, Iranduba and Atlético Huila), I decided to counterpose one figure actively involved in the day-to-day running of the female team with another figure important in the club hierarchy but not solely responsible for women's football. This insider-outsider approach seeks to present a



realistic portrayal of the internal struggles within many clubs, problematising older characterisations of the homogeneity of institutions. For the interviews with institutional figures I focussed upon those responsible for policy-making regarding club competitions at both national and continental level. Whilst numerically few women occupy institutional positions, in each instance I sought to include those in influential positions.

Within football institutions, I interviewed Aline Pellegrino coordinator of the Paulista Regional Federation, and Valesca Araujo from the CBF<sup>7</sup>. Allied to this I interviewed Romeu Castro, coordinator of women's football for the CBF and women's football executive delegate for CONMEBOL. At DIMAYOR in Colombia I interviewed Katherine Pimienta, head of marketing, Vladimir Cantor, general manager and Carlos Lajud Catalan the director of communications. For the clubs in my study, at Santos FC I interviewed general manager of women's football Alessandro Pinto and club marketing director Marcelo Frazão. At Atlético Huila I interviewed director Carlos Barrero and then-president of the women's team Diego Perdomo and at Iranduba I interviewed club president Amarildo Dutra and director Lauro Tentardini.

### **Ethnography (Chapters 4, 5 & 6)**

Ethnography is an attempt to represent culture in written form (Delamont, 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) with a descriptive and analytical account of a given group. Ethnography should aspire to portray the intersubjective reality of those on the inside, but in a manner understandable to those on the outside. People provide the focus for ethnography and their experiences, actions and views should be placed at the centre of the narrative. The choice of ethnography responds to a number of factors. Firstly to the structural disadvantages described in previous sections. This is to say, the gulf in agency between mass media,

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<sup>7</sup> Aline Pellegrino was a central defender who captained the Brazil Women's national team. For a detailed account of Pellegrino's fascinating career and perspectives see both Joras (2015) and Haag Ribeiro (2018).

football institutions and players which systematically privileges the narratives and representations of institutions which are largely controlled by male authority figures hostile to the growth of the women's game. These uneven power relations have been consistently highlighted in the literature to date. This thesis builds on that literature by offering a detailed counter vision to hegemonic narratives and finally making a series of recommendations to ensure the infrastructural growth of women's football.

In this way, ethnography goes beyond being a simply academic turn, as it involves juxtaposing the art of narrative with a methodological approach which in some sense is scientific (Radin, 1966). The ethnographies in Chapters 4, 5 & 6 capture a snapshot of women's football at a specific transitional moment in Brazil and Colombia – a moment in which the players involved (at the clubs I spent time with) are salaried and nominally professional in the majority of cases but at the same time, are treated in a way entirely coloured by unacknowledged assumption that football is socially masculine on the part of gatekeepers, managers and club directors.

Ethnography focuses on the minutiae and intends to understand more than the surface meaning providing what Geertz (1973, p.6) famously described as the 'thick description' of cultural and social activities. In this vein, through immersion I aspired to identify and interpret the motivations, intentions and underlying assumptions of those being researched. For this reason, this work is the result of significant time spent at three fieldwork sites. Three months were spent in Manaus and Santos in Brazil and finally Neiva in Colombia.

This ethnography does not claim to be representative of the lived realities of all women footballers in Brazil or Colombia, nor does the inherently reductionist written form aspire to providing a holistic or unbiased account of the lived realities of those involved. The ethnographies are the result of a total of 33 semi-structured interviews of around forty minutes and nine months of participant observation (three months at each site). The

ethnographic element of this research was designed to complement the continent-wide survey set out in Chapter 1 by going in deeper, and to corroborate and compare findings from the institutional chapter (3). The majority of interviews took place outside of training hours and usually at neutral venues. A number of interviews took place at players' homes, while others took place at quiet cafés chosen by participants. In all cases, particular emphasis was placed on where and when participants preferred to be interviewed, in the interests of them feeling comfortable to answer in as relaxed and uninhibited a manner as possible.

An ethnographic approach allows opportunities to access the subjectivities and intersubjective relations and multiple identities which conform the everyday experience of participants (Willis & Trondman, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Eberle, 2015). By spending a sustained period of time in each setting it was possible to develop an informed and comparative perspective of the motivations and interpretations of a range of women footballers from two countries. On the other hand, it is also intended to be read and intelligible (in translated form in Spanish and Portuguese) by research participants whose interpretations, viewpoints and experiences are foregrounded in the following chapters. From experience during fieldwork I am more aware than ever of how the jargon of academia has a tendency to render relatively straightforward concepts impenetrable to outsiders. Having said this, the chapters inevitably contain academic concepts which, without due explanation, may be initially confusing to a non-academic audience. In these cases, I aspire to make the theoretical frame intelligible using clear language understandable to all and by offering any explanation or to answer any queries players may have. In summary then, the dual aim of these chapters is to both explain the lived experiences of women footballers in Brazil and Colombia to an academic audience and to write an account which is recognisable to the research participants who informed it. Many of the distinguished ethnographers referred to in

the literature review have always aspired to do this, such as Simoni Guedes or Verónica Moreira. This thesis endeavours to continue that tradition.

It contributes to a body of work interested in the social significance of female exclusion. For example, Louro (1999, p.17) understands that ‘hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity are constructed, configured and learnt from pedagogical engagement with examples from society’. In the sphere of sport these life examples serve to reinforce the association between sport and a determined form of masculinity, which becomes a norm. Seen in this way, female participation in a socially masculine sport takes on an inherently transgressive meaning. As Goellner (2005a, p.92) explains:

‘the excessive sweat, the physical exertion, the strong emotions, the inherently competitive nature, the rivalries invoked, the muscle definition, the expressiveness of the body movements involved, their freedom of movement, the casual clothing, semi-nudity: these are all commonplace in the world of physical exercise. When they are related to women they immediately cause alarm, as they inherently weaken certain limits of an idealised image of femininity. They destabilise the terrain elaborated and maintained by male hegemony and rooted in the justification of the biology of sex and the body, which supposedly proves male superiority over women.’

By analysing and representing my experiences with women footballers I aspire to explain both how players experience the media and institutional polity and how their everyday activity destabilises male hegemony by occupying one of its most symbolic sites.

### **Participant Observation (Chapters 4, 5 & 6)**

Chapters 4, 5 & 6 each draw on participant observations made over a 9-month period (3 months at each site) allowing the level of detail necessary to portray the complexity of the lived experiences of women footballers. It is worth noting at this stage that I was only a participant insofar as I was present at training sessions and able to converse with anyone from players to managers, coaches and technical staff. I would sometimes share snacks and drinks with the players during breaks, and in the case of Atlético Huila always travelled on the team bus to training located some 25 miles from the city. I would often help set up activities but almost never participated actively in training sessions with occasional exceptions. I define this section as participant observation rather than naturalistic observation as there was significant interaction between the participants and I, the researcher.

On a fundamental level, participant observation ‘aims to record and present the nitty-gritty of everyday life and ordinary cultural practices, and analyse them in ways that produce maximum illumination for readers’ (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p.398). As I accompanied players on a daily basis to training, on team buses and on team outings, I became part of the everyday experience in a way that allowed a certain mutual familiarity to grow. This allowed me gradually to personalise my interview questions rather than ‘come in blind’ (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p.24).

A clear advantage of long-term participant observation is that it eliminates the distinct possibility in interview situations of information being presented in ways which evade, intentionally or otherwise, certain lived social realities. In a white-room interview devoid of context, information which is remembered or told anecdotally would inevitably be different from what was directly observed (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p.26). In summary, the potential for inaccuracy, hyperbole or interviewees misrepresenting is reduced by observing directly.

Whilst carrying out fieldwork I became acutely aware that I was more likely to note certain behaviours which felt alien to me, but which probably felt ‘perfectly normal’ – and

thus unnecessary to explain – to the players. For that reason, this type of information would never have come out only using interviews. Players took certain aspects of their surroundings or daily occurrences for granted in a way I, as an outsider, did not. Clearly, it is worth mentioning that participant observation means that the researcher makes various judgment calls vis-à-vis what to report and what to ignore. This clearly brings some benefits, though there is a danger that after a certain period, I too, would see certain behaviours and occurrences as normal.

There are clearly limitations to ethnographic work. However well observed, no written ethnographic work can reproduce a pure description of the lived reality of the studied group (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It is acknowledged then, that this work provides an informed re-representation rather than purporting to be an unmediated representation of reality. As with the media representations described in Chapter 2, this ethnography is shaped as much by its omissions as by its inclusions, which in turn are shaped by the researcher's subjectivities and biases. Attempts to comprehend and faithfully describe the interpretative processes of the social actors as they construct their reality around them, are inherently limited by my own (un)acknowledged assumptions.

Carrying out an ethnography of women's football is inevitably coloured by my own positionality as a researcher. Researching highly marginalised groups certainly does not automatically identify me an ally of the groups in question – much less so being a white male researcher benefitting from the considerable privileges offered by a UK university. From a number of reliable accounts it is known that women players on the continent have been silenced at the threat of sacking. There have been well-documented cases of the abuse of players (Pinochet, 2019) and on a number of occasions players have been connected to clubs without contracts or any appropriate cover in the case of injuries (ACOLFUTPRO, 2020). For this reason, gaining trust with players was challenging and there were several concerns

which were covered rigorously during the process of applying for ethical approval from Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol. There were no comparable projects both in terms of length, nor in nature, and for that reason much thought had to be put into how to approach certain possibilities during fieldwork.

More broadly, the ethnographic chapters (4, 5 & 6) try to take account of the various prejudices and predispositions I have accrued through forty years of life experience. My own experiences of football date back to 1988 when, as a (gendered) rite of passage, male members of my family first introduced me to my hometown club Oldham Athletic. Despite the fact that in the very same year a newly formed Manchester City Women's Team visited Boundary Park, Oldham and ran out 4-1 winners against Oldham Athletic Women (James, 2019), I remained largely oblivious to women's football until at least 2000, by which time I was twenty years old. My interest in the women's game grew significantly after watching a game from the 2017 China Women's World Cup on television. An eminently gifted Brazilian women's team convincingly defeated the hegemonic power of women's football (then and now), the United States 4-0 in the Semi-Final. Since that game in 2007 my interest in women's football has grown steadily culminating in this doctorate project.

### **Positionality (Chapters 4, 5 & 6)**

In Manaus, Santos and Neiva, I was frequently confronted with bemused participants who were curious as to what exactly I was doing so far from home with a women's football team. I was often mistaken by participants, in the first instance, to be just another journalist looking for a sensationalist story, entering their lives for an hour or two and leaving with a correspondingly superficial understanding of participants' lives. I felt gratified at the level of interest of many players who were keen to read the finished work, and endeavoured not to feel offended by those who were quite understandably less than optimistic about the prospects of a white male researcher gleaning any kind of understanding of their reality. This

was matched by a genuine interest from the friends and acquaintances I made in Santos, Manaus and Huila, many of whom had little or no interest in football more generally but saw the social and symbolic value. In the words of Colombian sociologist Beatriz Veléz (1993) *'la importancia cada vez mayor del deporte en la vida diaria de las sociedades parece contrastar con el desdén con el cual las ciencias sociales han abordado esta cuestión* (the increasing interest in the role of sports in our everyday lives lies in stark contrast to the disdain with which social sciences has approached the question'). Fortunately this was not my experience in academic circles. This interest in the project more generally consolidated my desire to disprove an elitist dual prejudice assuming firstly that 'those interested or involved in football would be unlikely to be regular readers and secondly that the more erudite tend not to engage with football' (Wisnik, 2013, p.11). I reproduce the remark in its original Portuguese: *'em geral, quem vive o futebol não está interessado em ler sobre ele, e quem se dedica a ler livros poucas vezes conhece o futebol'*. Their core assumptions concisely express the antithesis of the optimism I retain of engaging with both (slighted) audiences. Indeed, I was aware whilst carrying out my fieldwork, that my presence in Brazil and Colombia was motivated by a desire to dispel these very prejudices.

Upon being introduced at my first training session in Santos, Brazil I was acutely aware of my positionality as an outsider, both as a male researcher and as a foreigner. Prior to travelling I had elaborated a series of questions, based upon secondary research undertaken in the UK, designed to guide semi-structured interviews with players. The general focus around the interrelationship between football institutions, the media and the lived experiences of players remained broadly relevant. Only having spent time with the teams in question was I able to grasp the differences between fieldwork settings and the distinct understandings of terminology. For example, I realised the centrality of the concept of *obrigatoriedade/obligatoriedad* in both countries, along with the multiple positive and



negative understandings of the term. Similarly, I realised that when players referred to *torcedores*, it carried a much different meaning in Manaus and Santos – insofar as the Manaus crowd were generally dedicated followers solely of the women’s team whereas the Santos crowd attended women’s games occasionally for free as an additional activity. Playing a waiting game allowed me both to build a greater level of trust with players before interviewing them and also to hone my questions to make them more meaningful and to take account of the multiple subjectivities informing players’ understandings of the *torcedores* and *obrigatoriedade* for example. Not taking note of these factors could have resulted in the data being interpreted entirely wrongly or at the very least being significantly skewed.

I became particularly aware at an early stage of the bearing my role as a foreign researcher would have on answers. Players would explain regional nuances to me in a way that would not be necessary when relaying the same detail to a Brazilian (or Colombian) investigator. Similarly, they would perhaps be more candid with a true ‘outsider’ to Brazilian (or Colombian) society. Additionally, as we will see, there are many practical reasons why research participants may be unwilling to discuss sensitive issues with outsiders, or may even deliberately mislead them. This is particularly true as a male researcher in an area where there have been significant allegations of abuse against male gatekeepers. Being a male researcher meant, in my view, that male gatekeepers were particularly forthcoming and candid. For the reasons set out above, this may be significantly less true in the case of interviews with female players. For that reason, reading between the lines and carrying out a larger scale ethnography have in some sense guarded against the pitfalls of a more superficial methodology of simply carrying out ‘white-room’ interviews out of context.

A clear influence on this research is my own attachment to the countries (and indeed continent) of study. In a similar vein, eminent Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm confessed to having been ‘permanently drawn to Latin America’ (2007, p.369). He describes a love affair

with a place where he ‘did not even try to resist the sheer drama and colour of the continent’ (2007, p.376) and where he felt ‘not a bit surprised to meet presidents past, present and future’ (2007, p.362). Mawkishness aside, the openness and receptiveness of participants (particularly with Western foreigners) in Latin America, meant that gaining *an* understanding (rooted in my own subjectivities) was the (comparatively) straightforward part. Of infinitely greater difficulty was the task of rendering the experience intelligible to those on the outside.

In one sense, ethnography aspires to an ever-elusive authenticity. It tries to re-represent the experience as faithfully as possible. This means the researcher must engineer some sense of distance in order to interpret the lived reality to readers. In his pioneering works of the ethnography of the crowd Pearson described this omnipresent dilemma as being in ‘two places at the same time’ (1993, p.6). This means a type of ‘ethnographic ventriloquism’ (Clifford, 1983; Geertz, 1988; Auger, 2004). Both in undertaking ethnographic fieldwork and in writing it up there is always an intended audience, or even sometimes multiples audiences in mind. This influence means that the ethnographer cannot be considered a mere observer producing an account of pure description free from these interpretations, misconceptions and biases. I was acutely aware of much of what is written above while carrying out fieldwork. The remainder came as a result of reflecting upon the experience afterwards.

## Chapter 1 – Surveying the Field from the Players’ Perspective

### Introduction

An estimated television audience of more than a billion for the 2018 Women’s World Cup evidenced the continuing breakneck growth of global interest in women’s football. Of all the continents, South American coverage reached the highest percentage of viewers, registering an astonishing 560% increase from the previous World Cup (FIFA.com, 2019; Globoesporte.com, 2019) with Brazil enjoying the largest audience for the final despite not even being involved (Veja, 2019). However, whilst this quadrennial spike in visibility clearly indicates an enormous growth of interest in women’s football, institutional inertia unchecked by a complicit media polity mean this public interest has not yet translated into a well-developed club game or, by extension, to high profile club players. Indeed, particularly in South America, a continent where football has long been inextricably linked to tropes of national identity (Alabarces, 2002a, 2018; Kittleson, 2014; Bocketti, 2016), women’s club football remains barely visible. Moreover, when it is visible, it tends to be selective and episodic – coverage of extreme outbursts suggesting women should not even be playing the game, for example (ABC Fútbol, 2018; Gazeta Press, 2021) drown out more serious and substantive debate about how best to turn public interest in the Women’s World Cup into a more sustained interest in the club game. Whilst tournaments like the World Cup and the Olympics require only the most fleeting passing interest, arguably the deeper quasi-religious ties are often attached to the day-to-day progress of club football. These links are not present for South American women players, whose opportunities to make a living from club football remain scarce and transitory. For this reason, patterns of short-term transnational migration are common, albeit on a far weaker footing to their male counterparts (Agergaard et al., 2014; Rial, 2014; Tiesler, 2016).

The ascent of men's football in recent decades tends to be conceived of primarily in terms of its hypercommodification (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2009; Kuper, 2014) and secondarily in terms of its cultural omnipresence. In the latter vein, Arthur Hopcraft's seminal work *The Football Man* articulates the unacknowledged assumption that the game is 'an everyday matter; built into the urban psyche, as much a common experience to our children as are uncles and school' (Hopcraft, 1968, p.9). In this vein, this chapter, shaped by the concerns of players themselves, argues that in order to approach the quotidian ubiquity of men's football, the key struggle from here onwards for the women's game is establishing the game at youth and grassroots level – at schools and universities, in youth divisions within clubs and informally. The role of schools, colleges and universities where the game is deep-rooted in the leading country the United States must not be ignored (Markovits & Hellerman, 2003). Finally, the issue at hand in this thesis: that of creating a women's football culture at club level is identified by players as fundamental. A closer approximation to each of these spaces is necessary.

This survey was designed to identify a wide-ranging agenda of issues to explore in detail throughout the ethnographic chapters that provide the backbone to this thesis. In this way I sought to ensure that the direction of the thesis was driven by the participants/players' own concerns. It is split into a quantitative and qualitative section. The first section gives an indicative gauge of satisfaction with football institutions, clubs and the media before proceeding with a qualitative discussion around how things can be improved. The anonymity of the survey meant participants were allowed to express freely their opinions about the aforementioned themes. The second qualitative section, then, is guided by a carefully chosen selection of representative comments from participants considering the varying nuances across national settings using data collected from players based in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. This material feeds into the chapters which provide a richer

ethnographic insight into the lived experiences of women footballers at three South American clubs: two in Brazil (Irاندوبا and Santos) and one in Colombia (Atlético Huila).

### ***Beyond the Media Representations Paradigm***

Much of the scholarly work on women's football to date has tended towards analysing the shifting discourses used to represent women's football across print and broadcast media.

Given the dearth of coverage of women's club football until recent times, this has usually meant that national teams have provided the central focus (Conde & Rodríguez, 2002;

Ferretti et al., 2011; Mina & Goellner, 2015b; Pfister, 2015a; Ravel & Gareau, 2016a; Black & Fielding-Lloyd, 2019; Krasnoff, 2019). This has had the unintended effect of deflecting attention from neglect at institutional level, placing disproportionate emphasis on the media.

The introduction to this thesis sets out how scholars have demonstrated that women's football is often mis-represented, wilfully or otherwise. Nevertheless, the day-to-day struggle of players to professionalise the women's game and ultimately be able to make a full-time living from it have not featured. This has been complemented by recent literature noting a growth of alternative media with groups like *Dibradoras* in Brazil, *Fémina Fútbol* in Colombia and *Burn It All Down* in the United States. Indeed in Brazil, these counter narratives have already garnered academic attention (Vieira, 2018; Firmino, 2019). Similarly, socially engaged academic work continues addressing the underrepresentation of women's football and forwarding pragmatic proposals for change (Rial, 2013a; Goellner & Kessler, 2018a; Goellner, 2021). Building upon these bodies of scholarship, this thesis addresses inaccurate or disingenuous representations by attempting to strip away the mediation of broadcasters and commentators, foregrounding the perspectives of women footballers themselves.

Historical work has hinted at the omissions in the media-heavy analysis to date. For example, Elsey & Nadel (2019, p.18) identify three ideological camps they consider have historically shaped the politics of sports. They suggest the state, civic associations (religious and charity)

and sports clubs to be significant actors. A fourth highly ideological addition to these, in the case of football, is surely the regional, national, continental and global federations responsible for the governance of the game. Mirroring the development of critical studies of men's football on the continent, the pioneering works focussing on women players have emanated from Brazil, and to a lesser extent Argentina. Historians have shown the pernicious and lasting legacy of the deliberate erasure of women from tropes of national identity (Goellner, 2005c, 2012; Knijnik, 2014; Elsey & Nadel, 2019; Bonfim, 2019). This has fed into more contemporary work, both more critical of institutions responsible for running the game (Knijnik & Horton, 2013b), the role of clubs in promoting the women's game (Rial, 2013a), work focussing on the oral history of women players (Joras, 2015), and even ethnographic work juxtaposing the lived experience of a player with the critical tools of sociology (Garton, 2019). Thus far, however, there have been no attempts to record the perspective of women players in survey form. Similarly, there has been no comparative work which considers similarities and differences across national settings. This chapter therefore contributes a broad span of quantitative data to complement the qualitative research which has hitherto been a staple of the field.

### **Quantitative Survey Results**

For the quantitative section of the survey players were asked to rate their satisfaction with a range of questions from 1-10. The results are shown and analysed in the following tables (Figures 1-9 respectively).

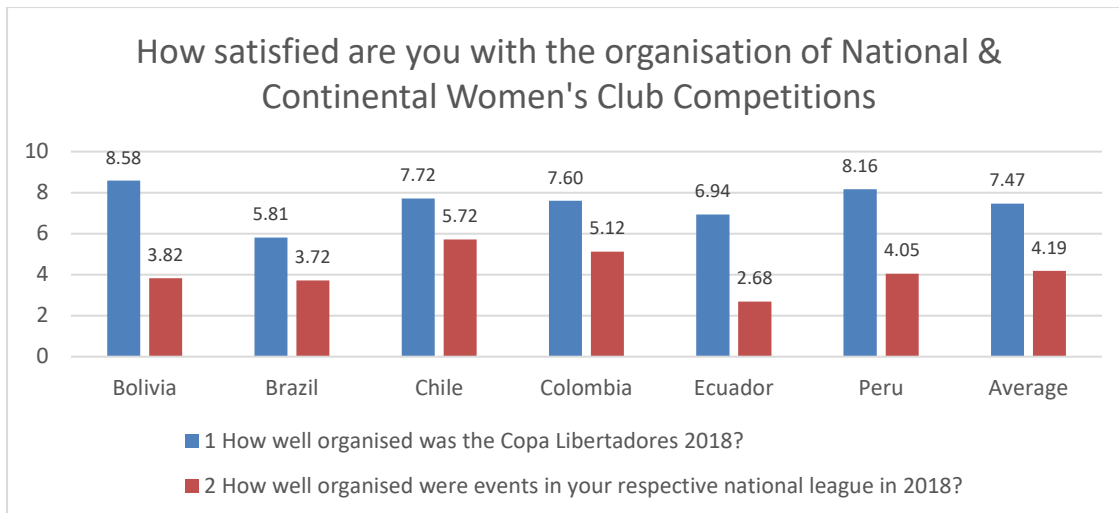
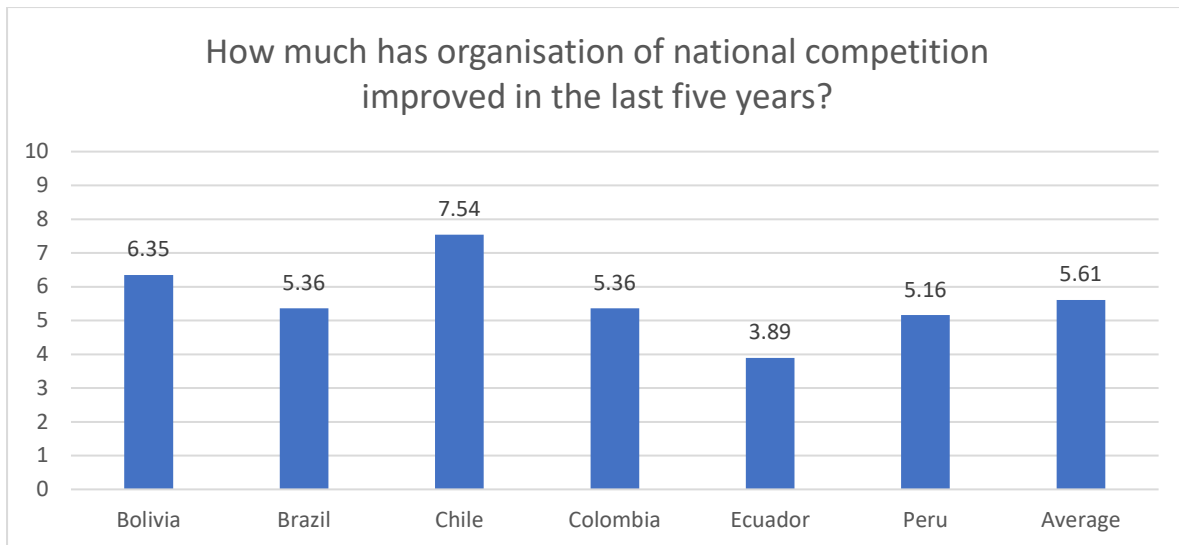


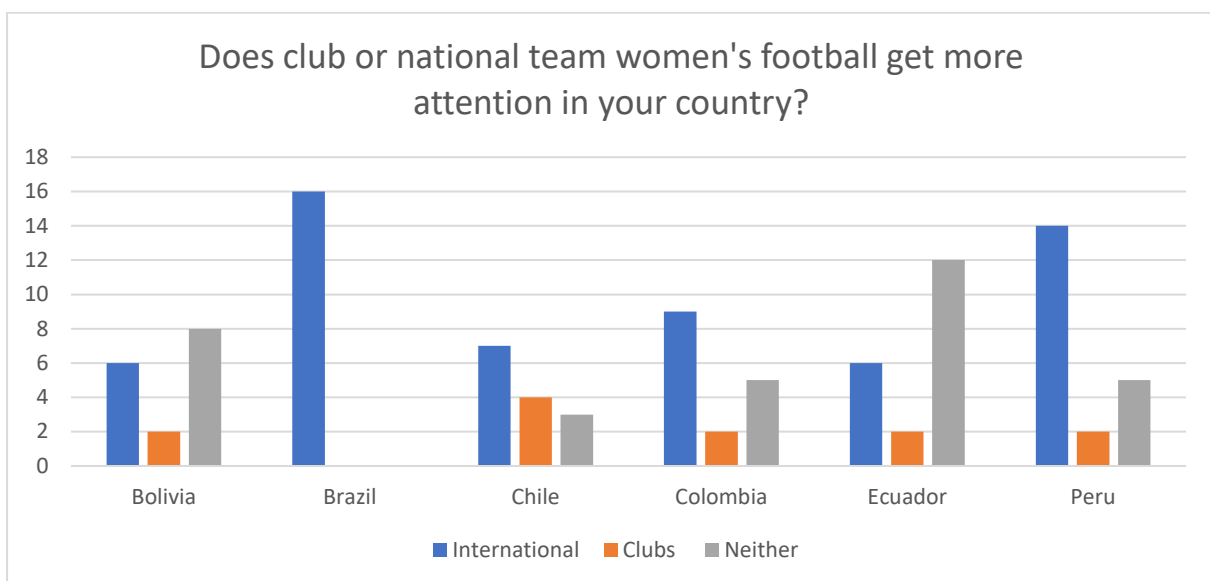
Figure 1. Satisfaction with Organisation of National & Continental Women's Club Competitions

As Figure 1 shows, without exception players from every country were always more satisfied with the shorter Copa Libertadores tournament than with their national leagues. Whilst fleeting in duration, players are able to play in large stadiums like the Arena da Amazônia and are accommodated in good quality hotels with training facilities and travel all covered by CONMEBOL. The Brazilian players registered the lowest level of satisfaction with the tournament as perhaps their expectations are higher from having had similar experiences in the Brazilian league playing games in large stadiums like the Pacaembu in São Paulo. Conversely in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, two countries where women remain unable to earn a salary from football, the breach between the national leagues and the Copa Libertadores shows itself to be far greater. The following question considers the organisation of competitions by the respective national federations over the previous five years, a period chosen to take into account the likelihood of positive changes reacting to global growth and the continental policy of *obrigatoriedade* (discussed in detail in Chapter 3)



*Figure 2. Improvement in the organisation of national competitions over previous five years*

As shown in Figure 2, the average satisfaction always exceeds 5 but is never higher than 7.54. The scores suggest a complex and mixed panorama. The notion of improvement is not rejected outright, however the middling results suggest players believe much more and much better can be done. Clearly, the question deals with generalities and there are some particular insights that follow later dealing with indicative remarks made by players in the qualitative section.



*Figure 3. Players' Perceptions of Media Coverage of Women's Club & National Football*



Figure 3 (above) shows perceptions of whether media coverage is skewed towards women's club or national football, or neither. They emerged from the academic literature which tends to pay more attention to national team football. I wanted to see if the players shared my hypothesis that this bias was mirrored in the media and that overall the day-to-day of club football is often forgotten about in debates about the growth of women's football. The results suggested that they did, particularly in the cases of Brazil and Peru where players felt international women's football eclipsed the importance of the club game.

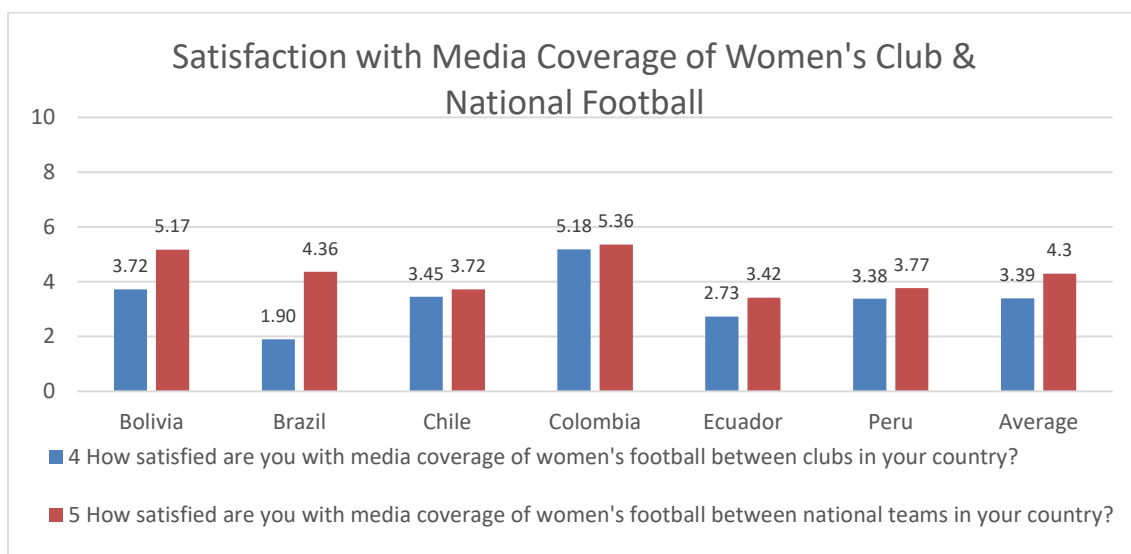


Figure 4 How satisfied are you with coverage of women's club/national team football in your country?

Figure 4, then, registers a higher level of satisfaction with the coverage of women's national teams. However, it remains far from satisfactory as the table below shows. Moreover, many of the differences are marginal, indicating most likely that neither is covered adequately.

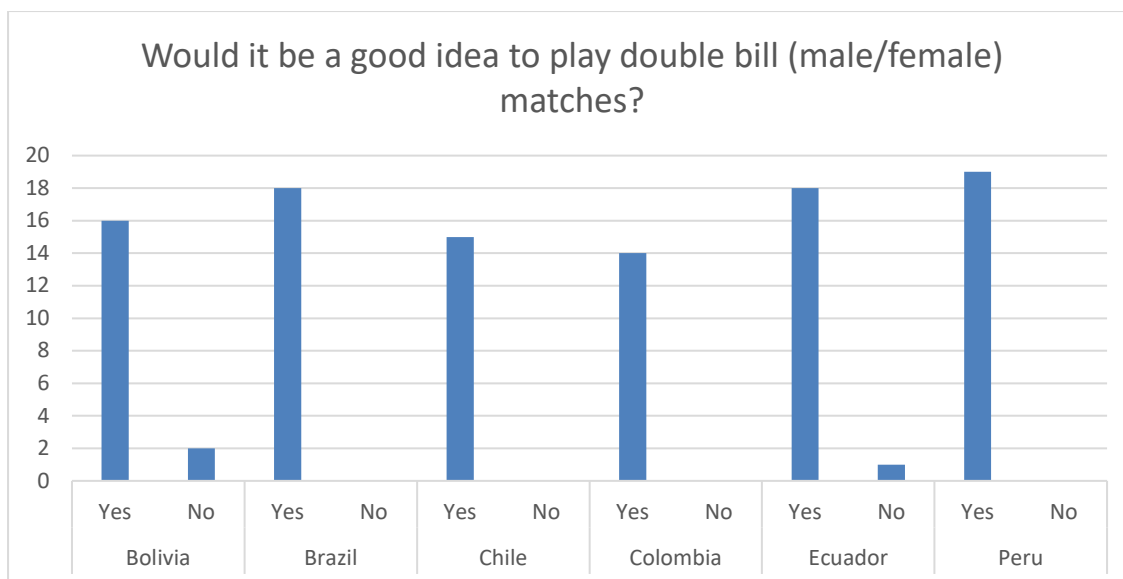


Figure 5 Would it be a good idea to play double bill (male/female) matches?

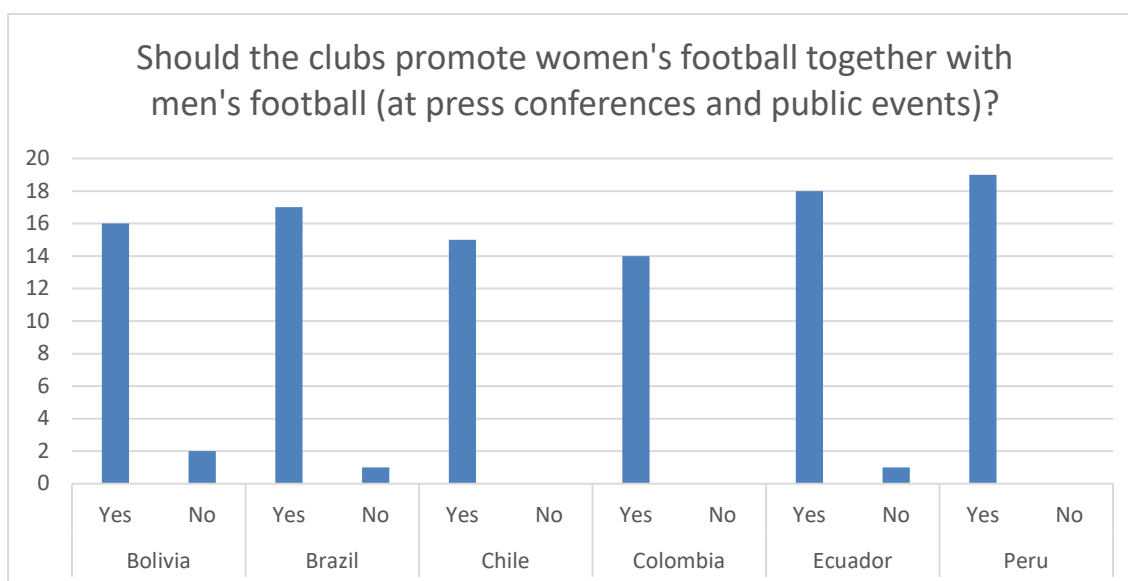


Figure 6 Should the clubs promote women's football together with men's football (at press conferences and public events)?

Figures 5 & 6 (above) concern hypothetical policy recommendations which could be implemented to encourage the growth of women's football. They were asked about integration with the male team. Firstly, whether they would like to play back-to-back games with the male team in front of larger crowds and secondly if joint press conferences would be a positive step. In both cases the results were resoundingly in favour.



*Figure 7 Is it important if your manager is male or female?*

Along similar lines, in Figure 7 players respond to whether it is important if their manager is male or female. When I later engaged players in far more detail during the ethnographies discussed in later chapters, it became clear to me that wording this particular question differently may have yielded different results. For example, if it had been worded, ‘would you prefer to have a female coach?’ results may have been different. However with the question worded as it was, very few players were prepared to express their preference in negative terms. The great majority of players answered no to the question.

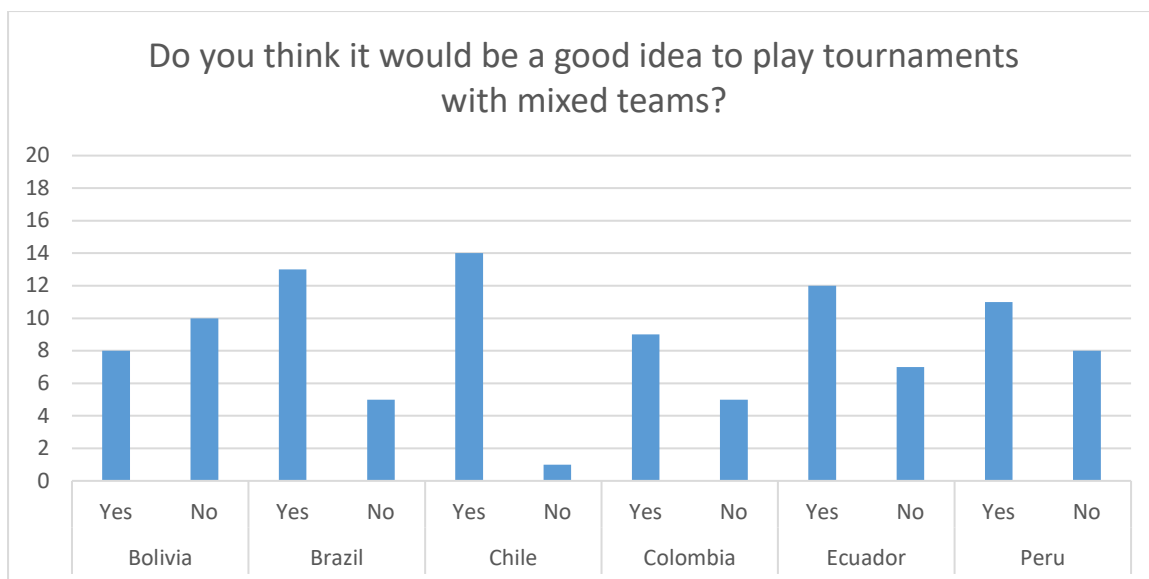


Figure 8 Do you think it would be a good idea to play tournaments with mixed teams?

A further hypothetical policy questions (as set out in Figure 8) concerned mixed gender football. Even in non-physical competitions such as Chess, gender division is deep-rooted and rarely questioned in sports – with occasional historical anomalies like mixed doubles in tennis (Lake, 2016; Wilson, 2021). For this reason, a good number of players were taken aback by the question. Whilst divisive with some participants, a majority of players from all countries except Bolivia were in favour of the proposal.

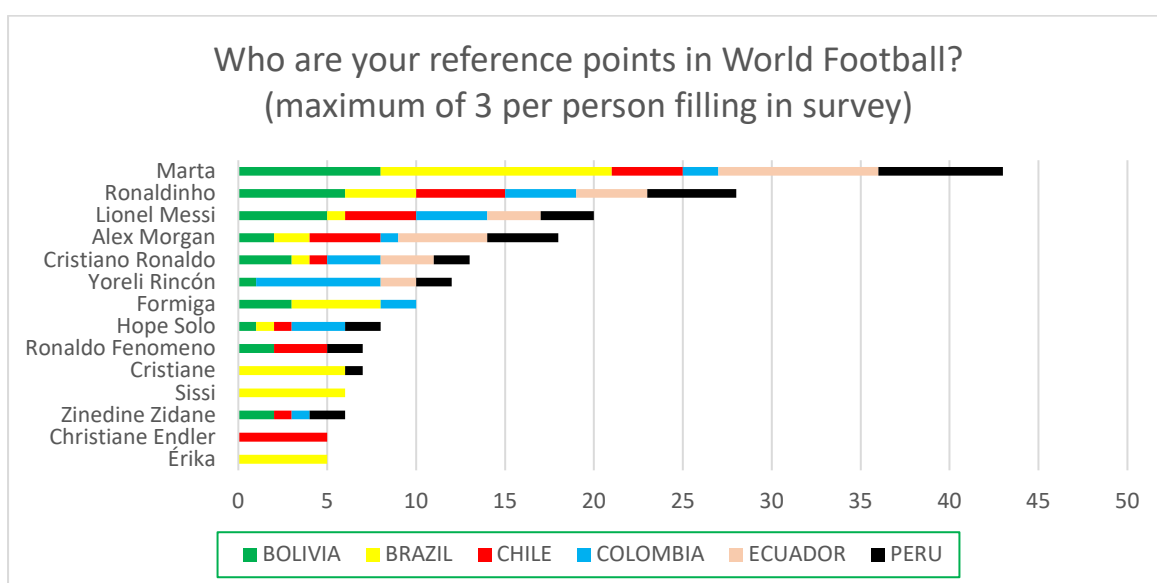


Figure 9 Who are your reference points in world football?

Finally Figure 9 (above) shows the responses players gave when asked to list their footballing reference points. The results were as follows. The question was deliberately worded in a gender-neutral way to see how players would interpret the question. The answers reflected a bias towards South American players and also an admiration for US women's football as the pre-eminent force of the modern era. The question was planted intentionally to catch the players off guard as a seemingly throwaway personal preference question. The intention of the question was to see if the players' footballing idols were in fact male or female players from the past. In both the Spanish and Portuguese versions of the questionnaire this meant avoiding the masculine or feminine words for players (*jogador/a* or *jugador/a* respectively). For this reason the wording was changed to the neutral *referente* (reference point in the sense of role-model/hero in Spanish and Portuguese). Whilst national omissions from the survey (the Argentinean and Venezuelan women players did not participate) have no doubt impacted upon results, it is still worthwhile to reflect upon the choices made by players.<sup>8</sup> From the 103 players surveyed, seven chose not to name any player, either writing 'none' or in two cases '*uno mismo*' (myself) hinting at positive self-esteem. A total of 54 players were named, 17 female and 32 male. Selections were largely South American (39 different players), with only six North Americans (all women) and nine European players mentioned. The preponderance of South American players reflects not only the players' knowledge but more likely the extent to which football is linked to national pride and identity. Predictably, these choices were often along national lines with Sissi or Érika only chosen by Brazilians, Christiane Endler only chosen by Chileans and so on. Of all the players named there were only two whose playing days pre-dated the date of birth of most of the players surveyed (Pelé and Teófilo Cubillas respectively). It seems relevant that these two players were trailblazers in their time,

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<sup>8</sup> It is merely my speculation that further participation from Venezuelan players (some participated as players based at clubs in Chile and Colombia) would have skewed the final results towards choosing a female player (Deyna Castellanos) and that Argentinean participation may well have had the opposite effect (Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi etc).

contributing to a re-imagining and consolidation of narratives around Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Peruvian players respectively. Whilst choices were often along national lines, the players most mentioned are clearly of a level of fame whereby they are known continent-wide or worldwide. Encouragingly for the growth of the women's game, six of the ten most chosen players were women. Of those, Marta was named by respondents from all of the participating countries.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps symptomatic of the commercial growth of the women's national game in the intervening period, a player Marta herself recognises as a true pioneer of the women's game, Sissi, was only named by five Brazilian respondents.<sup>10</sup> The much-vaunted player, along with Pretinha and Maravilha from the same early Brazil women's teams pre-date the mediatisation of World Cups, whereas the generation of Marta, it would appear, have become the lightning rod which has truly opened debates about the game. The reach of Marta, together with her phenomenal and surely unparalleled achievements are both discernible in answers to this question. The fact that she was named almost twice as many times than any male player is symptomatic of the growing self-confidence of the Marta generation.

### **Qualitative Discussion**

In addition to the quantitative questions described above, players were given the opportunity to explain their choices in further detail and to highlight areas they feel to be particularly pertinent and worthy of comment. The following discussion is led by players' observations and perspectives and feeds into the agenda of the rest of the thesis.

### ***On Club Competitions***

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<sup>9</sup> Peculiarly, Marta's name was often (twelve times out of 42 including Brazilians) spelt wrong as Martha while none of the male player names (including linguistically less familiar names) in the entire survey had any spelling mistakes whatsoever

<sup>10</sup> Sisleide do Amor Lima (Sissi) was Brazil's Number 10 before Marta, representing the country with distinction at the World Cup and Olympics. In 2019 she was inaugurated into the FIFA Hall of Fame (Cardoso, 2019b)

Players' responses reflected two major issues which dominate the panorama of women's club football in South America. Firstly, the issue of *obligatoriedade* and secondly, the varying states of professionalisation in each country. Both are discussed in this section. Beyond this, players showed an acute awareness of the need for youth divisions to be set up and also for women's football to be established as a staple at school level. They also pointed to a lack of marketing and promotion of the women's game and differential treatment within their clubs. *Obrigatoriedade*, the CONMEBOL policy enacted in 2017 to come into force in 2019 requiring clubs to have a women's team and youth division in order to qualify for the Copa Libertadores and Copa Sudamericana, generated lively debate among players. An Ecuadorian participant suggested: '*hay que obligar a la gente tener equipo femenino, sino (sic) nunca va a pasar*' (we must oblige clubs to have a women's team, if not, it's never going to happen). In a context in which, at the time of carrying out the survey, none of the larger Ecuadorian clubs had a women's team, meaning an unpaid amateur league was the only option for players, this attitude seems logical. Indeed, since I carried out the survey, the policy of *obligatoriedade* has seen action, with a number of larger clubs like Barcelona and Emelec opening women's divisions.

Another perspective, not necessarily at odds with the above view, comes from Brazil emphasising the longer struggle. In Brazil all the major clubs now have a women's team, however the next stage is expressed in the following response: '*Temos que criar um interesse genuíno e não ter que obrigar a gente ter futebol feminino. Questão de educação mais geral na sociedade*' (We have to create genuine interest and not to have to force people to have women's football. It's a broader education problem in society). Players recognise that the disinterest or outright rejection of women playing football comes from culture. That is to say that 'women being included or excluded from certain spaces or from belonging to a particular identity' (Louro, 1999, p.84) is a generational question of education. It is not so much that

some players oppose *obligatoriedade*, so much as they realise it is insufficient and that the problems are deeper rooted. They recognise sport as a key site where these identity markers are constructed (Goellner, 2005c, 2012).

Whilst opinion seemed divided about the policy, seen either way, it is certainly encouraging that a number of players either reject or are sceptical about solutions being imposed from above and are aware that for women's club football to thrive a genuine interest must be generated. In this respect, when comparing, it is important to factor in the extent to which answers are linked to the expectations that have been generated over a period of time. Brazilian women players, for example, have long enjoyed a far more extensive club calendar (which gives them an enormous advantage at tournaments like the Libertadores), are more accustomed to playing in larger municipal stadiums like the Pacaembu, albeit occasionally, and more accustomed to staying in decent quality accommodation and travelling in advance for away matches.

In Colombia, the women's league is nominally professional however players' responses reflected a scepticism about the gap between the federation's claims and the lived experience on the ground. Similarly, in Brazil certain larger clubs offer players year-round contracts and a level of stability which allows the players to dedicate themselves to football. These are not indicative cases however, as players who were lucky enough to benefit from those conditions were keen to express in the survey. As one player wrote '*En casi todos los otros clubes no hay contratos anuales por nosotras*' (At almost all the other clubs there are no annual contracts for women players). Moreover, in many other countries, at the time of carrying out the survey, professionalisation was only an abstract notion that players understood to exist in other places. In all these cases, definitions of what constitutes professionalisation remain nebulous, often spun to the discursive convenience of institutions or media. A body of work on men's football has often taken in similar debates (Taylor,



2001a, 2005a, 2013; Frydenberg, 2005a, 2011) with concepts like *marronismo* in between amateurism and professionalism (Garton, 2019).

Later comments from participants are perceptive in terms of linking the lack of adequate youth divisions to player development. A Chilean participant comments '*con un sistema serio de categorias de base, ya sería mucho más competitivo nuestro fútbol, atrayendo más interés de los medios y de la gente – por ahora falta mucho el nivel de nuestro fútbol. Deberíamos jugar más joven en colegios también, estilo EEUU* (with a serious youth system our level would be more competitive, and that would attract more interest from the media and people. We should play earlier at schools too, like in the USA). There is some scope for improvement at clubs in this regard as CONMEBOL's policy of establishing female teams within male clubs includes the pre-requisite of having at least one youth division within the female club (CONMEBOL, 2018, p.41).

Brazilian analysis largely concurs with the need for youth divisions to allow players to develop, adding another element that is outside of CONMEBOL control and difficult to enforce in any case. Numerous participants mentioned the need for a focus on marketing and publicising the women's game, both at club and regional/national federation level: '*A gente sempre acha e fala que futebol feminino não dê retorno mas nunca tentou de verdade fazer um bom marketing etc* (People say that there is no return on investment but they've never tried really'). The players showed in these responses that they are acutely aware of the commercial side of football, as the women's game has emerged at an entirely different conjuncture to the men's. Women's football is often presented as a counter-hegemonic form railing against modern football in its hyper-commercialised form (Goldblatt, 2019, p.28). In reality, its emergence could easily be complexified as forming part of the march of modern football or as part of a neo-liberal feminist agenda. Indeed, it has been argued that the pressure on players to market themselves has already resulted in the 'femming up' and

whitening of national teams (Elsy & Nadel, 2019, p.145). Women's football is certainly already deeply embedded within the divisive logic of the market – the best players enjoy the most stability and the longest contracts within clubs. Nonetheless, the players best paid for playing football are not necessarily those who benefit the most from lucrative spin-offs - the best profile for marketing purposes is usually linked to the heterosexual male gaze (Connell, 2005). As mentioned, the women's season is usually much shorter than the men's. The inaugural season of the newly launched Colombian 'professional' league lasted just four months with the latest season (2019) being inexplicably shortened to just two and a half months despite initial plans to extend it. The notion of such a short season, with the majority of players on short, precarious contracts, subject to dismissal should they get injured, being labelled 'professional' by DIMAYOR (the Colombian football league organisers) is clearly dubious. Frequently during fieldwork players would note the disjuncture between professionalism and their lived experiences. As they juggled playing with working or studying they would frequently question the notion of it being a professional league.

Indeed, in the following chapter I discuss Yoreli Rincón's symbolic struggle for professional recognition of Atlético Huila's triumph in the 2018 Copa Libertadores. Other players present instantly connect with the points Rincón is trying to make about the true state of the professionalisation of women's football and back her publicly. Liana Salazar, for example, ends the press conference post-Copa Libertadores by saying that all the players back Rincón (Win Sports, 2018). It would, in fact, be impossible to attach such a preposterously inaccurate label to a men's league in which players often only train twice or three times a week, which would be more correctly called amateur or semi-professional. In the case of Colombia's 'professional' women's league, the professional designation is used by the mass media, directors, managers (almost all male) and even by players themselves (perhaps understandably as players naturally seek recognition). Out of self-interest, a wide

range of actors want the league to be seen as professional, and thus rarely question the meaning of the term. Whilst the discourse of professionalism is strong, players appear dissatisfied with the lived experience of it. A Colombian participant explained: *‘los torneos de liga y libertadores deberían ser mucho más largas. Podría mejorar mucho poniendo divisiones menores también. Es importante también el apoyo de las empresas privadas.* (Both the league and the Libertadores should be much longer. And they could improve a lot by adding youth divisions too. There’s also an important role for private investors). Mention of the importance of private capital is significant. In Colombia particularly, whilst the larger clubs are happy to satisfy institutional requirements by having a women’s team, they are often unwilling to fund it from what they continue to perceive as ‘the men’s team’s budget’. The occasional success stories thus far have been propped up by outside investors like Diego Perdomo (once of Atlético Huila, discussed in chapter 6 and now at Santa Fé). This has created the illusion of commitment from Colombia’s leading clubs, that until now has not really materialised.

At the other end of the scale, the Brazilian calendar, at least, is more likely to satisfy players. It runs for almost six months and is supplemented by (often strong) state leagues which can offer a further three to four months football each year. Almost inevitably these end up running concurrently, but nonetheless the specificities of Brazil as a larger country with regional tournaments, means that Brazilian players benefit from far more competitive matches (although admittedly competitive imbalance is common in state championships which often pit big clubs against tiny ones). This is reflected in the Brazilian answers, which prioritise *‘mais marketing e divulgação* (more marketing and publicity). The Paulista Federation (São Paulo State) is bound by its historical amateurism, meaning it is impossible to charge for entrance tickets, but it has shown a very proactive approach to publicising the

women's game online and at a number of events, organised by ex-Brazilian national team captain, Aline Pellegrino.

### ***On Media Coverage***

Following the focus on national teams in academic literature, it was my hypothesis that the majority of media coverage was most likely dedicated to national teams at major tournaments. For that reason, I asked players whether the women's national team or women's club football received more coverage. My rationale for this was that, once again, the infrequent nature of national team football often means that it is possible to pay lip service to the notion of supporting the growth of women's football, without having to dedicate resources to it on a sustained basis. Both the continental national championship (Copa America) and the World Cup are quadrennial, meaning that media coverage of national teams only really need take place every two years to maintain a façade of genuine interest. As has been noted, such has been the inactivity of South America's women's national teams in terms of friendly games, they have even been removed from the FIFA rankings (Elsy & Nadel, 2019, p.246).

One Peruvian participant touched upon an important area noting '*ha mejorado bastante con la transmisión en vivo por facebook y en otras redes sociales* (it has improved a lot with live streams on Facebook and other social media)'. The existence of multiple platforms online has meant that those interested in women's football can now often find it outside traditional television options. This is important for keen fans who will look for the games anywhere where they are shown. However, other players felt that, whilst acknowledging the incremental gains made, coverage was still deficient in many aspects.

For example, a Brazilian participant noted that '*a frecuencia e a qualidade são diferentes -, as vezes nem põem comentarista para jogos do feminino*' (The frequency and the quality are different – sometimes they don't even put commentary with the women's

matches).<sup>11</sup> This brings into question the role of affect in constructing the hegemony of men's football. The often hyperbolic performance of the football commentator is remembered by the public as part of the most remembered moments the games produces.<sup>12</sup> At a level of interest where *'os comentaristas não se emocionam como nos jogos do masculino* (commentators don't get excited like they do for men's matches) and/or *'Os comentaristas nao sabem nossos nomes* (commentators don't even know our names) it is difficult for these layers of melodrama to emerge. This was certainly true in my experience at the Copa Libertadores 2018 event in Manaus where with embarrassing frequency goalscorers, substitutions and even team names were confused on the stadium tannoy. During televisual broadcasts namechecking of players tends to be much less frequent, replaced by generic terms like 'the defender' or 'the attacker'. Players are acutely aware of this and note it when they watch women's games. This chimes with the observations of Conde (2008) who argues that men refuse to relinquish their position of being the only ones who feel the true passion in football. Conversely, they note the increased level of interest from ex-women players working as commentators/pundits. Whilst commentators may be able to moderate their language to suit shifting societal expectations, it is more difficult to feign being genuinely moved (or otherwise) by games.

Furthermore, there is opposition to the notion that some coverage is better than nothing. Another participant from Colombia voiced a common notion that in fact coverage was deliberately poor in order to prevent growth of the women's game. *'que se puede decir? Es de muy baja calidad, muy mal hecho, aburrido entre otras cosas. Lo hacen mal intencionalmente para evitar el crecimiento* (What can you say? It's very poor quality, really badly done, boring more than anything. They do it badly on purpose to stop women's football

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<sup>11</sup> This is a common global practice for women's matches (the BBC among many others) – particularly in the case of online live streams or on secondary channels

<sup>12</sup> Think 'they think it's all over – it is now' from England's World Cup Final Victory in 1966 for example. Or the Barrilete Cósmico commentary of Victor Hugo Morales in 1986 – for more on this see Biram (2013)

growing). This analysis is in keeping with a body of academic work discussed in further detail in the chapter on media representations of women's football (Cooky et al., 2013; Musto et al., 2017; Van Dijk, 1995).

### *On The Role of Clubs*

CONMEBOL's move to debar those without a women's team from the male Copa Libertadores has meant most of South America's prominent clubs have now opened a women's team. Smaller clubs with less probability of reaching the financially lucrative Libertadores appear less concerned. A pertinent issue, with or without this radical change, is the role of South American clubs as potentially independent political actors, who can challenge the status-quo in society. Indeed, the most celebrated example is that of Corinthians of São Paulo and their two-year experiment with self-managed democratic practices between 1982 and 1984 (Florenzano, 2010). Whilst those democratic practices responded to a particular historical conjuncture and place, Brazil in dictatorship, it hints at the possibilities clubs have, particularly social membership clubs which were formed with an entirely different ethos to the private membership model dominant in the UK for example. Recent scholarship however signals an increasing shift towards the marketisation of clubs on the continent, most notably in Argentina (Hijós, 2013, 2014; Moreira & Hijós, 2013) and Chile (Vergara, 2019). In this context, sexism has taken refuge in the logic of the market, as in the case of Santos in 2012 when the women's division was temporarily closed, ostensibly to retain Neymar at the club for the hosting of the Brazil 2014 World Cup but in reality a spiteful cut to what amounted to less than 0.5% of the club's overall budget.

Prior to carrying out research I was aware that questions around the integration of women into traditional clubs would appear more familiar to some participants than others. By that I mean that the integration of the female arms of Santos, Colo Colo, Cerro Porteño, Peñarol and Atlético Huila is an issue to which players can easily relate. Indeed, in the very

season in which the research took place Santos announced the signing of David Braz to the men's team in a joint press conference with a female player (Mendonça, 2018c). Similarly, initiatives in Chile and Colombia have seen double bill matches, albeit widely unreported and with the women's game billed as a 'preliminary' to the main action on both occasions (Prensafútbol, 2019; Fútbolred, 2019). On the other hand, to participants from other countries, where the larger clubs remain closed to the paid participation of women's players, the mere concept of a double-bill game seemed far-fetched or outlandish, though possibly something they may in theory embrace.

The integration of women into press conferences was almost universally accepted with many players feeling that occupying the same physical space in the same stadium as the high-profile male players from their country would be beneficial on a number of levels. From a pragmatic perspective it was felt that the occasion would allow them to draw upon the significant support base of the male teams. Beyond this, participants felt that fans have an emotional attachment to the teams' home stadiums, and hence if they are moved to play 'professional' female matches at a training ground or smaller amateur facility then the authenticity of representing Santos, for example, is lost. This was borne out during my fieldwork when a full Vila Belmiro (the traditional home of Santos FC) saw Santos Women narrowly beat Corinthians Women. Entering the stadium, the murals of previous great matches involving Pelé and Coutinho and more recently Marta and Cristiane gave a sense of the history attached to the space. In more academic terms, there is a body of work from social geography attesting to the affective dimensions of sports grounds (Bale, 1991, 1994; Giulianotti, 1999). Similarly, the Maracanã, intentionally designed as the world's most impressive stadium of its era, symbolises Brazil's arrival as a footballing force in the world and thus occupies a particular space in the Brazilian and indeed international social imaginary (Lacerda Abrahão & Soares, 2009, p.17). A feature of women's football that is partly

attributable to federations and equally the clubs (who have the right to request changes to fixture times and locations as they wish) is the tendency to play women's games at times and places clearly inconvenient for the public during weekdays (at 9am on a Monday). Women footballers are acutely aware of their exclusion from these spaces and of the effects that this has upon the development of their teams.

In line with CONMEBOL's policy of excluding any club without a female division from the male Copa Libertadores, major clubs have either already opened up to women's football or are in the process of doing so. This means an opportunity to begin in a spirit of integration taking advantage of such opportunities. As with the last questions, there was a mixed response according to the current state of development in each country. In Brazil, participants noted that this had already been trialled successfully - *'sim, no brasil ja fizeram isso, no Santos e Corinthians. Foi uma grande iniciativa* (Yes, in Brazil they've already done this, at Santos and Corinthians. It was a really great initiative'). Whilst in Bolivia and Peru participants noted that, at the time of carrying out the surveys, major clubs in their countries had not opened women's divisions as a participant wrote *'si seria bueno pero primero hay que abrir futbol femenino en los clubes masculinos* (yes, it would be great but first they need to open women's football within the male clubs)'. Participants from those two countries were from amateur clubs. In this way, they saw the question hypothetically.

Almost all participants approved of the idea. It is worth noting however, that some participants did qualify the idea of the double-bill matches with the following type of statement - *'la mejor idea que las mujeres sean los preliminares - eso ayudaria a fomentar el fútbol femenino* (the best way to do it would be for the women to be the support/opening event'). This type of comment echoed the media rhetoric sub-categorising the women's game. The degree to which players have internalised patriarchal media and institutional tropes, and at the same time the degree to which a wave of feminist consciousness across the



continent has imbued them with a greater sense of self-confidence is discussed in the following section.

### *On the Social Attitudes of Players*

This final section probes the social attitudes of the sample group of women footballers. One of the pioneering sociological works opening up a conversation on the relationship between football in society suggests the game can be understood as a dramatisation of social life (Da Matta, 1982b). In trying to understand the mass appeal of football, Da Matta considered the various roles within the game as a window to explore social identities within popular culture. These meanings are necessarily mutable - they change across time and place, are influenced heavily by discourse and by the social environment in which events occur. In Brazil, for example, the role of goalkeeper took on an extra dimension of symbolic importance in debates around race relations after a split-second error from Brazil's black goalkeeper Barbosa saw him widely vilified for defeat in the 1950 World Cup Final to Uruguay (Buarque de Hollanda, 2014).

A response to the growth of women's football and its perceived threat to the hegemonic male sporting identity is a charged ideological battle in women's football over the authority conferred upon the manager – historically characterised as *El/O Mister* in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking worlds. The kudos attached to the position described as 'the Svengali of football' (Hopcraft, 1968, p.95) has certainly evolved over time – with an important step in the ascension of the manager's authority being the introduction of the possibility to make substitutes. This change, it has been argued, resulted in the manager being discursively portrayed as a quasi-omniscient authority figure (Wisnik, 2013, p.130). In this vein, then, it could be viewed that the role of manager, in many cases, remains the last bastion of male hegemony within the game. Further examination of the symbolic meaning of this could

contribute to undoing or at least further unveiling the complex web of gender hierarchies (Louro, 1997, p.24)

There are a few notable (and successful) exceptions such as Emily Lima (appointed the first female coach of the Brazilian national team in 2016) and Tatiele Silveira (the first woman to win the Brazilian Women's Championship in 2019), Vanessa Arauz (in the case of Ecuador) and Macarena Deichler (a Chilean based in Brazil). From longer semi-structured interviews carried out in Brazil and Colombia I gleaned from players a strong preference for more female involvement in coaching and management. Players often expressed feeling more empathy from female ex-players. The current crop of female managers were perceived, from lived experience, to understand the precarity and lack of stability of players employed for short periods.

The narrow scope of the question most likely fed into the logical meritocratic answer to the question - '*no tengo preferencia porque el desempeño no depende de género*' (I don't mind as performance is not related to gender). Nonetheless, a number of players did qualify their initial answer in the comments box with a simple but revealing remark which frequently came through quite strongly during ethnographic fieldwork - '*prefiro treinadora pessoalmente. Mas obviamente pode ser qualquer pessoa competente* (I prefer a female manager personally, but obviously it could be anyone as long as they're competent).

Supporting my sense that Brazil is an outlier rather than a typical case both regionally and more globally, Brazil was the only country where an equal number of players answered that the gender of the team manager was significant. It is worth adding that of the eight teams surveyed, only Santos FC had a female coach at the time of carrying out the research. Beyond this, the Brazilian teams had more players with experience playing in other countries (particularly in Europe and North America) where female coaches have already won major honours (USA, Germany, Sweden etc). The preference was by no means unique to the

Brazilian players in any case. For example, a Chilean participant added the following '*una entrenadora nos entendería mejor - una ex jugadora preferiblemente - aspiro a hacer eso cuando termine. Los hombres entienden poco nuestra realidad*' (A female manager would understand us best, an ex-player ideally – which is what I plan to do when I finish. Men don't really understand our reality). These comments from the survey fed into my line of questioning when I went on to carry out detailed ethnographic research with three specific teams. Numerous players expressed a desire to continue with coaching roles in the future.

If the previous questions could be said to have divided the continent's players in terms of whether they were understood hypothetically or otherwise, the final question in this survey about mixed gender games was unambiguously hypothetical. It is worth pointing out, for the sake of problematising the oft-cited biological arguments, at this point that it is a common practice for women's teams to train against young adult male teams, and/or male teams of a lower standard (players who do not earn a living playing the game) and that there is no evidence to suggest that women are placed in danger or get injured as a result of the practice. At training sessions in both Brazil and Colombia I saw both Iranduba and Atlético Huila Women defeat male sides said to be under seventeen and under eighteen, though no age confirmation was provided and some of the male players appeared older to me. This question, of all the questions in the survey, caused the most debate between players.

Whilst competitive intergender sport has occurred for some time in non-contact sports such as tennis, there is an overriding sense, expressed by some players that women would be physically unable to compete with male players and may even be at risk of injury. Indeed, whilst carrying out in-depth interviews with players in Brazil and Colombia the disturbing notion that male players may intentionally try to injure women players was mentioned more than once. Nonetheless, results from the survey show that around two-thirds of players (67 to 36) would be in favour of mixed matches. Players were allowed to comment in further detail

upon their answers. A number of strands of thought emerged. Amongst those who rejected the proposition out of hand, there was a sense echoing the historical investigation that it would be like a circus and beyond that an assumption that physical injury would inevitably ensue for the female players. *'no – seria un absurdo, como un circo, no deberíamos mezclarnos nunca – sería peligroso para nosotras.* (no, it would be absurd – like a circus. We shouldn't mix ever, it would be dangerous for us'). The choice of the word circus is interesting as during prohibition in Brazil one of the ways women found to participate was as part of circuses (Bonfim, 2019, p.72). Underlining the pervasiveness of socially constructed notions of gender (Goellner, 2003, p.33) one participant suggested the following: *'no sería tan parejo ya que los hombres por naturaleza son más físicos bien más agresivos* (it wouldn't be very equal as men are naturally more physical and more aggressive).

As the results suggest however, the great majority of responses suggested enthusiasm for mixed games, adding a number of positive effects it would hypothetically have and seeing no major obstacles to impede it from happening. For example, one participant suggested: *'sería buenísimo, nos ayudaría muchos a nosotras a superarnos y subir nuestro nivel. Ojalá fuera varios partidos con hombres al mes.* (it would be great, it would help us set goals and improve our level. If only we could play a few games with men each month'). This comment implies that the male level is currently much higher and that it could provide a learning curve for female players. It could well be, however, that the belief in male players having a more developed level is not so much connected to naturalistic beliefs of male superiority, so much as a more practical view based on the infrastructural differences that male and female players have had during their formative years as footballers. These structural advantages should clearly be factored in, and indeed are quite prominent during interview material with women players which will be presented in greater detail later in this thesis. Along with the potential learning curve, players also saw the idea of mixed games as an opportunity to lay tired

clichés and stereotypes about the women's game to rest. For example, one participant noted *'uma oportunidade para mostrar que jogamos muito também. Enfrentar os estereótipos de que o futebol feminino é chato* (it would be an opportunity to show that we play the game too, to face those stereotypes that women's football is boring/rubbish). Players who were more aware of the commercial potential of the women's game felt that a mixed game would be a great opportunity to amplify the media growth of women's football and to announce the presence of women's football within the traditional clubs of the country. For example, *'Sim, claro. Seria bom para melhorar o nível de divulgação, especialmente agora que os clubes grandes tem futebol feminino aqui. Vai repercutir bem nos clubes, na federação e para nós* (Yes, sure. It would be good for improving the level of promotion we get, especially now the big clubs have women's football. It would have positive effects for clubs, for the federation and for us).

### **Conclusion**

The responses to the survey presented in this chapter suggest the need for holistic approaches which take into account the discursive, economic and political power of football clubs and institutions and the way those interact with the power of the mass media. It follows logically that these very same actors responsible for the historical marginalisation of women's football have a significant role in visibilising it and effecting a shift in public attitudes. Across participants' answers, whether experienced first-hand or derived from an awareness of developments elsewhere, there is a sense of the ever more prominent profile of the women's game and the potential for significant change in the coming years.

Nonetheless, a number of players are also wary of depending on a top-down approach where political will to effect change cannot be taken for granted. The policy of *obrigatoriedade* is a case in point. The potential financial implications of missing the male Copa Libertadores coerces larger clubs towards opening women's teams but as a stand-alone

policy it does little to address deeply ingrained attitudes about women's football. In theory clubs are a step down from federations hierarchically. Nonetheless, individually and collectively they are an extremely powerful group with autonomy to act in or against the interests of women's football if they so wish. The accumulated cultural capital of clubs is a factor that until now has clearly been underestimated. They have enormous reach and wield significant influence with the public of each country. Moreover, the power of fans as a collective (Bundio, 2013) could be harnessed to push women's football forward. Closer relations with fan groups may be advantageous. Whilst it is true (and more in keeping with the tone of academic work to date) to note that Santos FC closed its female team for three years between 2012 and 2015, the club has also had one of the only female managers on the continent and in recent times has presented various joint press conferences with male and female players together. This is to say, there is a significant internal struggle within each club around these issues. In Colombia, both Atlético Nacional of Medellin and Santa Fe of Bogota have already organised double-bill games exposing the women's team to a mass audience for the first time. Corinthians, a club with a progressive history, has run a number of campaigns urging respect for women's football (Mendonça, 2018a). Players' responses reflect the extent to which they are aware of the possibilities for growth that clubs offer.

The survey results suggest that players are acutely aware of clubs which only pay lip service to institutional discourse. Until legislation is tightened up, there is a possibility of carrying out the bare minimum to meet CONMEBOL requirements without making any serious commitments. Players overwhelmingly back integration into the continent's larger clubs. Many of South America's clubs have active women's and anti-fascist fan groups. Closer relations with these groups may be advantageous.

The agency of players themselves in these changes has been neglected thus far. In 2015, Spanish international Verónica Boquete, through an online petition, managed to get

women's players included in EA Sports FIFA video game series (Goldblatt, 2019, p.22).

There are players actively involved in both the media and federations. Alline Calandrini has begun a career in journalism and ex-Brazil captain Aline Pellegrino was prominent in the Paulista (São Paulo region) Federation and now coordinates women's football for the CBF in Brazil. Mediatic tropes about women's football continue to be highly gendered with clearly differential treatment of women's football. Nonetheless, this area of male domination is also slowly being eroded. Indeed, particularly in Brazil, podcasts and webpages initially aimed at a niche media are slowly seeping into the most read and most viewed media. The influential podcast *Dibradoras*, is among the best known. Similarly, Globo now has dedicated women's football journalists like Cintia Barlem, albeit that even the name '*Donas de Campinho*' (owners of the little pitch) – the section of the Globo website dedicated to women's football, hints at the continued sub-categorisation and/or sense that women are invading the territory of the real owners of the 'campo'.

Overall, results from the survey are inevitably uneven given the large group and variety of contexts from which they are drawn. The methodology used in this chapter provides an initial insight signalling broader issues that will be examined in greater depth in the coming chapters. In countries like Brazil, Colombia and Chile levels of satisfaction with national leagues are closer to that of the Copa Libertadores. In Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador it would appear the level of investment in the Copa Libertadores far outweighs what they see at national league level. It is clear from the survey that these clubs each have different dynamics according to their history, location, size of following and economic means among other factors. For this reason, the following ethnographic chapters approach three distinct settings which offer varying opportunities and challenges to players.

## **Chapter 2 - Mis-representing the agenda: The Case of Yoreli Rincón at the Women's Copa Libertadores 2018**

### **Introduction**

Victory for Atlético Huila at the Women's Copa Libertadores 2018 represented an unprecedented achievement for a provincial club, for Colombian football's most emblematic female player Yoreli Rincón, and for its embattled women players fighting for the survival of the precarious gains made in recent years. In spite of existential doubt over the future of the Colombian women's professional league, a series of stoic displays saw Atlético Huila overcome numerous obstacles, not least two of the Brazilian favourites (Irاندوبا and Santos) on penalties in the semi-final and final respectively, to bring the continental women's title to Colombia for the first time.

After typically threadbare media coverage of the first round of the tournament, the triumph brought about a rare moment of visibility for Colombian women's club football. Their victory saw the team trending on social media and saw them greeted by jubilant crowds in their home city of Neiva (@HuilaSport, 2018). However, rather than using the moment to publicise the proven quality of Colombian women's football at continental level, the diverse sections of traditional media included in this study – largely television and newspapers but also radio programmes – tended to deflect attention from the players' victory by focusing disproportionately on a row over tournament prize monies. Influenced heavily by players' concerns about the logic underpinning media coverage of women players, this chapter considers the downplaying of the performance of women players and the attempts to portray women players as belligerent and inopportune in attempting to discuss the clear inequalities and contradictions in the way they are treated. Moreover, it calls into question the top-down assumptions underpinning work on media coverage of women's football to date by



considering an increasingly heterogeneous range of actors who produce meaning via social media platforms.

### **Media Representations Paradigm**

A great deal of the contemporary sociological work on women's football has analysed the output of traditional media – in particular television coverage of matches and newspaper discourse. Broadly speaking, a transition from the crass caricaturing of female participation in early coverage (Bonfim, 2019; Brewster & Brewster, 2019; Santillán Esqueda & Gantús, 2010) towards the gender-bland sexism (Musto et al., 2017) identified in contemporary coverage is in keeping with the progress presented by institutional narratives in the 'official' era which began with FIFA's 1991 Women's World Cup – then marketed as the FIFA Women's World Championship so as not to threaten the reputation of the World Cup. Scholars have identified tendencies which have characterised coverage – for example, how match action is consistently described in polite but lacklustre and often sexist terms (Santos & Medeiros, 2012; Salvini & Marchi Júnior, 2013a; Mina & Goellner, 2015c; Gutiérrez Sánchez, 2015; Morel, 2019). In both Colombia and Brazil, coverage has been shown to conform on a superficial level with notions of gender equality, whilst suppressing any notion of female athletic performance, and notably falling short of the hyperbolic overexcitement which characterises coverage of male football. This polite, but banalised uninspiring coverage was characterised in both print and broadcast media coverage of the Women's Copa Libertadores 2018 in Manaus during my research. It is a strategy that serves to deny women a symbolic space in a domain that is discursively portrayed as eminently masculine.

Similarly informed by the male gaze is the trope prescribing the eroticisation and sexualisation of women players in order to make women's football more marketable (to men). Pfister (2015b) details how this objectification is a recurring framing device used to portray women footballers in the German press. This is echoed by similar tropes of athletic

femininity across a range of global settings. For example, Cashman & Raymond (2014) describe the overt and covert objectification of the Mexican women's national team. Christopherson et al (2002) and Jones et al (1999) explain how a heteronormative femininity is central to representations of the US women's national team and finally Ravel & Gareau (2016b) recall how model Adriana Karembeu was used for a promotional campaign 'French Football needs more women like Adriana'.<sup>13</sup> Tropes of athletic or heteronormative femininity are reproduced and even actively encouraged by institutions. Indeed, ex-FIFA president Sepp Blatter infamously suggested that 'tighter shorts for women players could be a step towards making the game more marketable' (quoted in Christenson & Kelso, 2004). Sports companies have also got in on the act – despite the availability of thousands of Colombian women footballers, Colombian model Paulina Vega was chosen to star alongside men's player James Rodriguez to promote Adidas's specially designed women's version of the Colombia national team shirt (Marcos, 2017). This is symptomatic of the promotion of an idealised type which speaks not to the diversity of women players but rather to the male gaze in positions of power.

There have been attempts to account for the presence of social media in the existing scholarship. For example, Pegoraro et al (2018) consider how Instagram is used overwhelmingly by players to highlight athletic performance rather than more superficial marketing aspects. Similarly, Coche (2016) and Hayes and Blaszka (2018) consider how the US federation and its players respectively use social media to generate interest in women's football and its individual players.

Nonetheless, there is a clear lacuna in the literature to date. Top-down mediatic tropes from traditional media do not exist in a vacuum and neither do they go entirely unchallenged. The relationship between the social media use of players to promote the women's game and

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<sup>13</sup> Adriana Karembeu is a Slovakian model, the wife of ex-French international Christian Karembeu.

how this is interpreted and reconfigured by traditional media remains relatively untouched. By considering them as separate entities the crucial interactions between the two media systems are neglected. Moreover, to date there has yet to be an engagement with the notion of off-the-field scandal being used as a mediatic diversion to avoid covering women playing football. Many casual observers would be aware of Megan Rapinoe's Twitter spat with Donald Trump, or perhaps even her solidarity with Colin Kaepernick on taking a knee during the US National Anthem in 2016, but it is far less likely that they would know which club team Rapinoe plays for in the United States and much less the fact that she was injured for most of the season before being awarded FIFA's World Player of the Year for 2019. This chapter argues that structural forces avoid focusing on women's athletic performance and place disproportionate emphasis on constructing narratives that characterise women players as belligerent; these discourses are rooted in misogyny and a reluctance to allow women to occupy a space that has long been solely male.

### ***Yoreli Rincón***

Yoreli Rincón has a pertinent backstory both as a footballer and as a public figure. Rincón realised early that she wanted to play football professionally but saw no formal paid opportunities to earn a living in Colombia. The only way to forge a professional career for Rincón was to move abroad early. At the age of 18, she migrated to the interior of São Paulo state in Brazil to play for XV de Piracicaba. This proved a springboard for opportunities in leading women's leagues in Sweden, the United States and then Norway. During this period, Rincón and a number of her contemporaries who honed their talent in the US university system gained a reputation for overachieving at national team level. In the absence of significant institutional support in their own country they helped Colombia reach two Copa America finals and even the last sixteen of a World Cup in Canada 2015. Rincón, as the standout player with the most impressive international trajectory, often found herself as the

spokesperson for Colombian women's football and for the growing clamour to create a national league. This status as a pioneering Colombian female player who has played professionally abroad has helped her amass a social media following which is considerable compared to many other women players: 86,000 on Twitter and 232,000 on Instagram.<sup>14</sup> This agency has been a mixed blessing for Rincón as her role of spokesperson has brought her into direct conflict with football institutions responsible for the appalling treatment of women players in the country. Rincón has consistently been a dissenting voice highlighting the chasm between the marketing of DIMAYOR's women's professional league and the continuing amateur conditions that women players face, such as short non-officialised contracts, pay below the national minimum, lack of adequate health cover and sub-standard training facilities among other issues. Rincón herself claims that she has been vetoed by the Colombian Football Federation from appearing in national team games since July 2019 (Futbolred, 2019; El Tiempo, 2019b).

### ***Wider Conflict between Players & Federation***

Conflict between Rincón and the federation, along with hostile media coverage, dates back to the beginning of her career in 2012 when she was also omitted from the team for the London Olympics on spurious grounds (El País, 2012; Semana, 2012).<sup>15</sup> She was not the only player punished for speaking out. Teammate Daniela Montoya even provided audio proof of having been vetoed from appearing for the Colombian national team after going public about the federation's failure to pay the players at all after their run to the last sixteen of the 2015 Canada World Cup (El Tiempo, 2019a).

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<sup>14</sup> The only women's player with a larger following is Nicole Regnier (400,000) – a player consistently foregrounded for her appearance, clearly against her will (El País Cali, 2014). The second most followed player for Huila is Liana Salazar with around 10,000 followers. To place this public reach into context, the two highest profile male players in the current squad, James Rodriguez and Radamel Falcao each have around 17,000,000 followers on Twitter.

<sup>15</sup> Rincón was left out of the squad for supposedly not being match-fit- though she continued to be selected consistently at club level during this period without showing any such signs.

This background of outright hostility towards outspoken players can be situated historically in a context of uneven and often hostile relations between players and institutions and as a consequence of widespread corruption among sporting authorities in the continent. Indeed, other South American players like Carlos Caszely, Socrates and Diego Maradona have all received harsh treatment from the media and/or their clubs for taking supposedly political positions on issues those at director level habitually opine about (De la Parra, 1989; Peinado et al., 2013; Florenzano, 2010; Downie, 2017). Colombian sportswomen, like Catherine Ibargüen and Mariana Pajón, who have not directly challenged authority in the way Rincón has, have consistently been treated much more sympathetically.<sup>16</sup> Their endeavours are less high profile than football and do not encroach or impinge in the same way upon the symbolic male sporting hegemony. This point is corroborated in the North American context by Jones et al (1999) who found that female athletes' performances are emphasised and praised in sports which are not seen to be encroaching upon the male identity.<sup>17</sup> There is a clear tension, in the Colombian context, between the way traditional media protects and polices the traditional link between football and masculinity and a discernibly gendered discourse of national identity, which has notably incorporated football in recent times (Watson, 2018, 2019). This has contributed to a fractious relationship between the media and female players, with Rincón in particular habitually portrayed as querulous and belligerent.

The way hostility to players like Rincón and Montoya manifests itself is sometimes blatant and sometimes more nuanced. It is certainly located within the habitual modus operandi of media coverage which tends towards scandal. Indeed, referring to the historical development of the British media, Curran (2002, p.92) points to a shift towards 'the easy arousal of sensationalism as a strategy to maximise sales'. This chapter problematises the notion that

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<sup>16</sup> Catherine Ibargüen is a high, triple and long jump athlete and Mariana Pajón is a BMX cyclist.

<sup>17</sup> This would seem to account for the relative social acceptance of the US Women's National Soccer Team, though this acceptance, as yet, does not translate into equal pay (Das, 2020).

traditional and digital media are separable or distinct systems by considering the economically driven drift towards scandal, exacerbated in the digital era by the desire to provide clickbait online. Scandal, as a sales-maximising technique, is deployed with a dual purpose in the case of Colombian women's football. Firstly, it serves as a pretext not to cover any actual women's football. By disproportionately covering scandal rather than actual games, a female performance of gender out of sync with Colombian social representations is avoided. An excellent Colombian study suggests a perceived incommensurable sexual difference between men and women in social representations of sport (Vélez, 2001). In this environment then, women playing football, per se, constitutes a subversive act which undermines the credibility of 'the collective societal agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders' (Butler, 2011, p.140).

Secondly, given the stark imbalances of influence between players and traditional media, the latter are able to construct narratives which serve to discredit those threatening the status-quo: in the case of this chapter Rincón is portrayed as being belligerent and unreasonable. For this reason, a sustained analysis of the coverage of Rincón explains how the player has become a lightning-rod at the centre of ongoing debates about the contestation and reproduction of heteronormative gendered visions of what women's football means in Colombia.

### ***Post-Match Celebration Video***

On the team bus in Manaus after Huila's remarkable victory Rincón is sat with teammate and partner Jaylis Oliveros. Various members of the team are celebrating with drinks, singing songs and relaxing after the tournament. With the caption 'Disfrutemos que nos atrevimos soñar - somos campeonas continentales (celebrate our daring to dream – we are continental champions), salsa blaring in the background and a celebratory beer in hand Rincón kisses

partner Jaylis Oliveros and exclaims ‘vamos a brindar que somos campeonas continentales’ (let’s toast to being continental champions.)

This video also travelled from social media to mass media, as Caracol gave it a short television slot, reposted the news on Twitter and on their website (@GolCaracol, 2018; GOL Caracol, 2018) together with a brief summary of Rincón’s comments. A number of other well-followed social sites followed suit (Pereira, 2018; Pulzo, 2018; Sánchez, 2018). One provincial newspaper takes the retrograde stance that ‘figuras públicas deben dar ejemplo de ética y moral’ (public figures should be an example of morality)’ (La Piragua, 2018). This is explicitly homophobic as it is unlikely a call for morality would have occurred if a man and woman had kissed in the video.

From empirical observation during fieldwork it was clear that the club hierarchy felt that Rincón’s open show of affection with a female teammate had the potential to damage the image of the club. Equally they were grateful that traditional media did not embrace what they considered to be a non-story. I will argue in the following chapter that there is a top-down push towards presenting a unidimensional heteronormative athleticism for women’s football. Indeed, the advertising campaigns for FIFA World Cups and national leagues consistently show this. From Sepp Blatter’s much criticised remarks that ‘women’s football would sell better if they wore tight shorts’ on a (slightly) more nuanced level there has been a continuation of its logic which can be found in almost any promotional material for tournaments or in the decisions about which players to interview pre- or post-match. There is a consistent evasion of the issue of players’ sexuality, particularly in South America. From earlier portrayals of *marimachas* (a derogatory term used to designate a woman exhibiting behaviours traditionally thought to be socially masculine) the present iteration of women’s football in the mainstream media is reluctant to touch upon the subject, even while it is highlighted by the players themselves or international commentators.

It is worth considering the reasons, given traditional media's predilection for scandal, for the omission of a lesbian kiss between two female football players. During informal discussion during fieldwork a deeply unsatisfactory hypothesis floated was that of traditional media respecting the privacy of individuals. More realistically, the agenda-setting choice made by the media in this instance is far from coincidental and is symptomatic of the male dominated media and institutional polity. Having demonstrated how a singular focus on one issue was used to attack Rincón, the reasons why structural conditions did not allow the hostility to continue in this instance are illuminating.

The most plausible explanation for the omission of Rincón's post-match kiss with Jaylis Oliveros is simply that lesbianism destabilises the matrix of heteronormativity. In theorising this matrix Judith Butler argues that gender is discursively constructed through a 'grid of cultural intelligibility' (2011, p.208). Within this understanding gender is a performance which serves to reproduce itself. Within the matrix a masculine male is assumed to be heterosexual as a feminine female would also be, for instance in Rincón's case.<sup>18</sup> The unreality of the continuing media taboo vis-à-vis lesbianism in football is symptomatic of the symbolic importance of sports to male hegemony. The short biography of Rincón underlines her importance as a figurehead in the launch of Colombian professional football. For that reason, it is inconceivable, in spite of all other (unfair) criticisms levelled at her, that the media present her as a lesbian player. Nonetheless, the lack of media coverage did not prevent the issue going further. Whether on this occasion Rincón chose to 'subvert and resist the construction of heterosexual space' (Caudwell, 2002, p.35) is unknown. Rincón and Oliveros certainly helped legitimise and create a space for other lesbian players. It is established then that the non-story around Rincón and Oliveros kissing had little to do with a

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<sup>18</sup> Openly gay male footballers remain few and far between. Robbie Rodgers of LA Galaxy became one of the first to come out during his career. Justin Fashanu, a black gay English footballer came out after his career before committing suicide.



respect for privacy and much more to do with the heteronormative vision of the media and institutions. This story largely escaped the international community and thus in a sense the heteronormative vision of the media and institutions was not openly problematised, but it seems likely that in the future similar occurrences may disrupt the hegemonically promoted image of women's football which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

There were no stories about this incident and thus the story remains limited to local coverage until an extraordinary outburst from Tolima President Gabriel Camargo some seventeen days later. In an interview with Caracol Deportes, Camargo is asked about the progress of the women's league, in which Deportes Tolima participated in 2018. His provocative answer was the following: 'Eso anda mal – eso no da nada ni económicamente ni nada de esas cosas. Aparte de los problemas que hay con las mujeres son mas tomatragos que los hombres. Preguntan a los de Huila como están de arrepentidos de haber sacado el título y de haber invertido tanta plata en el equipo. Es un caldo de cultivo de lesbianismo tremendo. (It's going badly, it's doesn't give anything back, economically or otherwise and apart from those problems the women drink more than the men. Ask the Huila directors how much they regret winning that title and putting so much money into the team. It's a breeding ground for lesbianism). Camargo's comments do not cite Rincón personally, but do cite Atlético Huila's victory together with a supposed culture of alcoholism and lesbianism.

Now, considering their initial reluctance to even touch the inconvenient taboo of lesbianism, the traditional media were forced to engage with the topic. The only saving grace from the media perspective is that Camargo's comments could be portrayed as abstract, making no particular reference to anyone. In this way, they were able to dismiss Camargo's remarks as an unfortunate exception. In this vein, a clearly serviceable story of Latin American machismo quickly travels appearing in the Spanish, British and Brazilian mass media among others (ABC Fútbol, 2018; BBC Mundo, 2018; Mendonça, 2018b). All of the

aforementioned are quick to condemn Camargo and explain it in terms of an aberration linked to the inherently machista culture of Colombia. Bizarrely, given the openness to feminism displayed in other sections of the newspaper, Colombia's leading daily newspaper, *El Tiempo*, reports Camargo's comments in neutral terms with barely a word of admonishment (El Tiempo, 2018a). Here there is a clear compartmentalisation of the ideology of the organisation which is instructive. Within football coverage, inextricably linked to tropes of male identity in Colombia, coverage remains deeply defensive of largely male football institutions. Machismo within a football institution must be admonished, however the lesbian kiss which triggered the outburst remains somehow taboo – an area where media outlets are not prepared to go, particularly in the case of two sportswomen playing the most hegemonically masculine sport.

### **Mediations of the Prize Money Episode**

During fieldwork interviews with players a recurring theme was that Huila were playing to save the professional league from extinction. A sense of hyperbole notwithstanding, the existential threat the players perceived to their livelihoods undoubtedly fuelled an extraordinary effort against more established Brazilian opponents in the Copa Libertadores.<sup>19</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the tournament, the unbridled joy of becoming champions with an unfancied provincial outfit spilled over into anger, expressed by the team's figurehead Yoreli Rincón.<sup>20</sup>

According to media reports, after just two years of competition the players faced the threat of the dissolution of the Women's Professional League (Galindo, 2018; Prieto, 2018).

The legitimacy of the league depends largely upon the cooperation and commitment of

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<sup>19</sup> Brazilian teams had won eight out of eleven editions beginning with two Santos victories in 2009 and 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Rincón, as the best-known player, is often mistakenly referred to as the captain. In fact, Colombian international teammate Gavy Santos, often mis-spelt in the media as the more common Gaby, captained the team.

Colombia's professional football clubs, who were in theory able to offer the infrastructure, pay professional salaries and operationalise the women's game using professional marketing departments.<sup>21</sup> In the first year, women's teams travelled to games without adequate medical staff or physiotherapists. The non-payment of players was a consistent problem and Colombian businesses were reluctant to sponsor women's teams (Galindo, 2018). After two years a number of these clubs had been unwilling to make the financial commitment to paying for a women's team, disbanding it quietly. This struggle transcends the economic sphere involving the considerable symbolic social capital which football has in the formation of identity. In this way, the history of the Colombian women's league dramatises a disjuncture between the corporatised global vision of gender equality promulgated by FIFA and the deeply-embedded masculinised cultural meanings attached to football at a local level. Plagued from the outset by this inherent contradiction, the league has suffered from insufficient length, being scheduled at times which make attendance prohibitive (during work hours) and generally from being undermined at every turn by those purporting to support global policy prescriptions encouraging gender equality.

When Yoreli Rincón took to social media after the Copa Libertadores tournament negotiations of 'the hypermediatic circulation of meaning' (Verón, 1987, 2013, 2014b) began in ways symptomatic of the effects of social media downplayed (or explained as changes of scale) in the hypermediations literature. Post-tournament Rincón made two social media posts (@yoreliRincón, 2018a, 2018b) which were subsequently reproduced on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook among other social networks, circulated globally and were resignified in traditional media discourse in Colombia. Firstly, she published a video revealing that the CONMEBOL prize-money received by Atlético Huila would not reach or be spent on the

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<sup>21</sup> According to sources at Santos FC in Brazil, the cost of running a women's club is less than 1% of the club's overall budget.

women's team at all. This situation is symptomatic of the precarious nature of women's football in Colombia and beyond. In the case of male players, their contracts would not only be much longer than those of women players, crucially they would also include clauses regarding bonuses in the cases of winning a tournament like the Copa Libertadores. The club may receive the prize money in the case of a male team winning it, but they would distribute significant bonuses to players through contractual stipulations. To exacerbate the problem, the fact that the salaries of Atlético Huila women were fully covered by a third-party, businessman Diego Perdomo, made the players feel that the club itself had not invested in the women's team and thus did not deserve the prize monies.

In his earlier work, written prior to the emergence of social media, Eliseo Verón argued that social events only occur when the (traditional mass) media construct them as such (Verón, 1982). Seen in this way, the post made by Rincón in Caracas Airport only became an event in the Veronian sense when traditional media reconfigured its meaning to suit their agenda as will be shown later in the chapter.

The media coverage of the prize money feud did accelerate a settlement. Within a short period of time, club benefactor Diego Perdomo clarified to the media that each player would receive a bonus for winning the tournament, though details remained private. Subsequent to this, agreements were made with each player. Rincón was correct in alleging that the CONMEBOL prize money would go to Atlético Huila (men), despite the fact that the club's hierarchy had not contributed to the salaries of the women's team. They depended upon a third-party benefactor to cover the women's salaries, and after a disagreement with the benefactor Perdomo, the club simply disbanded its women's team rather than use Atlético Huila (men's) money to continue the operation.

### ***Initial Mediations of Prize Money Scandal***

Atlético Huila, and all the other teams at the tournament, returned from the tournament in Manaus on ordinary scheduled flights, rather than the customary charter flights used for male players (RedGol Chile, 2018; RT, 2018). In the case of Atlético Huila this necessitated a lengthy double stopover, with several hours in the Venezuelan capital Caracas and then once again in Bogotá before returning to their base in Neiva. From Maiquetía Airport in Caracas, Venezuela, Rincón, with time on her hands, recorded a video which she uploaded to her Instagram stories, a format akin to Snapchat insofar as it means videos are only available for a short time (usually 24 hours) before becoming inaccessible. Owing to the incendiary nature of the post, it was quickly captured and saved by a number of users who reproduced it on other media sites – an example par excellence of what media theory calls hypermediations or what could be described as internet posts which become ‘viral’. The substantive content of the message from Rincón is reproduced here. The message was posted at some stage on 4<sup>th</sup> December, though the format does not allow the exact time to be specified.

‘Quería agradecerles infinitamente por todo el apoyo que nos han brindado, todos los buenos mensajes, las felicitaciones y el orgullo que han sentido por nosotras, por el Atlético Huila, por Colombia. Somos campeones continentales pero no crean que a las campeonas femeninas también les da premio. Por ser campeonas nos ganamos \$55,000, la cual nunca va a llegar a nosotras lastimosamente. Eso llega al Atlético Huila masculino, quiénes tienen un presidente diferente al nuestro presidente Diego Perdomo el femenino. Sí tendremos un reconocimiento que nos da nuestro presidente Diego Perdomo. Pero es del bolsillo de él.’ (I want to give my heartfelt thanks for all the support you’ve given us, all the positive messages, congratulations, and the pride you’ve felt for us, for Atlético Huila, for Colombia. We are continental champions but don’t believe that the female champions also received a prize. For being champions

we earned \$ 55,000, which will never come to us sadly. That will go to Atlético Huila men, who have a different president from ours Diego Perdomo for the women's team. We will have some reward given to us by our president Diego Perdomo. But it's from his pocket'.<sup>22</sup>

At this stage the message was only available to Rincón's followers on Instagram. Despite the uneven power relations Rincón was clearly aware of her agency and it is beyond any doubt that the message was fully intended both to reach a wider audience and to exert pressure on the club and the national federation to ensure a fair settlement and to explain the lack of professional agreements in women's club football. In this way, from the beginning Rincón was aware of the mediations and mediatisation that would ensue, both nationally and internationally – as the following sections show. The following diagram (figure 10 on the following page) uses Verón's model of the production and reception of discourse as published in *La Semiosis Social* (1987) to illustrate the multi-directional and complex processes involved in the production of meaning. Rincón's original discourse is first received by multiple social media users who each subject the message to various interpretations, which are denoted as R(D) – reception of the discourse. This is followed by further production, which is duly denoted as P(D) insofar as they produce a new discourse by adding their own captions before re-sharing the original discourse, subjecting it to slight but important shifts in meaning before it reaches traditional media sources.

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<sup>22</sup> This video can be found at the following link: <https://www.vanguardia.com/deportes/futbol-local/yoreli-rincon-denuncia-que-no-les-daran-los-premios-ganados-en-la-libertadores-OCVL452185>

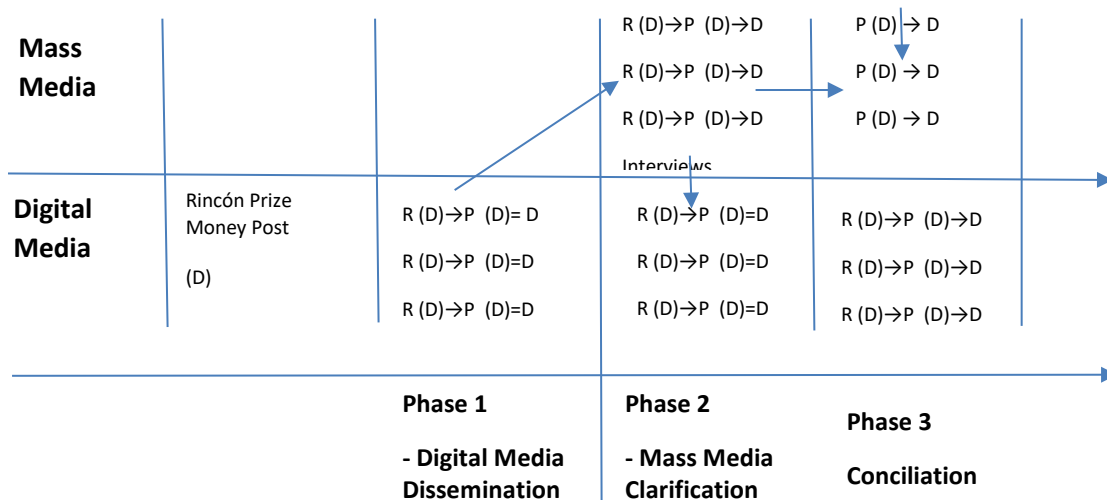


Figure 10 Circulation and Production of meaning of Rincón Prize Money Discourse (format borrowed from *La Semiosis Social* [Verón, 1987])

### First Phase of Social Media Circulation

The intended circulation onto a wider scale began with a tweet from a provincial fansite (@futbolsinlimi, 2018).<sup>23</sup> This phase in media theory is a ‘change of scale’ (Verón, 2014b). Verón refers to the immediate shift both qualitatively and quantitatively in readings of the original discourse. By this he refers to the demographic of the audience changing and with this a multiplication of new readings based upon the amount of knowledge of the new readers. For example, a new reader of the text elsewhere in Latin America may not know who Rincón is, or that Atlético Huila (men) do not pay the salaries of the women’s team, or that there is a third-party benefactor involved. This provokes an immediate and abrupt decontextualisation of future processes of reception and resignification (Verón, 1982, 1987). The loss of context goes beyond knowing the background details. In a Veronian sense, it also refers to the original time and place when the video was recorded, coloured by the euphoria, emotion and fatigue of the moment, and influenced by the surroundings of being in a run-

<sup>23</sup> Fútbol Sin Limite is a provincial football site based in Pereira, Colombia. They have approximately 75,000 followers and largely share memes, videos and articles related to regional but also to national football.

down airport terminal late at night surrounded by teammates who have just become continental champions trying their best to sleep on a concrete airport floor.

In addition, the change of social media platform is also consequential. Instagram as a photo and video-sharing service is viewed differently to Twitter which has long been used for (pseudo-)official statements by companies, organisations and individuals. The concise format of Twitter is key to re-signifying meaning. With only a certain number of words available inevitably meaning is lost and a small chunk is emphasised (Verón, 2014a). The post from @futbolsinlimi foregrounded the idea of the players not receiving any prize: ‘Muchas felicitaciones han recibido las chicas del Atlético Huila, pero lo triste es que este premio no será para ellas’ (Huila’s girls have received lots of congratulations, but the sad thing is that they won’t receive the prize). This constitutes a mis-representation of Rincón from the beginning. In her original post, Rincón had mentioned that the team will receive some form of recognition from the President/Benefactor who covers the Atlético Huila women’s salaries, Diego Perdomo, but this nuance is immediately lost in this first re-tweet. Rincón was keen to highlight the disconnect between the Atlético Huila (men’s) hierarchy and the women’s team but this detail was lost early on. Whether intentional or not, this important loss of context had profound effects for the later stages of re-signification. Given the brief nature of Rincón’s original intervention, there is no clear articulation of the women’s precarious, third-party outsourced and marginal status within Atlético Huila – assumed knowledge which some of her followers may have but most people do not. Allied to this, the Twitter format, with its overarching logic of generating re-tweets and follows took precedence over elaborating on the minutiae of the problem. An easily consumable narrative needs to be produced, which has consequences further down the line.

Already, the agenda of Yoreli Rincón – to highlight the discriminatory treatment of women’s football and the way in which the outsourcing of women’s football has occurred



within clubs perceived to have fully incorporated it - was guaranteed not to figure in further negotiations of meaning. This omission is particularly pertinent as it is a salient issue on a continental level. For example, in Colombia, Independiente Medellín entered into a partnership with the long-time dominant amateur club in Colombian women's football Formas Íntimas in 2019, meaning the professional Medellín club could lean on existing infrastructure (training facilities, connections in the women's game and expertise) rather than commit to any serious investment themselves. Similarly, Brazilian giants Corinthians, a club with considerable demotic tradition, initially entered into a partnership with Osasco-based Audax, again sharing the 'burden' of developing women's football internally. This partnership has now ended with both clubs operating separately in Brazilian women's football's top flight. Similar outsourced arrangements at arch rivals Palmeiras and Belo Horizonte giants Cruzeiro have characterised the lip-service major clubs have at times paid to the need to create women's sides (Mendonça, 2019) – an issue, to some degree, provoked by the ham-fisted application of *obligatoriedade*, touched upon in the players' comments in Chapter 1 and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Confirmation of the distortion caused by the paraphrasing of Rincón's original video is found in the polarised responses which reflect how readers generally inferred that either CONMEBOL prize monies will immediately be awarded as a bonus to Atlético Huila's male players, or concluded that there is no story as tournament prize monies always go to the club rather than the players. In the latter interpretation, social media users, who are already reading others' interpretations, see Rincón as simply having misunderstood the rules of the game. The same video is shared a day later by two other accounts (@FonsiLoaiza, 2018; @SemaforoDeporti, 2018) whose interpretations further consolidate the emerging polarisation. For example, 'deben decirle a la señorita que Huila es solo una institución con equipo masculino y femenino – la plata siempre va a la institución' (they should tell the girl

that Huila is just one institution with a male and female team – the money always goes to the institution). Beyond the patronising ‘señorita’, the comment is essentially true as set out above – what it lacks is any understanding of the context that Rincón tried to highlight. From these tweets onwards the news reaches national and international traditional media, effecting, as the Verón literature suggests, far greater changes of scale than those referred to earlier.

In this vein, the post first reached the Anglophone world when freelance journalist Carl Worswick re-tweeted it.<sup>24</sup> Again embedding the original post from Fútbol Sin Límite, he added an English language translation of some of Rincón’s words: ‘Atlético Huila star Yoreli Rincón claims the \$55k prize money the women’s team earned from winning the Copa Libertadores on Sunday will go straight to the Huila men’s team. None of it will go to us, it’s unfortunate but that’s women’s football’. Inevitably, the way Worswick foregrounds ‘the money going straight to the men’s team’ suggests it goes directly to the male players rather than to the directors of the club to administrate as they see fit. By suggesting the money goes to the men’s team rather than to the directors of the club, a reductionist dichotomy is then invoked pitting the men’s team against the women’s. For example, a response bemoans ‘the appallingly bad men’s team benefitting from the amazing women’s team’s victory’.<sup>25</sup> From Worswick the tweet then follows the usual pattern of re-tweets by members of the public and other sports journalists, ensuring that the news will reach the English-speaking traditional mass media later down the line. Worswick’s tweet is re-tweeted 67 times, which is significantly more than any other post he makes that week. Future understandings are certainly influenced by this. This includes RT’s focus on ‘every penny being handed to the men’s team’ (RT, 2018), which emphasises that ‘the money will be given to a men’s team who didn’t even qualify for the Copa Libertadores’ (Grez, 2018).

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<sup>24</sup> Worswick has written extensively for The Guardian and World Soccer and tweets at @cworswick

<sup>25</sup> Atlético Huila was only formed in 1990. Nonetheless, in their relatively short history they have twice won the mens’ second division and twice finished runners-up in the mens’ top division, along with providing several players to the national team.

This concludes the first phase of dissemination of the ‘social media’ generated news around the prize money for Atlético Huila. Within a matter of hours, the post had crossed language barriers and reached key social media users paving the way for what is referred in media studies as hypermediations. In the later works of Verón, he refers to interactions on the internet as not being just another form of media. His work is characterised by a recognition of a ‘nueva gramática y nuevas reglas de producción y reconocimiento’ (Verón, 2013, 2014b). Allied to this the ease with which ‘sensationalism’ (Curran, 2002) travels is also fundamental to the case at hand. In the case of women’s football, considering the amount of coverage of the two fabricated ‘scandals’ in this chapter against the immense difficulty in generating any large-scale interest in the actual tournament, it is easy to see the media prejudice women’s football faces.

### *Second Phase of Circulation – ‘Hypermediations’ of Clarification & Explanation*

Verón suggested that people’s everyday behaviour in the public sphere is essentially a ‘performance’ because they are ‘acutely aware that what they say and do is actively being mediated in some way’ (Verón, 2013, p.292). This observation appears more relevant than ever and certainly pertinent to the case at hand. The narrow framing of the issue is key to this phase of the reproduction of meaning. Without any attempt to contextualise Rincón’s grievances, a series of institutional figures are given the opportunity to explain the ‘real’ situation regarding the Women’s Copa Libertadores prize money. This version of events foregrounding the views of institutional figures is the one which reaches a mass audience – this is the ‘hypermediated’ version of the Rincón story. The institutional view strips away many of the nuances to tell a simplified version which defends football authorities against the complainant. In basic terms it holds that a tournament took place, the winners of the tournament received their prize money like at any other tournament and thus Rincón’s grievances were baseless. Without access to the background information about the internal

politics of Atlético Huila, this appears, superficially, to be wholly reasonable.

Hypermediation in this case means a change of scale. That is to say that the news reaches a far greater audience. In the case of social media the news is condensed into a digestible length for Twitter for example. Clearly the protagonists each deploy the *nueva gramática* Verón discusses, and in their public pronouncements they put on a performance to show the values that the audience expects of them (Verón, 2013).

Revealingly, for the phase of ‘hypermediation’, none of the other Atlético Huila players were asked for their opinion by media outlets, nor were any other ‘professional’ footballers operating in Colombia at that time. Both other professional footballers and the Huila players did also tweet their indignation and try to give the necessary context – but by this time they were drowned out by the larger media outlets with much bigger followings. In this vein, given the imbalance in power relations, this phase of debate was entirely framed around the narrow issue of whether or not players or the club ought to have received the prize money. Almost mirroring a well-known political science maxim, the traditional media agenda here encourages ‘very lively debate around an extremely limited spectrum’ (Chomsky, 1998, p.43) thus creating the illusion of healthy debate – space for the supposedly oppositional viewpoint that women players ought to receive their prize money directly rather than the club, in this way obfuscating more substantive debate. The wider issues which Rincón wished to highlight – that is to say the marginal position of the women’s team outside of the club proper and funded by a third-party benefactor – is now buried. As explained in Chapter 3, incorporating women’s teams properly within the clubs represents a threat to male sporting hegemony. A common response to *obligatoriedade* has been to pay lip-service to it whilst keeping women on the outside of the clubs. By skirting over, or not even mentioning, the extent to which Huila’s women players exist on the fringe, the nature of Rincón’s point is misrepresented to the point where significantly fewer people will sympathise with her.

The arguments put forth by institutional figures in this phase, then, disingenuously presupposed that the women's team was a fully incorporated part of Huila and centre upon the notion of merely following due process with the prize money being filtered down from CONMEBOL to the national league and finally to the winning team. The assumption of this fully incorporated status within the clubs, gender equality in FIFA's own terms, provides ideological cover for the claims of football institutions to have made more progress on gender equality than lived reality suggests – as will be shown in more detail in the coming ethnographic chapters.

To begin this phase, Diego Perdomo was interviewed by Deportes RCN, a national broadcaster (Deportes RCN, 2018). Unlike the short clip upon which Rincón is judged, Perdomo was allowed several minutes to provide detailed background about how he came to be involved with women's football before explaining the misunderstanding. Described as the man whose 'passion diligence, competitiveness and management and hunger to win led Huila to a continental title' (Bermúdez, 2019, p.9), Perdomo is habitually portrayed in traditional media as the man behind women's football. Underlining his non-economic motives, he pointed out that though he was derided by colleagues for getting involved in the unprofitable venture of women's football, he did so 'porque genera una pasión bonita' (because it generates a nice passion) and also because the president of Atlético Huila (men) Juan Carlos Patarroyo 'no tenía tiempo, estaba enredado con el Huila' (didn't have time, he was busy with Huila). With those comments the scene is set, with the women's team imagined as a pleasant side project which the president of the 'real' Atlético Huila does not have time (or money) to administrate. Exemplifying 'la terquedad de diferenciación de género' (persistence of gender differentiation) which characterises Colombian attitudes to sport (Vélez, 2001, p.44), the interview transitioned to the Rincón complaint, to which Perdomo, the sole outside funder of Atlético Huila women states unchallenged that: '*aquí no hay equipo femenino ni*

*equipo masculino. Fue la tergiversación de una jugadora. El dinero llega al Atlético Huila'* (here there is no female and male separation. The issue was misrepresented by a player, the money will go to Atlético Huila). The interview underlines the convenience with which the arrangement is used to suit the needs of the club's hierarchy. As players wishing not to be named explained to me during the ethnography of Huila the club is one when it comes to glory and claiming prizes, but two different entities when it comes to paying salaries and expenses.

Almost simultaneously to the point of seeming a coordinated strategy, the President of DIMAYOR, Jorge Enrique Vélez appeared on Caracol's VBAR Radio Show<sup>26</sup> (VBAR Caracol, 2018). Inevitably, among the first questions is the prize money controversy to which the same officialist trope is deployed without challenge: *'no es un tema de equipo femenino y masculino, no queremos guerra entre mujeres y hombres'* (this is not a male and female issue, we don't want a war between men and women). With this remark, Jorge Enrique Vélez firstly reiterates the official line insisting there is equal status within the club and secondly, by stating that the institution does not want a war of the sexes, is clearly insinuating that the instigator is Rincón and that she does. By turning fire on Rincón, Vélez essentially engages in gaslighting or victim-blaming. He goes on to clarify that *'CONMEBOL le da al equipo que tiene la licencia y luego las decisiones administrativas son del equipo'* (CONMEBOL gives the money to the team that holds the licence, and then they take any administrative decisions). Once again, the media re-signification prioritises the institutional line using a female presenter to create an illusion of balance. The female presenter lightly suggests that maybe some people may side with Rincón, before asking Vélez a leading question which allows him to reaffirm the correctness of the institutional process, emphasising Rincón's

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<sup>26</sup> This is also tweeted to Caracol's three million followers - (@VBarCaracol, 2018) marking the story reaching a mass audience [date, time]

supposed lack of understanding. Having clarified the official line Vélez attempts to discredit the agency of Rincón striking a condescending tone and stating that *'la niña pidiendo plata por internet'* (the girl asking for money over the internet) was unbecoming and even suggesting it should be contractually *'prohibido hacer declaraciones monetarias públicas'* (contractually forbidden to make public statements involving money). There are precedents of these kinds of relations between institutional figures and dissident players – particularly in times when clubs and institutions held the upper-hand over players with extremely dubious contractual arrangements.

Indeed, the players as a collective all felt that they needed to win the Copa Libertadores in order to save the beleaguered women's league from being discontinued. Whilst this felt like a case of hyperbole symptomatic of the fetishisation of winning, it would appear that it did give them extra leverage in the dispute. Whilst the line of questioning from the presenters was particularly friendly, not challenging Vélez at any point, the success of the women allied to the scandal about the prizes forced his arm to some degree, into confirming there will be a league the following year.

To allow the club an opportunity to clarify the situation, Atlético Huila's General manager Carlos Barrero was also interviewed. He explains: *'estamos dando los dos primeros pasos primero para preguntar en definitiva cuánto es el premio segundo del cobro del mismo. Desconozco igual le pregunté al presidente y me dijo que desconocía hasta ahora cuál es el arreglo que haya hecho el ingeniero Diego lo realizará de ahí que vamos a esperar de todas maneras yo pienso que son conjeturas que no vienen al caso y que por supuesto todo el mundo entiende que quién gana merece el premio'* (we are taking the first steps – first to define how much the prize is and second to claim the prize. I asked the President (Patarroyo) and he told me that he still didn't know what the arrangement that Diego has made with the players was, but anyway I think that these are unnecessary accusations and that

of course everyone understands that the winners deserve their prize). Barrero admits not knowing what agreement has been made between the third-party benefactor and the players. This demonstrates the club's distant relationship with the women's team. Moreover, it directly contradicts the official position and claim that the women's team is incorporated within the club at the same level as the men's team. These remarks, which undermine the official line, are given no salience by national media.

This sub-phase of explanation is brought to a close when an anonymous *El Tiempo* article (El Tiempo, 2018b) summarises a number of the above interventions in one article designed to explain the story from the beginning<sup>27</sup>. Titled '*Insólita queja de Yoreli Rincón tras ganar la Libertadores femenina* (Strange Complaint from Yoreli Rincón after Winning the Women's Copa Libertadores), the emphasis is placed on the belligerence of Rincón. They cast doubt on Rincón's claims in the first paragraph reporting that '*se quejó en un video de que, supuestamente, el premio que le entrega la Conmebol al club va para el equipo masculino*' (she complained in a video that, *supposedly* (my italics), the prize from CONMEBOL would go to the men's team). El Tiempo, once again, embed the original social media post from Fútbol Sin Límite which is in fact the original Instagram story post from Rincón, and also include quotes from the Vélez radio interview with VBAR Caracol. They quote one of a number of condescending remarks from Vélez '*las palabras de la niña son desacertadas*' (the girl's account is wrong), without even reproaching the tone of the institutional response. Instead, El Tiempo once again repeats the official procedure: '*El procedimiento de la entrega de los premios en dinero en los torneos internacionales es que la entidad organizadora le gira el valor a las federaciones a las que están afiliados los clubes y luego estas se encargan de enviarlo a los clubes. En el caso del Huila, el club es el mismo: el*

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<sup>27</sup> El Tiempo is Colombia's most popular newspaper. It has 6 million Facebook and 7 million Twitter followers respectively meaning its reach is considerable.



*femenino no está aparte del masculino*'. (The procedure for distributing prize money in international tournaments is that the organising entity passes the money to the federations to which the clubs are affiliated who then pass it down to the clubs. In the case of Huila, the club is unified: *the women's team is not separate from the men's one*). Once again, this has a twofold purpose, first to exonerate football institutions of any wrongdoing by re-stating the official procedure and secondly to discredit Rincón's claim and by extension Rincón herself. Whilst juridically the Huila women's team is part of the institution Atlético Huila, the editorial makes no mention of the peculiar two president arrangement, whereby the second president, with no directorial influence over the club, funds the women's team's salaries separately.

In order to consolidate its discursive discrediting of Rincón the (anonymous) editorial draws a comparison between bonuses received for representing clubs with national team bonuses. '*En los campeonatos nacionales de FIFA el procedimiento es igual. La entidad gira a las selecciones participantes. Los jugadores, por lo general, arreglan un premio con su respectiva Federación antes de participar, independientemente del dinero que se reciba por llegar al torneo*' (In FIFA national team tournaments the procedure is the same. The entity hands down the prize to the competing teams. The players, generally, have arranged bonuses, on top of their pay for participating, with their respective federation before the competition in question). By focussing tenaciously on money received on top of players' salaries and drawing attention to how even those representing the nation receive bonuses,<sup>28</sup> the editorial is insinuating there is a level of greed in Rincón's demands. This one-sided interpretation is backed up by *El Espectador*, who also embeds the original video from *Fútbol Sin Limite* in

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<sup>28</sup> The Colombian women's national team, in particular Daniela Montoya, complained at not receiving any bonuses from the 2015 Women's World Cup and was subsequently vetoed by the Colombian Federation (Ramírez, 2019)

their online version, and also immediately dismisses Rincón's allegation in the first two sentences of the first paragraph:

*La jugadora del cuadro opita, que se coronó campeón de la Copa Libertadores Femenina, señaló que el premio económico se iría a las arcas del equipo masculino. Al llegar a Bogotá aclaró que, de hecho, el club le dará el dinero al plantel.* (The Huila player, who was crowned champion of the Women's Copa Libertadores, stated that the prize would go straight to the men's team. Upon arriving in Bogotá she clarified that, in fact, the club would give the money to the team) (El Espectador, 2018).<sup>29</sup>

The chain of events and interactions which have been described thus far are reduced in the above article to just one sentence, the article exaggerates the de-contextualization of time and space to which Verón (1987, 2013, 2014b) refers, giving the impression that Rincón changed her mind during the course of the flight home and dropped her irrational complaint upon landing. The article goes on to explain in similar terms Rincón not understanding how the award of prize money works: 'a pesar de la indignación de Yoreli Rincón, este tipo de premios generalmente son para los clubes, gracias a ellos se sostienen y le pagan a sus empleados, sus técnicos, deportistas, administrativos, etc. Eso mismo lo hacen los clubes masculinos. Los premios a los jugadores se dan siempre y cuando hayan pactado un arreglo con los dirigentes, o ellos mismos accedan a darles una bonificación por el rendimiento.' (Despite Rincón's outrage, these type of prizes are generally received by the clubs, it is the clubs who pay for their livelihoods, they pay all the technical and administrative staff, and the

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<sup>29</sup> El Espectador has just over a million followers on each social media platform. 'Opita' refers to people from Huila province.

players. That is exactly what happens with the male clubs. Bonuses go to the players when they have a pre-agreement with the club's owners/directors, or they award one for excellent performance). *El Espectador's* article ends with a factually incorrect declaration concluding that Huila president Juan Carlos Patarroyo would give the players all the prize money, when in reality the President of the women's team Diego Perdomo awarded them an improvised bonus after the victory and following Rincón's successful complaint.

By the end of this phase of explanation, multiple processes of re-signification have taken place and the debate is framed in such a way that the public's responses are confined to a narrow debate about how and to whom prize monies ought to be distributed, and to visceral opinions about Rincón. The ensuing divisive debate ensures that the websites receive high-traffic and also serves the purpose of avoiding any serious scrutiny of the institutional status-quo.

### ***Third-phase of circulation – Conciliation and Resolution of Conflict***

Whilst it is difficult to mark definitively the end of one phase and the start of another, a clear discursive change towards conciliation and harmonious resolution of the conflict is notable at the post-tournament press conference broadcast in Colombia by DIMAYOR's commercial partner WIN Sports.<sup>30</sup> In some sense the identified phases overlap as for example, *El Espectador* refers briefly to the next step which marks the resolution of the conflict (by incorrectly suggesting Huila rather than Perdomo would be covering the bonuses). The post-tournament press conference live streamed from Manaus, on the day after the tournament, lasted twenty minutes and covered a number of issues. Nonetheless, it was used by traditional media, largely, to signal a harmonious end to the mediated conflict.

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<sup>30</sup> WIN Sports is half owned by Colombian channel RCN and half by American channel DirectTV. They had announced in 2018 a pay-to-view premium channel ensuring revenue streams for DIMAYOR and an unprecedented number of live Colombian games.

Nonetheless Rincón, once again, took the opportunity to address the room of largely male journalists and underline the magnitude of the players' achievement '*nunca en la vida había visto a tantos periodistas aquí para el fútbol femenino. Es un placer para nosotras ver a todos ustedes haciendo un reconocimiento a la mujer futbolista de Colombia*' (I've never seen so many journalists together for women's football. It's a pleasure for us to see you all together recognising women footballers in Colombia) (Win Sports, 2018). Inevitably, she is immediately pressed to explain how the prize money saga has been resolved and Rincón replies: '*creo que es más que merecido por estas veinte jugadoras.....es lo que queríamos en un principio*' (I think it is more than what these twenty players deserve...it's what we wanted from the beginning) (Win Sports, 2018). To this, teammate Liana Salazar adds her support and emphasises the collective nature of the struggle and the complaint made '*si quiero invitarlos a todos los medios a que no le den palo solo a Yoreli porque realmente fuimos todas y somos un equipo y como equipo asumimos estas cosas*' (I would like to invite the media not to slate only Yoreli as really we agreed all of this collectively as a team and as a team we face the consequences). Salazar's comments are skirted over or repeated extremely briefly in articles referring to the conference.

The first section showed how an Instagram video from Rincón gained significant traction on social media, forcing traditional media into covering it. Traditional media attached particular salience to the official procedures for distributing prizes, assuring the public that due process had been followed and that all was in order. Instead of considering the wider context of Rincón's complaint in a spirit of investigative journalism, the traditional media ensured the terms of debate were narrow thus circumscribing the debate. It argued that what became the prize-money scandal was sparked by an intentional attempt on the part of Rincón to highlight the plight of women's football. Recording the video in a dilapidated area of Caracas Airport, where her teammates were forced to sleep on a concrete floor, Rincón's

video explicitly highlighted the perpetually second-class conditions women footballers have to face in comparison to their male counterparts. This choice certainly gave extra purchase to the claim being made, ensuring the scandal went as far as possible.

The following section reconsiders another social media post from Rincón that had a much lower media uptake. Considering the media's agenda-setting role of presenting women's football in line with the hegemonic institutional vision of it, it is argued that this earlier post is strategically downplayed and/or ignored as it does not fit within the hegemonic institutional vision for women's football.

## **Conclusion**

The media representations paradigm within academic work on women's football accounts largely for how male hegemony is protected by means of marginalising female participation in women's football or covering it in ways which portray it as banal or as a sub-category of the men's game. This is largely explained in a top-down fashion which presupposes the immense power of mass media. This chapter does not dispute the power imbalances at play, but wishes to nuance existing accounts of mass media coverage by accounting for the agency of players themselves. Moreover it opens debate about the complex interrelationships which go towards making each 'story'. The phase of 'hypermediation' is characterised by a systematic and intentional distortion of events. In spite of this, Yoreli Rincón successfully managed to represent the collective interests of Colombian women footballers. Her achievements are laudable but come at a cost for Rincón who as a result of this story, became (even more of) a lightning rod for resolutely hostile media coverage and arguably was further singled out by the federation as a trouble-maker.<sup>31</sup> The reaction of traditional media to Rincón's activism has not been to highlight the precarious lived experiences of Colombian

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<sup>31</sup> Since this incident Rincón has not returned to the Colombian Women's national team despite starring for Internazionale in Italy.

women footballers but rather to depoliticise collective struggle and also polarise debate by emphasising a constructed individualistic portrayal of Rincón as greedy and impudent. By closing ranks and refusing to discuss the substantive issues facing women's football, traditional media shows a distinct tendency towards compartmentalisation and most of all towards policing the status-quo of male sporting hegemony. A certain level of media engagement with feminist issues is permissible or even desirable whenever it does not interfere with perhaps the most important symbolic area of male hegemony.

In the case of the lesbian kiss, for example, the story was closed down as it had the potential to open up a wider discussion about the sexuality of players and the unidimensional way the game is envisioned, represented and marketed by largely male football institutions. By contrast, 'scandal' – as the media would have it – is cultivated in the case of Huila's CONMEBOL prize money as it places all responsibility for controversy upon Rincón and finds her to be in the wrong before even the most preliminary investigation into the structural conditions which engendered the issue.

Whilst the central findings of this chapter suggest the continued power of traditional media, there are reasons for optimism as the agency of Rincón, and women's football online media, have exerted pressure on institutions and created a growing consciousness of the struggles of women footballers. Moreover, Rincón's interventions did ensure a settlement for the players that was not stipulated in their original contracts. The danger of social media engendering individualistic logic notwithstanding, it also does appear that Rincón uses what little agency she has to represent the collective in the case studied. In this way, it is important not to be entirely dismissive of the agency of football players, even if claims players are now more powerful than the media (BBC Sport, 2019) seem somewhat premature.

By acknowledging the multiplicity of complex interactions which go towards creating meaning, this study captures a limited snapshot of the picture which reflects the researcher's

own biases and empirical lived experiences with women footballers in Brazil and Colombia. This chapter hopes to inspire a shift away from top-down analyses of media output towards studies which take account of dissenting narratives from below and how these are incorporated and reconfigured by the traditional media. The following chapters will lay out in greater depth the perspectives and lived experiences of players in the context of the social and economic background laid out in previous chapters.

## Chapter 3 – Football Institutions

### Introduction

This chapter has three primary contentions which will be examined with particular reference to the CONMEBOL policy requiring teams to open a women's division in order to continue competing in the men's Copa Libertadores. Firstly, I contend that sexism and male hegemony have taken refuge in the logic of the market and secondly, that the rootedness of male hegemony within the hierarchy of clubs and national federations runs into clear tensions with the global FIFA agenda, where gender equality is at least nominally enshrined (FIFA, 2016, p.22). I argue this means that gender equality is quickly watered down to a logic of inclusion at best and that, in addition, women's football finds itself in a situation where 'by being subordinated it comes to reinforce the hegemonic practice' (Louro, 1997, p.30). Nonetheless, the third main argument in this chapter is that previous inward-looking academic incarnations of institutionalism which emphasise conservatism and stability are insufficient in accounting for the gradual changes which are being forced by a range of outside factors. Moreover, I argue that the relentless application of market logic to gauge the popularity of women's football is unjust insofar as women's football suffers from multiple structural disadvantages. For example, women's football still receives very little promotion in comparison to the men's game. Its competitions are allocated fewer funds and space on the calendar and nascent women's divisions within major clubs thus far reflect a need to comply with legislation rather than an attempt to promote women's football. Moreover, by tying participation in women's football to an economic sanction affecting the hegemonic male team, both the hierarchical relationship between men's and women's football and the prevailing market logic are reinforced.



To illustrate both these points I look in-depth at CONMEBOL's flagship policy, colloquially referred locally as *obrigatoriedade/obligatoriedad* and consider how it has impacted upon the gradual professionalisation of the sport at my case study clubs in Brazil and Colombia. I argue that uncritically declaring a quantitative increase in the number of large clubs with women's teams neglects a number of worrying continuities of the 'equal but different negative integration' (Williams, 2007, p.183) of women's football. Furthermore, I argue that a model which ignores the role of development and independent women's football club risks replicating the concentration of wealth and talent within a small number of clubs where male hegemony is hard to dislodge. As explained in the introduction to the thesis, this will be achieved with reference to discursive institutional theory. Discursive institutionalism considers a broad range of social, cultural and political factors influencing the formulation and enactment of public policy. In its most recent iterations, most prominently the work of Vivien Schmidt (2008, 2010), it questions the supposed neutrality traditionally attributed to embedded institutional values.

The term '*obrigatoriedade/obligatoriedad*', then, has become shorthand in South America for the policy incentivising clubs to open a women's division by making it a prerequisite for entry in the ever more lucrative male Copa Libertadores. To place this in context, it is worth considering the respective prize monies for the male and female competitions. The winners of the 2020 male Copa Libertadores received US\$15,000,000 and the losing finalist US\$6,000,000 (CONMEBOL, 2021). Meanwhile, Ferroviária, the winners of the female equivalent won US\$85,000, some 176 times less (CONMEBOL, 2021). Barriers to female participation have clearly been eroded in recent times. The new obstacle underpinning male hegemony is the deep-rooted assumption of the greater commercial appeal of the men's game. This overlooks the role the accumulated cultural capital the men's game has accrued. Whilst this has occurred women's football has not been promoted, has been

actively discouraged and in some cases has even been prohibited (Goellner, 2005d; Elsey & Nadel, 2019).

At this point it is worth pointing out that the main thrust of *obrigatoriedade* is incentivising teams to open a women's division, falling short of specifying that they must be professional. Firstly, this chapter will contextualise the policy in Brazilian, Colombian and global terms and detail how and when it came into operation. It will then outline the clear impact of this affirmative action before pointing out fundamental flaws and loopholes which mean that, in some sense, it has consolidated women's football as a sub-category tagged onto the men's game. To support these arguments, interview material with directors of the three clubs in my study will be used.

### **Brazilian Overview**

For almost four decades Brazilian women were officially banned from participating in the sport (Franzini, 2005b; Goellner, 2005b). This began in 1941 when the Conselho Nacional de Desportos (National Council for Sports) instituted Law 3.199. This legislation was fundamental in ensuring a highly gendered social order in years to come. One of its articles established the prohibition of female participation in various sporting activities, including football. This decree remained in place until 1979. By prohibiting women from competing, the momentum towards growing participation was fragmented or entirely severed in the case of women, and was consolidated as an exclusionary and highly gendered concern. Moreover, professionalisation, however, by almost any definition or data, including the world governing body's own report (FIFA, 2019) is distant on the horizon, despite struggles yielding notable gains in visibility and structure. Drawing on data provided by all the associated members, FIFA states that 15,000 women in Brazil play in competitions at some level. This compares unfavourably to 27,000 in Argentina and 24,000 in Venezuela respectively. These numbers reflect long-term institutional neglect from the CBF. Many of the positive changes, on the

other hand, have been a knock-on effect of FIFA and the CONMEBOL coercion or policy prescriptions.

In the contemporary context moves towards female inclusion in Brazil can be traced back to the first mentions of gender equality in FIFA official policy in 2016 (Soares, 2019). This notional equality is quickly watered down to a logic of inclusion (Else & Nadel, 2019, p.10) albeit on a negative footing as Williams (2006, 2007) has argued. Nonetheless, the shift to inclusion marks the definitive end of absolute male institutional hegemony over football and signals the onset of a long symbolic struggle over the manifest social significance the world's most popular sport carries. For illustrative purposes it is worth setting out the first explicit FIFA policy prescriptions on gender equality. Article 23 states that 'legislative bodies must be constituted in accordance with the principles of representative democracy and taking into account the importance of gender equality in football' (FIFA, 2016, p.22). Further significant mentions of gender equality appear in Articles 2, 15 and 49 of the same document.

It is worth outlining some of the more significant changes. The manager job being male is symptomatic of ingrained attitudes, so placing a woman in charge was a significant step. Following this, a cross-disciplinary panel for the Commission for the Development of Women's Football was formed by the CBF (Soares, 2019). The Commission for the Development of Women's Football in Brazil met just three times and lasted less than three months. Emily Lima was dismissed after eight months in the job, judged ostensibly on a few friendly games without being given the opportunity to take the team to a major tournament. In September 2020 Aline Pellegrino and Eduarda Luizelli, two ex-players of note, were appointed to prominent CBF roles. Indeed, Pellegrino, the ex-captain of the Brazilian women's national team is now the coordinator of women's football competitions after an impressive period in a similar position overseeing club competition in the most powerful state federation - the Paulista (São Paulo state). This allied to other appointments such as Beatriz

Vaz and Valesca Araújo shows some intent on the part of the CBF to redress the gender imbalance, particularly in the running of women's football. Furthermore, they voice, from personal experiences, the multiple and complex challenges women's football faces in establishing itself.

The most significant policy for women's football, as alluded to above, comes not directly from the Brazilian federation but rather from the South American confederation CONMEBOL. In light of FIFA policy the confederation elaborated a policy designed to incentivise greater participation in women's football from major clubs. During interviews a number of federation officials including Romeu Castro, Aline Pellegrino and Valesca Araújo were keen to emphasise that they felt the *obligatoriedade*, the name most often used in the media, is a misnomer and a misconception that has been driven by media oversimplification. These institutional figures were opposed to the term *obligatoriedade*, considering it to be a damaging misnomer. Each felt that it was fair that if the clubs wished to continue participating in the (men's) Copa Libertadores, they would have to modernise their clubs accordingly. The policy also includes requiring clubs to have fully operational youth teams for example. From a DI perspective, the general policy of CONMEBOL is the 'inclusion' of women's football in order to satisfy the requirements enshrined within FIFA's gender equality statute. Reflecting this need, the program of *obligatoriedade* is foregrounded in order to ensure this inclusion happens. The underlying assumption, as DI behind the policy is that inclusion, and not any push towards outright equality will be socially acceptable at the current juncture.

### **Colombian Overview**

In Colombia, advances in visibility began with the national team in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Colombia won its first honour when the under-17 team won the South American championship in Chile in 2008. In the 2010 Copa America in Ecuador, Colombia

finished second securing its first appearance at a Women's World Cup in 2011 (Mina & Goellner, 2015b). Following this they went unbeaten at the Ecuador 2014 Copa America and reached the last sixteen of the Women's World Cup in Canada 2015. These events were influential in pressuring intransigent institutions into making some kind of concessions to acknowledge the remarkable progress achieved in the absence of any concerted institutional support. Embarrassingly from an institutional perspective, since the professional league began, Colombia's women failed to make the 2019 World Cup and have performed less well at Copa America competitions than before the professional league was launched.

Demands for further progress exist in a constant tension with the persistence of highly gendered understandings of the sport at regional and national level. In order to remain a member of FIFA and to receive funds from the FIFA Forward program, federations need to show quantitative progress, however this is often frustrated by a lack of female representation at both club and federation level. Policy continues to be rooted in gender differentiation despite policy documents from FIFA and CONMEBOL stating a commitment to gender equality. Following this, the women's professional league, launched in 2017, has not meant a growth in opportunities for players at youth level. Clubs largely provide just one senior women's team, meaning the development of youth players remains an amateur concern. Many players still develop at schools like the Carlos Sarmiento Lora in Cali or at an amateur club Formas Íntimas of Medellín.

In order to get a feel for the atmosphere of DIMAYOR it is important to consider how it came into being. The Colombian professional federation DIMAYOR, emerged in 1948 in Bogotá as a market-oriented alternative to the amateur leadership of Colombian football until that point, headed up by ADEFUTBOL in the coastal city of Barranquilla (Goldblatt, 2007, p.278). Within its first year the organisation was temporarily suspended from FIFA due to escalating quarrels with ADEFUTBOL. At that point an extreme market-driven modus

operandi was consolidated by luring star players over from Argentina and beyond, offering high wages as they were not liable to pay transfer fees as a rogue league outside of FIFA. In this way, whilst in Brazil for example, the CBF and its regional federations oversee both professional and amateur football, DIMAYOR is a federation which by definition, was born in opposition to an amateur federation, and is wholly committed to delivering 'professional' football.

The progress made in the case of Colombia appears similarly linked to the global FIFA shift towards inclusion (FIFA, 2016). However, there are discursive nuances that are significantly different in the case of Colombia. As the evidence below suggests, *obligatoriedad* (*obligatoriedad* in Spanish) has also had an impact in the case of Colombia. There has been a shift towards larger clubs more likely to push to compete in the men's Copa Libertadores with smaller clubs paying less attention to the policy.

Nonetheless, the Colombian federation DIMAYOR pushes the idea of a year-zero when their professional league came into being in 2017. Eschewing the idea that the league was a consequence of FIFA's embrace of gender equality, sporting Director of DIMAYOR Vladimir Cantor explained that 'the women's league is a product that Jorge Fernando Perdomo wanted to launch'. DI tends towards historical explanations of how discourse is elaborated. In this case, the underlying assumption behind the Colombian women's league is rooted in the extreme market logic in which Colombian professional football was born in the 1940s. In this vein, the launch of the Colombian Women's League diverges from others in the region. Market logic is more deeply entrenched than elsewhere and thus the policy core elaborated by DIMAYOR reflects this. Another contributing factor to the formation of the league was the level of performance of the Colombian women's team, who in the absence of a professional league, have performed remarkably at international tournaments (Mina et al., 2019). From a DI perspective this is not foregrounded as the achievement of Colombian

women prior to the establishment of a women's league, and is inconvenient to the organisation which, by definition as the professional arm of Colombian football, wishes to foreground the achievements of professional federation. A talented group of competitive players with professionalised counterparts globally existed prior to the emergence of an official league. At club level for example, Formas Íntimas of Medellín in particular, had already reached a Copa Libertadores final in 2013, years before the Colombian professional league was launched.

Beyond this, despite a discourse which focuses relentlessly on professionalism, even DIMAYOR's Head of Marketing Katherine Pimienta admits that 'at the moment we still have clubs without professional women's teams but we are still in a period of transition'. As alluded to earlier, the very binary structure of the organisation of Colombian football dictates that any endeavour from DIMAYOR is likely to be characterised as professional. This is aided by highly supportive mass media pushing the slightly nationalistic idea that Colombia has been more proactive than its neighbours having already achieved professionalism. Professionalism in football has always been a slippery and elusive concept. In the British case, the transitional period between amateurism and professionalism is well documented (Taylor, 2016, 2017). Similarly, in Argentina it is well trodden ground, nuanced by the concept of *marronismo* (Alabarces, 2002b; Frydenberg, 2011) which takes account of the multiple ruses used to incentivise amateur players to sign on in the 1920s – mechanisms which persist to this day in women's football, as described by Gaby Garton in Argentina, who described covering scholarship costs at university teams, covering accommodation, travel expenses and food (Garton, 2019).

One of the main discursive planks in constructing the success of the Colombian women's league has been a couple of isolated high attendances back when the league was launched in 2017. Hinting at what could be achieved with sustained rather than occasional

promotion, the final between Santa Fe and Atlético Huila attracted an impressive 33,327 spectators. Pimienta explains ‘in June 2017, we achieved a world attendance record for women’s club football, which shows what a success it has been’. This is not strictly true. In May 2017, 35,271 spectators saw the women’s FA Cup final between Birmingham and Manchester City Women at Wembley (BBC Sport, 2017). The extent of attention to detail was further highlighted when the Colombian Federation, in a complaint letter about their failed Women’s World Cup 2023 bid, alleged that the Colombian Professional Women’s League had an *average* attendance of 28,000 (Núñez, 2020). The majority of games attract less than 1,000 fans and often take place in midweek at obscure venues during the mornings.

In Brazil a number of the larger clubs offer free entrance for women’s game. I was aware that fans paid to see the Santa Fe and Atlético Huila record attendance at the Estadio Campín. Given the generally market-driven ethos of DIMAYOR I asked Head of Marketing Carlos Lajud Catalan about the cost of attending Colombian matches to which he responded ‘I imagine that the majority of the tickets for women’s football are free, but that is up to the clubs’. The indifference as to whether clubs charge for games suggests the women’s game as a commercial proposition is not really taken seriously by the organisation. Despite this, DIMAYOR regularly cites the commercial unviability of the women’s game.

Clearly, promotion of the women’s league is lacking (Mina et al., 2019). In this vein, I asked whether there were separate social media accounts to promote the newly formed women’s league. Head of Communications for DIMAYOR Carlos Lajud Catalán explained that there were not as ‘the leagues are promoted on just one account on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook in order to give equal importance to the women’s league’. Nonetheless computerised searches reveal just 42 tweets historically containing women’s league or similar searches, out of a history of 21,000 tweets as of January 2021 with around 400 tweets each



month. During the season of my fieldwork, one match was screened weekly during the women's season, meaning around 10 games annually given the short length of the season.

Further gender differentiation is discernible in the two and a half month calendar the women's game has been given. Vladimir Cantor argues that 'a three-month tournament makes it more exciting and competitive'.

### **Official FIFA Discourse**

FIFA's embrace of women's football has been tentative and gradual. What is now the Women's World Cup, began life as the World Championship for Women, on account of FIFA anxiety about the brand of the (men's) World Cup being tarnished by association (Williams, 2019). The FIFA chronology has the 1991 China tournament as a year-zero for women's football despite overwhelming evidence of over a century of female participation (Mourão & Morel, 2008; Nadel, 2015). After the first 1991 tournament, a quarter of a century would pass before gender equality was enshrined in FIFA's statutes (FIFA, 2016). From a DI perspective, gender equality (nominally) serves as the wider policy and a quadrennial World Cup tournament eventually given the same name and mirroring the frequency of the men's equivalent 'a micro-level programme designed to legitimise and lend credence to the notion of equality being a reality' (Schmidt, 2008, p.314).

FIFA discourse now even acknowledges 'years of institutional neglect and a lack of investment have prevented girls and women from playing the game and from assuming roles in technical, administrative and governance functions' (FIFA, 2018, p.4). Predictably, they foreground the FIFA Women's World Cup as a major milestone. This is bolstered by the FIFA Under 20 Women's World Cup in 2002 and the FIFA Under 17 Women's World Cup which followed in 2008. They take the credit for 'the level of play dramatically improving' as a result of these tournaments. Nonetheless, the official 2018 FIFA document acknowledges women's football is 'in need of fundamental change' listing a number of key global

objectives. These objectives, taken from the strategy document include ‘developing and launching new international competitions for women’s clubs, developing, monitoring and raising the standard of professional club leagues, doubling the number of youth leagues and finally female representation at executive committee levels’ (FIFA, 2018, p.6).

### **Reception of Official FIFA Discourse in Brazil and Colombia**

In the context of Brazil and Colombia, the incorporation of gender equality into FIFA’s statutes in 2016 has had significant effects which have manifested themselves according to local understandings of the social significance of football. It is worth outlining some of the more significant changes. In Brazil, just months after FIFA incorporated gender equality into its statutes, Emily Lima was appointed as the first-ever female manager of the women’s national team. The manager job within the game remains one of the last bastions of male hegemony, so the gradually increasing presence of women in management jobs is significant. In addition to this, a cross-disciplinary panel for the Commission for the Development of Women’s Football was formed by the CBF (Soares, 2019). In Colombia, women’s football was brought under the auspices of the professional football federation DIMAYOR for the first time, leading to a women’s professional league being formed in 2017. Much of this progress would prove to be ephemeral and/or precarious. For example, Emily Lima, the first woman manager, was abruptly dismissed after eight months in the job, despite reasonable progress (Pires, 2017). This episode can be explained, by new institutionalist analysis by reference to the way formal and informal rules interact. The commission for women’s football appeared in response to the formal need to respond mimetically to the actions of other similar organisations globally (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), however the way in which it was quickly disbanded responds to informal rules in operation at a local level (Peters, 2019; Schmidt, 2010).

Much of what is to follow explains how the gender equality in FIFA's statutes becomes watered down to a modus-operandi of limited inclusion in the Brazilian and Colombian contexts. Inclusion, of course, is a far more nebulous concept which affords institutions considerable room for manoeuvre. A recurring theme during fieldwork interviews was the need for women's football to develop 'unique selling points'. This demonstrated two things: firstly, the unwillingness to allow women's football to share the space of what they consider the legitimate hegemonic masculine space and secondly, how interviewees are, at least, aware of the need to commercialise women's football. Interviewees felt, or at least expressed the idea, that women's football would have little chance if ever placed in direct competition with men's football. When I interviewed Romeu Castro, who has a dual role both as an executive delegate of CONMEBOL and as the supervisor of both women's leagues in Brazil for the CBF, I asked about the historical failings of the CBF. Castro's discourse mirrors the FIFA one. He follows the rubric of FIFA discourse in wresting the responsibility from the institution and explaining the transition in terms of a linear learning curve for society: 'in the 1980s we had players who suffered violence simply for playing the game, it wasn't easy. But we're overcoming prejudices bit by bit and society is changing'. Once again there are interactions here that chime with the explanations of distinct institutional frameworks. The reference to society changing is an acknowledgment that institutions respond not only to internal dynamics, as older institutionalisms would suggest, but also to what new institutionalists see as 'the transformative impact of small, evolutionary adjustments over time' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013, p.40). Institutions takes 'rational choices' (Schmidt, 2008; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013) based on developments in wider society, rather than depend on their own internal dynamics.

The rhetoric of difference can be traced back to official documents. For example, FIFA's own women's football strategy speaks of 'adding unique dimensions to the women's

game' (FIFA, 2018, p.6). By suggesting that it is possible for the women's game to have unique dimensions, it implies it must develop outside of the male hegemonic version (Archetti, 1998; Alabarces, 2002b). The academic literature attests to the persistent 'othering' of the non-hegemonic form (Louro, 1997). Female participation in various sports is inextricably tied to male identity tropes (Hjelseth & Hovden, 2014; Ezzell, 2009). These narratives oscillate between emphasising the importance of not imitating (or challenging) male physical hegemony and, in even more inimical form, invoking supposed psychological differences between men and women that are understood to affect the running of a club. For example, CONMEBOL executive delegate and CBF coordinator of women's Serie A and B football Romeu Castro felt that 'women's football should be treated as a different sport – as a female sport and not as the same as men's football. We need to avoid the route of simply imitating men's football because if we go down that road we'll always lose'. Essentialising his vision further he suggests that 'women's sport is extremely creative, maybe more creative, so we need to emphasise that artistic side and not the physical side'. This socially constructed femininity continues in ex-Atlético Huila president Diego Perdomo's analysis that 'it is different because they're women, they think differently and thus make different decisions. They are less rational'. Along the same lines, Carlos Barrero, a director of now the now-defunct 2018 continental champions Atlético Huila suggests 'it's a different sport. It's more complicated to manage a women's team because of women's moods, which are naturally very different from those of men'. These remarks are less extreme iterations of the infamous remarks of Tolima President Gabriel Camargo that 'the women's league breeds lesbianism, it is not profitable for clubs, and the women drink more than the male players' (Vanguardia, 2018). Curious as to the reaction to this in my case-study clubs, I asked Huila director Carlos Barrero who responded that 'he was partly right but he expressed it in a rather unfortunate way'. Barrero reiterated the assumption of it being impossible to make a profit

from women's football, in spite of his team being the continental champions at the time of the interview. Recent work delving into early representations of women playing football on the continent date 'lesbian' characterisations back to the 1920s (Wood, 2018). On the other hand, it has been suggested the influence of the heterosexual male gaze is discernible in the Latin American context where there are now fewer short haired players, with a long ponytail becoming the norm with the foregrounding of 'white blonde players' (Elsey & Nadel, 2019, p.144). The latter observation certainly dovetails with a more global tendency to present women footballers in a way more likely to appeal to television, attract advertising and sponsorship.

The notion of the women's game being 'different' is institutionalised by a FIFA policy which places it at the level of youth football, futsal and beach football (FIFA, 2020a). Moreover there is a distinct lack of accountability emanating from FIFA and this is embedded at all levels. Whilst gender equality is enshrined within policy documents there is little monitoring of where exactly funds received from the FIFA Forward programme by national federations are spent (Elsey, 2018). The programme lumps women's football together with youth football and even beach football (FIFA, 2018, p.4)

Referring back to global objectives promising the development of competitions with ever increasing standards for women's clubs, a fundamental problem has been the reluctance of clubs to open a female team. Further goals pertaining to creating youth leagues and ensuring female representation at executive committee levels appear hollow when the basic objective of having a women's team has been dodged, paid lip service to or has been met and later reneged upon, as in the case of Atlético Huila who, even after winning the continental challenge, now regard a women's team as being an extra they cannot afford.

### **The Context and Implementation of *Obrigatoriedade***

Clearly the emergence of the policy of *obrigatoriedade* firstly, did not occur in a vacuum and secondly, did not emerge solely at the behest of the CBF. Rather it is linked, albeit indirectly, to a global push for greater gender equality, exemplified by movements like #metoo and #niunamenos (Elsey, 2018). Conversely, the same deeply patriarchal organisations which have underrepresented women's football have systematically championed the men's game buttressing its immense structural advantages and reproducing a gendered social order (Goellner & Kessler, 2018b).

### The Positive Impact: Expanded Women's Leagues in Brazil

As Figure 11 below shows the policy has changed the panorama of Brazilian women's football. From just Botafogo and Vasco da Gama in 2013, almost all of the major teams now have an operational women's team. Moreover, as a direct consequence of the policy, the Brazilian women's leagues have swelled in numbers in recent years. There are now two female leagues, Serie A1 and Serie A2, with 16 in the top flight and an unwieldy 36 teams in the second tier.

State	Team	Year							
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
São Paulo	Corinthians				A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
São Paulo	São Paulo							A2	A2
São Paulo	Santos			A1	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
São Paulo	Palmeiras							A2	A1
São Paulo	Portuguesa		A1	A1	A1	A2		A2	
Rio	Flamengo				A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
Rio	Fluminense							A2	A2
Rio	Botafogo	A1	A1					A2	A2
Rio	Vasco Da Gama	A1	A1					A2	A2
Minas Gerais	América Mineiro			A1		A2	A2	A2	A2
Minas Gerais	Atlético Mineiro							A2	A2
Minas Gerais	Cruzeiro							A2	A1
Santa Catarina	Internacional						A2	A1	A1
Santa Catarina	Gremio							A2	A1
Pernambuco	Sport Recife					A1	A1	A1	A2

Figure 11 Participation of clubes de camisa (major teams) in the top two tiers of Brazilian Women's football (Serie A1 & Serie A2)

Serie A2 began in 2017 to accommodate the increasing numbers, allowing a system of promotion and relegation to be instituted. This has meant a 20 team top division and 32 teams in a second league. Whilst as of June 2020 there is no official CBF (Brazilian Federation) youth division tournament, under coercion, the country has clearly moved in line with global and continental prescriptions.

Many of the major teams who joined the league did so with marquee signings of players with experience in Europe and/or North America. For example, Cristiane initially joined the new São Paulo team and Rosana dos Santos joined Palmeiras. With one or two notable exceptions, each of the large clubs has maintained its women's team since. During fieldwork it was felt that the incursion of the large clubs had pushed up wages, a much welcome trend for women players who still struggle to make a decent living from the game.

Recent times have seen an increase in female representation in key positions in the Brazilian federation. As alluded to earlier, the promotion of ex-players who can be empathetic with the realities of women footballers such as Aline Pellegrino is a step which will improve the possibilities of the next affirmative action making a meaningful contribution. Under Pellegrino the Paulista Federation increased exponentially the number of games available to watch both online and on mainstream channels, and also brought numerous games to the municipal Pacaembu stadium in São Paulo opening the tournament up to a much larger audience. The presence of women players on the federation(s) means more opportunities to promote the game and win over further sympathetic sectors of the public. In this way, a growing public pressure for informal *obrigatoriedade* may force institutions' hands.

### **The Positive Impact: The Professional Women's League in Colombia**

In Colombia there have been two main tendencies. First of all, as with Brazil, many of the larger clubs have opened women's teams, presumably in order to protect the potential income from participating in the male Copa Libertadores. From just Santa Fe and América de Cali in the inaugural competition in 2017, now all of the major Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla and Bogotá clubs participate (figure 12).

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Santa Fe	x	x	x	x
Millionarios			x	x
América de Cali	x	x	x	x
Deportivo Cali			x	x
Junior de Barranquilla		x	x	x
Independiente de Medellín			x	x
Atlético Nacional		x	x	x
Atlético Huila	x	x	x	
Deportes Tolima		x	x	
La Equidad	x	x	x	x
Envigado FC	x	x		
Cortuluá	x	x	x	
Total number of teams participating	18	23	20	13

Figure 12 Participation of selected clubs in Colombian Women's Professional League since its inception in 2017.

Less encouragingly, during the COVID pandemic participation slipped to as low as just thirteen clubs, and even prior to the pandemic participation did not seem to be growing at anything like the rate it has done in Brazil. This hints at flaws in the policy, insofar as only a handful of Colombian clubs regularly participate in the Copa Libertadores, leaving the great majority indifferent to the punitive threat of expulsion from the competition. On one hand, the emergence of the Colombian women's league is the result of the same process of coercive isomorphism described above. On the other, local understandings mean that policy and decision-making is influenced by numerous factors beyond merely complying with the social pressure exerted from elsewhere.



The launch of the Colombian league can be broadly linked to the unacknowledged assumptions tied to the economic paradigm in which Colombian society operates. It has been argued that the Colombian democratic model centres upon efficiency and the market, delegitimising the role of citizenship and state intervention (Mejía Quintana & Jiménez, 2005). Actors' decisions and social attitudes are foregrounded, or at least influenced by this ingrained but often unacknowledged market fundamentalism more than they realise. Following Schmidt (Schmidt, 2008, 2010), an organisation as blatantly mercantile in its orientation, policy and discourse as DIMAYOR is only likely to change significantly once the paradigm of wider society changes or as Schmidt has it 'when the Kuhnian paradigm expires because it has lost its explanatory potential – ideational change will result from external processes and events that create a receptive environment for new ideas'. In this regard, the last Colombian election fleetingly hinted at this, with the end result being a (re-)consolidation of the social, economic and cultural assumptions underpinning the prevailing development model.

This said, the *modus operandi* of DIMAYOR and the Colombian Federation is clearly not only profit but also the protection of their own institutional hegemony and the hegemonic values of masculinity which they embody. This means women's football finds itself at an impasse whereby it cannot generate profit without much more promotion and investment and cannot attract the latter due to not generating profit. Whilst wishing to conform to global standards of gender equality (or some nebulous notion of inclusion), any substantive progress immediately comes into tension with the Colombian development model and the rootedness of deeply gendered attitudes to football and even in some cases misogyny.

### **Policy Loopholes**

The previous section evidences how, taken at face value, *obligatoriedade* has brought about improvements both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Numbers alone, however, are not

enough to guarantee success. As Santos General Manager of Women's Football Alessandro Pinto argues 'the success of *obrigatoriedade* will be governed largely by the level of seriousness of the major clubs. Inevitably all the clubs will now open women's teams – but will they just pay lip-service to it or will they do it properly? Women's football has already accrued considerable cultural capital at Santos, this is not the case at some of the other large clubs'.

By incorporating women's football into major clubs and opening up the potential to draw upon the considerable fanbases each club has, the policy has the potential to move women's football forward substantially. This section will now highlight areas where the policy could be tightened up in order to accelerate progress that women players need now and not as a gradual trickle effect of piecemeal concessions. For the purpose of analysis, an English translation of the policy is provided here:

'The solicitant must have a women's first team or be associated to someone that has. Also, they must have at least one youth category or associate themselves to a club that does. In both cases there must be proof of technical support with all the necessary equipment and infrastructure for the development of both teams in decent conditions. Finally, it is required that both teams participate in their respective regional and/or national leagues authorised by the respective member association' (FIFA, 2016)

### ***Outsourcing***

It is worth noting that in the first sentence it is stated that it is sufficient to 'be associated with' another women's team. This first loophole has been used to outsource the responsibility to create a women's team. For example, upon the launch of the policy, Corinthians of São

Paulo immediately entered into an agreement with Grêmio Osasco Audax, another club on the periphery of São Paulo with a functioning women's team. Audax had been created just a year earlier than this agreement and had already put the hard yards into developing youth players, making facilities available and so on. In this way, Corinthians kept the women's team, in a sense, at arm's length from the men's team as the women's team would use the Osasco facilities belonging to Audax.<sup>32</sup> In a similar fashion, Palmeiras, the richest club in Brazil based on its spending on the men's team, entered into an agreement with the Prefecture of Vinhedo, some 75 kilometres outside of São Paulo, allowing the women to use the facilities there rather than use their own facilities. There are examples of this occurring across the continent – for example in Colombia where Independiente Medellín satisfied the prerequisite by entering into a deal with Formas Íntimas, a long-time successful women's team from the same city, who also already had facilities where the women could train. This trend of 'being associated to someone who has' women's football is a direct consequence of the wording of CONMEBOL's policy. Outsourcing the women's team is a clear signal that it is a sub-category that they are only complying with because they have no other choice. The practice is light years away from recognising gender equality. It is a begrudging inclusion of women that is telling of the predominantly male hierarchies of Brazilian clubs and their deeply gendered understandings of the social meanings of the sport.

### *Youth Categories*

Similar to what has been described above, the policy also stipulates that clubs must have 'at least one youth category or associate themselves to a club that does'. Without wishing to repeat what has been set out above this immediately opens up the possibility of outsourcing the development of youth players rather than carrying it out within the club itself. In this way,

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<sup>32</sup> Corinthians has since taken full control of its women's team and established itself at continental level winning national and international trophies.

the clubs remain hegemonically masculine and women's football is relegated to a sub-category at arms-length. Players spoke of growing up playing street football and only finding a club at fifteen or sixteen years old. Without multiple youth teams starting from an early age, with the full commitment of the large clubs, the current semi-satisfactory situation looks likely to continue.

In stipulating that just one youth team is necessary rather than legislating towards the full incorporation of women's football on equal terms, there is a clear danger that the policy itself is, in fact, helping to reproduce structural inequalities. Major clubs have innumerable youth categories beginning with under-sevens which eventually feed into the club's senior team. A number of Brazilian women players have commented about how their background is in street football in lieu of the necessary facilities to develop in a more structured way. By allowing teams to have just one youth women's team which may be an under-17 team for example, many women players will continue to be denied the development opportunities that they clearly need.

### ***Contractual Arrangements***

The most significant absence from the policy is any mention guaranteeing professional conditions for players. By professional I refer to the conditions enjoyed by male counterparts whereby they are employed on year-round contracts (thus avoiding much of the precarity inevitably brought about by much shorter contracts), they are eligible for health benefits in the case of injury and are registered with legally recognised *carteira assinadas* (*legally binding contracts*) which entitle the employee to a notice period, unemployment benefits, paid holidays and maternity and paternity leave among other benefits. There have been reports of informal agreements between players and clubs which fall considerably short of these minimum standards. Once again, by leaving to chance any mention of these professional conditions and merely stipulating that a women's team must exist, CONMEBOL

policy has left players open to these kinds of abuses. There is an increasing awareness of these practices in the media where clubs have, to some degree, been held to account and have been forced into giving concessions. An example of this is the COVID-19 situation, where institutions gave financial support to women's team (Biram & Goellner, 2020; Biram & Mina, 2021) without the necessary accountability for how the money was used (Mendonça, 2020a, 2020b).

The Colombian women's league was marketed aggressively as being a professional league. It is telling that the word 'professional' is ubiquitous in every media or institutional mention of the league. If it really were professional, the label would be redundant, as it is with the Colombian men's league, the Premier League or Serie A for example. A recent report from ACOLFUTPRO, the organisation representing male and female Colombian players, stated that only three out of eighteen clubs had formal contractual arrangements with players, only 11% of players had contracts exceeding six months and over half were on short-term contracts of less than three months (ACOLFUTPRO, 2020). This owes much to the season itself only lasting between two and a half and three months, a structural factor that meant almost all of the players were out of contract at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and thus ineligible for help emanating from CONMEBOL and FIFA, and distributed by DIMAYOR.

This section has focussed on the minutiae of the policy and how clubs have interpreted and implemented it in its present guise. The following section considers how the policy has affected the wider panorama of Brazilian women's football – for example how it has affected clubs best known for their women's team and who have done much, under the radar, to advance women's football in the country.

### **Wider Consequences of *Obrigatoriedade***

There are a number of wider theoretical and discursive issues attached to the way CONMEBOL has sought to promote women's football on the continent. As alluded to in the introduction, by coupling the promotion of women's football with entry to the lucrative men's Copa Libertadores, women's football is placed in a relationship of dependence, ultimately, on the male part of the team being a realistic candidate to compete in the Copa Libertadores. Firstly, mirroring Europe, this essentially means ever-decreasing circles of wealthy clubs, rather than an opportunity genuinely open to every team in each country. In this way, the mechanism to incentivise compliance is problematic insofar as many teams are unlikely to reach or even aspire to compete in the Copa Libertadores. Moreover, by making the primary incentive to open a women's team economic, women's football becomes bound up in a relationship with an increasingly marketised polity which tends to overlook structural imbalances. Serious concessions need to be made to redress a history of discrimination. If not, it is likely that women's football is ultimately defeated by the very same logic being used to promote it – that of the market.

By making opening a women's team merely a means to an end in order to compete in men's continental competition, women's football is clearly sub-categorised as an extra activity tagged onto the main one. The policy has been lauded as progressive (de Alencar et al., 2020), however this neglects the extent to which it buttresses the status-quo of women's football existing on the fringes of men's football. The following section examines how challenges to the country's dominant centre both in a sporting and economic sense have been set back by *obligatoriedade*.

### **The Centre and the Periphery**

Much can be discerned about the social, economic and political power bases of a country from the spread of football teams and the power that they wield within their national

federations. In Brazil, the so-called *clubes de camisa* were powerful to the point of building a 'clube dos 13' to challenge the power of the CBF. These clubs come from São Paulo (4), Rio de Janeiro (4), Belo Horizonte (2), Porto Alegre (2) and Bahia (1). In Colombia, a similar football power base of large clubs in Bogotá (2), Medellín (2) Cali (2) and Barranquilla (1) dominate men's club competitions. Broadly speaking this spread of teams reflects the economic dominance of certain cities in the countries' social, economic and political life. The growth of women's football, in some sense, offered an opportunity to redress this balance as clubs from outside this traditional power base emerged.

On one hand the Brazilian federation is aware of the symbolic power of football and thus of its need to push decentralisation as much as possible. Numerous women's national team games were played in Manaus while the team had its first female manager Emily Lima.

In Brazil's bid for the 2023 Women's World Cup the CBF made reference to Manaus (Amazon region) as the capital of women's football (FIFA, 2020b, p.5). They have broken all attendance records for women's football in the country – attracting 25,371 to the Amazon Arena for their semi final with Santos in the 2017 tournament (Padin, 2017). As pithily summarised by Iranduba club president Amarildo Dutra 'there is a real injustice here as clubs who have done nothing for so many years now find themselves at the forefront of a new dawn for women's football in Brazil – there are so many teams like ourselves (Iranduba), Ferroviária, São Jose and Kindermann, for example, who deserve to be there – but this is not the model they are promoting'. The clubs he refers to are São Jose (a record three times women's Copa Libertadores champions), Kindermann of Santa Catarina (a renowned development club which has provided numerous players to the Brazilian national team) and 2021 Women's Copa Libertadores champions Ferroviária. This, clearly, mirrors what has happened in Europe and goes against one of the CBF's identified aims which is to develop football in the provinces. Romeu Castro commented on a number of occasions on how keen

the federation and CONMEBOL were to bring the Copa Libertadores to Manaus.

*Obrigatoriedade* is surely a setback for this project as ultimately it reinforces the centre rather than develops the periphery.

### ***Obrigatoriedade Informal?***

This chapter does not take issue, per se, with affirmative action as an appropriate way to redress historical imbalances. On the contrary, it argues the policy falls short of including several guarantees for women's players vis-à-vis working conditions to incorporate them into men's clubs on a genuinely even footing with men's football. This would mean, among other aspects, sufficient youth teams, full incorporation into clubs rather than arms-length involvement via outsourcing and the same facilities available as the men's teams. In any case, it is important to think beyond forcing teams to comply with the policy and to consider how women's football can be further established as a widely accepted part of social life.

Clearly, alongside the essentially punitive measures designed to ensure compliance with the policy, there is a greater and more important struggle to establish women's football into twenty-first century Brazil and Colombia. Indeed, outside of the federation, it could be that an informal *obligatoriedad* is starting to emerge whereby large clubs are seeing what others are doing and so as not to lose face are making some of the necessary arrangements to consolidate women's teams within their clubs. This is essentially what has happened with the major clubs of Europe – Real Madrid and Manchester United, for example, as recently as 2019 opened a top-level women's team as they felt growing pressure to match rival teams. Each club is a battleground with its own unique internal politics and nuances – meaning further investigation of club settings would be desirable. For example, periodic changes in club president can have an enormous effect on women's football – as in the case of Santos which disbanded its women's team between 2012 and 2014 coinciding with a considerable



pay rise to hold on to Neymar (Goldblatt, 2014). Smaller clubs such as Huila are not moved by the threat of expulsion from a competition they have never played in nor come close to reaching. Similarly, clubs like Iranduba whose women's team are considerably better known than the men's team are not affected by the policy, other than the ripple effect on wages increasing their costs. What is clear is that a sense of being perceived as less modern or less malleable to societal shifts means that clubs will make progressive changes as and when they feel society demands it.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter argues that whilst quantifiable progress has occurred as a result of *obligatoriedade*, there is strong evidence to suggest it represents another addition to a series of global policies which treat women's football as a sub-category of the hegemonic version. DI is illuminating in explaining how certain programs launched by CONMEBOL, the CBF and DIMAYOR respectively seek to legitimise the underlying assumption that only inclusion is actually required to satisfy FIFA, the global football body. Furthermore, particularly in the Colombian case, discourse around the professional nature of the league that was launched in 2017 is rooted in the historically extreme market-driven rubric which has governed Colombian football for decades.

The numerical increase in teams participating in women's competitions is clearly laudable. Nonetheless, close attention must be paid to the detail of how these teams are formed, how they treat their players and to what extent they are actually embedding women's football within the club at youth level for example.

This cultural capital develops over time and depends upon the sympathetic treatment of mass media in particular, but also the clubs who are responsible for promoting football as an inclusive game open to everyone. For this reason, it is of tantamount symbolic importance

that a women's team is not located 75km from the much cherished traditional home of the club. Similarly, it is important clubs produce women's players from a young age within the club and its environs rather than just cherry-pick ready-made players who have managed to develop elsewhere in spite of a lack of formal routes. It is part of football culture for fans to have a particular affinity for home-grown players. Furthermore, the practice of outsourcing women's football to another entity or club sends out a clear message that certain clubs have only paid lip-service to the policy rather than entered into the spirit of it. In this case, the wording of the policy 'must have a women's first team or be associated to someone that has' almost encourages the practice.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the policy makes no stipulations regarding professional legally binding contracts. This omission, once again, buttresses a paradigm which continues to treat women footballers with disrespect encouraging precarity and amateurism. It is assumed perhaps, that given the enormous capital flows that men's football moves that it may not be necessary to make specific mention of professionalism in legislation. In the absence of clear institutional guidelines, maybe professionalism will take root as a result of a more informal *obligatoriedade*. In time the policy may cause a delayed domino effect as a critical mass of clubs seek to imitate the few clubs who have already provided year-round contracts and conditions that could credibly be described as professional. In this regard, even if, for numerous reasons, it does not immediately trigger professional women's football, it may well inadvertently be a stepping stone on the way to doing so. For that reason, despite all its loopholes, the effect it has upon reinforcing the centre and marginalising the periphery, and its lack of contractual guarantees for players, does provide something to build on and consolidates women's football as part of every major club in South America. The battle to turn sometimes negative inclusion into being equal partners in each club is a longer-term one which is already underway. The following chapters consider

players' experiences of the institutional environment showing how, in some ways, *obligatoriedade* has helped grow the women's game providing more opportunities at more clubs but at the same time has reinforced the notion of women's football being a sub-priority which must be legislated for in order to participate at the highest level for the highest prizes in the hegemonic men's game. Two of the clubs in the following chapters have only indirectly been affected by *obligatoriedade*, whilst Santos FC, a regular participant in the male Copa Libertadores, is directly affected.

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## **Chapter 4 –The Team from the Heart of the Amazon**

### **Introduction**

At first glance, the choice to carry out an ethnography with Iranduba Esporte Clube may appear counterintuitive. The development model for South American women's club football in recent years has been characterised by the priority given to the integration of women into the traditionally male-dominated clubs. This paradigm shift is inextricably linked to the South American confederation CONMEBOL's flagship policy requiring the larger traditional clubs to open a women's division in order to keep their seat at the top table in the lucrative men's Copa Libertadores (Barreira et al., 2020; Goellner, 2021). This policy, as outlined in earlier chapters, is driven by the confederation wishing not to look out of step with global policy prescriptions. In turn, this has changed the landscape of women's football on the continent. It has undoubtedly multiplied the number of opportunities for women players across the continent to earn from the game. However, on many occasions, there has already been evidence that women's divisions within the traditional clubs have been treated merely as an (obligatory) addendum to the main part of the club (Mendonça, 2019). In this way, male hegemony over the game has not only been left untouched but, arguably has even been consolidated by the changes. In summary, to some degree the women's game is markedly more visible than it was a decade ago (Rial, 2013b), however it is already clear that dislodging the everyday banal patriarchy pervasive in many of the leading clubs, will be a much greater undertaking.

For precisely this reason, this chapter draws upon an ethnographic visit to a club which is a clear outlier to the paradigm described above. Iranduba Esporte Clube differs significantly from many of its rivals insofar as its women's team is the main attraction and the principal concern of the club's owners. For example, the club president Amarildo Dutra

told me that the women's team always occupies over two-thirds of the club's budget. Being from Manaus, a place as distant as possible from the 'country of football' social imaginary (Fontes & Buarque de Holanda, 2014; Goldblatt, 2014; Kittleson, 2014; Bocketti, 2016), the club and players are able to mobilise an oppositional antagonistic identity pitting the local Amazonian team against the *clubes de camisa* (big name clubs) of the perceived economic, sporting and political centre.

Despite many of the laudable achievements of the club, this chapter finds both ruptures and continuities of a gendered social order expressed through football. In different ways to the others, Iranduba also typifies the peculiar state of semi-professionalisation at which the women's game currently finds itself (Garton, 2020; Garton et al., 2021). To even be at this stage of semi-professionalisation marks significant progress as less than ten years ago it was only possible to earn a living even semi-professionally in 30 out of 123 FIFA-listed women's football countries (Agergaard & Tiesler, 2014, p.3). On the one hand, the surprise success of the club proffers a profound symbolic challenge and offers an alternative to the top-down mainstream development model. By the same token there are numerous instances which evidence deep-rooted unacknowledged assumptions about the social masculinity of football. The women players are presented as being strong characters with considerable control over their career paths. The reality on the ground is one of precarious contracts, the continued objectification of women and the persistence of male gatekeepers overseeing every step of the women's sporting lives. As Toffoletti (2016, p.200) has it 'the complexities of a postfeminist cultural landscape cast women as empowered agents and yet it fails to dislodge the persistent devaluing and marginalisation of female athletes and women's sporting pursuits more generally'. This chapter, then, considers the balance of these experiences arguing that the particularities of Manaus, as a place outside the country's traditional (masculine) football imaginary, has allowed women's football to make significant

ground in a short space of time in ways that would be difficult, if not impossible, elsewhere in the country.

I travelled to Manaus in October 2018 just as Iranduba were about to host the 2018 Women's Copa Libertadores. This event represented the culmination of a period of breakneck growth for the club. Unexpectedly they challenged many of the country's *clubes de camisa* (big-name clubs) on a regular basis in women's competitions. In 2017 they reached the semi finals of the Brazilian women's championship and in 2018 they had another run to the quarter finals. Meanwhile the Iranduba men's team languish in the fourth division of Brazilian football not even making a serious impact on the Amazonian state league.

At 7.45am the humidity in the Amazonian city of Manaus is already stifling. The cadences of cicadas, the chirping of crickets and the incessant noise of hundreds (or thousands) of white-winged parakeets perched on the trees along the Avenida Efigênio Salas all compete with the sounds and sights of urban sprawl. Owing to the climate of the Amazon region all Iranduba's training sessions begin at 8am or earlier to avoid the unbearable midday heat. The audible presence of nature juxtaposed with urbanity remind me that, in a context of unprecedented climate change and environmental destruction, I am in a region inextricably linked to our survival as a species. Seeing the reality of Manaus, a humanitarian crisis of urban migration from Venezuela, crawling city traffic visibly churning out pollution, and smoke billowing from industrial zone factories brings home what a symbolic battleground for conflicting visions of the future of Brazil, and indeed the planet, this is. These particularities of Manaus, I will learn, explain in large part the club's appeal and success. I return to thinking about the purpose of my visit – to see one of the surprise success stories of Brazilian women's football -Iranduba – and wonder what it is about Manaus that has allowed women's football to take centre stage in a country where football ordinarily carries such deeply gendered meanings. Is it possible that women's football will grow from the periphery of the

country's social imaginary rather than from the centre? Manaus is an outpost in every regard: politically, economically and, far from coincidentally, in a sporting sense too. For this reason, it has been possible for a women's team to take centre stage in a country with a distinctly masculinised footballing identity. Manauarans are able to feel a loose sense of belonging to the country of football (Kittleson, 2014; Goldblatt, 2014; Bocketti, 2016) and at the same time feel estranged from it, creating a fierce centre-periphery antagonism which the club feeds on. Moreover, the approach of the club places women's football at the centre of its business model rather than making it merely a sub-division of a men's team. These factors have meant that the players have embraced their role at the club and built a meaningful relationship with the public.

On the way to my first training session with Iranduba our relatively short trip takes in dozens of precarious informal settlements.<sup>33</sup> As the traffic grinds to a standstill once again, my final destination, the Barbosa Filho training ground, comes into view beyond the disturbingly normalised presence of the growing Venezuelan diaspora fleeing a humanitarian crisis. I ask my taxi driver if he knows anything about Iranduba: a surprise local success story of recent years. He replies that the municipality south of the Rio Negro is a point of local pride. Its rich biodiversity means it is frequented by foreign academics like me. This gives me some insight into the connotations the chosen club name Iranduba conjures in the local imaginary.<sup>34</sup> I reformulate my question to include 'women's football team'. He has heard of them too, but like many Manauarans he has always supported Rio giants Flamengo.<sup>35</sup>

Iranduba have won the Amazonian women's championship six consecutive times and have

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<sup>33</sup> A number of the favelas near the Free Trade Zone have names like Xerox, Panasonic and Sharp, acknowledging the various multinationals who at one time or another invested in the Manaus experiment (Brianezi, 2013, p.83). Each is pronounced according to Brazilian phonetics. Due to catastrophic performance Sharp has abandoned the Americas everywhere except Brazil.

<sup>34</sup> There is in fact another women's football team in the city named 3B (or triple B) after owner Dom Bosco Brasil Bindá, which has also enjoyed relative success at national level.

<sup>35</sup> In the pre-globalised era Clube de Regatas do Flamengo could make a credible claim to be the club with the largest fanbase on the planet. The Rio club traditionally draws support from across the country.

reached the semi-final of the Women's Brazilian Championship too. Whilst he has never seen them play he has heard and read about them filling the Arena da Amazônia – a stadium tipped to become a white elephant after the 2014 Brazil World Cup (Villoro, 2016, p.248).

We arrive at our destination. I am warned to put much more insect repellent and sun cream on as everyone knows there are a lot of dengue carrying mosquitoes in this area.

Upon getting out of the car I initially wonder if I have come to the right place. Having read every article and watched every videoclip I could find about Esporte Clube Iranduba prior to fieldwork I had credulously believed a team which performs in the glamour of a sparkling new World Cup stadium like the Arena da Amazônia would also be training in swanky facilities befitting of often international level women footballers.<sup>36</sup> I eventually see a ramshackle training ground in the distance that I later discover belongs to lowly local Serie D men's team Nacional FC.<sup>37</sup> At this point I glimpse the faces of three established Brazilian international players: Andressinha, Camilinha and Raquel.<sup>38</sup> Andressinha and Camilinha are both contracted to the United States NWSL<sup>39</sup>, whereas Raquel has just returned from playing in the Spanish women's league. The three have been loaned in at considerable expense by Iranduba especially to compete in the Women's Copa Libertadores in December 2018. Their mid-November arrival coincides with mine. They appear jetlagged and justifiably a little spaced out but seem relatively unperturbed, or at least unsurprised, by being asked to turn up early the next day after long flights to train immediately. It appears par for the course.

Andressinha clearly knows many of the other players and is given a hero's welcome. She has a rapport with players from a previous loan spell. She competed in the Amazonian league for

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<sup>36</sup> The Arena da Amazônia was one of a number of purpose-built stadiums built at considerable expense for the 2014 Brazil World Cup.

<sup>37</sup> Nacional FC are the oldest club in the state of Amazonas. In the 1970s and early 1980s they participated in Serie A with a highest finish of 16<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> There is a long tradition of referring to Brazilian players both by first name and by diminutives and nicknames, a custom which may be misread as rude or condescending by other cultures. For more on this see Piovezani (2011, 2012)

<sup>39</sup> The National Women's Soccer league, the latest incarnation (after several aborted attempts) to launch a commercially successful US Women's Soccer league, launched in 2012.



the club in 2018. The lack of synchronicity between the North American and Brazilian seasons, along with their relatively short length means that star-name players like Andressinha are in the privileged position (relative to other women players) of being able to play both the North and South American ‘seasons’, thus not falling out of practice for prolonged periods. I also see Djeni, Monalisa and Koki, three other well-known players and mainstays of the Iranduba project. My contact Lauro Tentardini, a Director of Iranduba, greets me and introduces me to the team and all of the staff. The team are used to announced and unannounced media attention and so are not at all surprised at receiving yet another visitor. Tentardini announces that there is little time to lose and the training session begins.

### **Locating the fieldwork site**

#### ***Modernity in the Forest***

Manaus is a sizeable city by any standards. It has both the 7<sup>th</sup> largest GDP and is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest city in Brazil with 2,182,763 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2019b). Amazonia’s other large city, Belém is of a similar size – meaning the great majority of the Amazon states’ population are urban. Despite narratives suggesting otherwise, Manaus and the Amazon have been integrated within the systems of global trade for over half of a millennium. The steady growth of Manaus has been punctuated by two paradigmatic and fleeting periods of boom capitalism – firstly the *ciclo de borracha* (rubber boom) from 1879 to 1912 and secondly the post-1967 development in the free trade manufacturing economy which brought mass migration to the city (Brianezi, 2013; Despres, 1991; Seráfico & Seráfico, 2005). The free trade zone has seen more than a tenfold increase in the population of Manaus from just 200,000 in 1960, a period in which, for the first time on record, Manaus has become home to around 60% of the population of the Amazonas

state<sup>40</sup> (CEPAL, 2007). These boom phases saw the ruling class attempt to re-imagine Manaus as a modern cosmopolitan city (Chernela & Pereira, 2018). Coinciding with the *belle époque* in Europe, at the peak of the rubber boom, then governor Eduardo Gonçalves Ribeiro (1892 to 1896) embarked on a programme of ambitious developments aimed at turning the city into the ‘Paris of the Jungle’. With electric lights, an ornate cathedral, paved roads, a British-designed floating wharf, architecturally advanced bridges and the Opera House as the jewel in its crown, the aesthetic makeover was complete (Despres, 1991; Brianezi, 2013; Zouein, 2016). A period of substantial international investment and the levying of steep export duties meant that Manaus enjoyed electricity before London, telephones before Rio de Janeiro, and a network of electric trams at a time when New Yorkers were still riding in horse-drawn coaches (Burns, 1965; Zouein, 2016; Pinheiro, 2018). A desire for the rest of the world to acknowledge this rapid embrace of modernity is discernible in a study of late nineteenth century Manaus postcards which attempt to represent the advanced ‘technometropolis’ to the world (Oakdale & Watson, 2018; Zouein, 2016). Nonetheless these discourses have been undermined in two crucial ways: firstly, by an inability to universalise progress. That is to say, its progress has been fleeting and built upon extreme inequality. Secondly, its discursive purchase has always been overpowered by the pervasive Eurocentric imaginary that continues to see the Amazon as a place of nature or an anachronistic and non-modern place (Killick, 2018).<sup>41</sup> The Amazon is persistently imagined as the antithesis of modernity (Nugent & Harris, 2004). Reformulated by Oakdale and Watson (2018, p.1)

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<sup>40</sup> Amazonas state has a land area of 1,570,745.7 km<sup>2</sup> which is roughly the size of metropolitan France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Greece combined. It would be the 16<sup>th</sup> largest nation in the world.

<sup>41</sup> When Manaus was announced as a host city for the 2014 Brazil World Cup, then-England manager Roy Hodgson instinctively named the city rather ‘the one to avoid’. Predictably, Hodgson’s diplomatic slip triggered a round of lazy, ignorant stereotyping from tabloid and broadsheet press alike (Coelho, 2014; Longman, 2014). Upon being criticised heavily, not least by Manaus mayor Arthur Virgilio, in an interview with Sky Sports (2014), Hodgson backtracked significantly suggesting ‘it may actually be rather titillating to visit Manaus, a location where the famous Werner Herzog film *Fitzcarraldo* was partially filmed’.

‘whether green hell or the lungs of the planet or simply a land out of time, the Amazon region is consistently seen as a space of nature rather than culture’. For its own discursive ends, the Eurocentric imaginary of the centre needs a dichotomous point of comparison which it can portray as the antithesis of modernity. For example, *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978) and *Imagining the Balkans* by Maria Todorova (2009) portray dyadic categories of analysis in which a necessarily nebulous geographical area is stigmatised by comparison to a central locus of modernity. The areas demarcate racial, political and social hierarchical orders and boundaries imposed by modernity. This is discernible in the Latin American context where value is attributed to whiteness, Europeanness, urbanity at the expense of blackness, indigeneity and nature (Quijano, 2000; Lugones, 2007; Mignolo, 2009, 2011). Whilst writers like Milton Hatoum (1990) rebut these arguments portraying Manaus as a liquid liminal space which resists these narratives, Manaus and the Amazon continue to be erroneously conflated as is convenient, as will be shown in this chapter.

The position of Manaus in the Brazilian social imaginary is crucial to the growth of Iranduba Esporte Clube. Football is a game which offers multiple symbolic opportunities to contest and reproduce prevailing discourses. Furthermore, the game is inextricably linked to urban expansion and imaginaries of modernity – neither of which tend to be associated with the Amazon. This explains, in part, how a successful women’s football team has caught the collective imagination of the Manaus public and beyond as a manifestation of modern sensibilities in a region still portrayed as pre-modern or even backward. Within its fanbase, I noted a fanatical passion which, thus far, is generally reserved for male clubs with much longer histories.

### **Irاندuba, Amazonas and Clube Esporte Irاندuba**



Figure 13 Iranduba looking across the Rio Negro (my own photo)



Figure 14 The Official Clube Esporte Iranduba logo

The club took its name from the municipality (shown above in Figure 13) and, even before embarking on fieldwork, this caught my attention. Iranduba means ‘the land of an abundance of honey or bees’ in Tupi Guaraní. At the instigation of president Dutra, the club

also has '*o clube do coração da floresta*' (the team from the heart of the Amazon) emblazoned on its merchandise (see figure 14).

### **Representing Iranduba/Amazonas**

Whilst the directors have clearly encouraged certain narratives, the following section sets out how over three months of ethnographic experience in Manaus, through a mix of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, I learnt that the way in which Iranduba as a club has caught the imagination of the Manauaran and Brazilian public has much more to do with the agency of the players themselves and the way in which they have engaged with playing for the club and the public alike. I argue this is possible, firstly due to the determination and enthusiasm of the players, in spite of many obstacles, and secondly, because of a perfect storm of circumstances thrown up by being in Manaus.

#### ***Players from the South East in the North West***

Only upon attending a number of training sessions did I realise that for the great majority of the club's players Manaus represents a home away from home. The club has uprooted a number of young aspiring players and brought them to the Amazon region. Owing to the lack of youth opportunities in the Amazon region (and many of the other states), the club pursued an accelerated route to getting a competitive women's team – they decided to recruit proven players from elsewhere in the country. Using the contacts of Lauro Tentardini (described in the institutions chapter), a significant number of players were brought to Manaus from Santa Catarina. This involved a challenging period of adaptation, almost akin to living abroad, for many players. Others joined from the North East and on occasions the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. Perhaps the shared experience of each being far from home in Amazonas has been the main factor influencing the strong bond that has developed between the players. Since the beginning of the Iranduba project there have been mainstays who have almost come to personify the club in different ways. One of these is Djeni Becker, who is part of the Santa

Catarina contingent. She has been one of the star players going on to represent Brazil at youth and senior level. She moved to Manaus at the age of twenty. At the beginning, she recalled immense difficulties in connecting with the public in Amazonas. She explained that at first bridging a perceived cultural gap was difficult as the players were initially pigeon-holed as outsiders to the region. It was perceived that as they were not from Manaus they were unlikely to represent the city and region with pride. As the team proved to be a runaway success these fears were quickly allayed. When interviewed Djeni concurred with Tentardini in believing the embrace of the club is, in large part, related to being successful and more than anything to the feeling of challenging and often beating the *clubes de camisa* – who to many Manauarans represent the country's political and social elites. This theme will be investigated in more detail later. A number of the players from Santa Catarina commented on the deep sense of isolation they felt upon joining the club. It was impossible to go home during the season and even visiting other places was out of the question. Each day at training it is evident that the players have consciously turned this negative into a positive. They seem intent on enjoying every moment at the club, knowing that the relatively short contract lengths in women's football mean that a visit home will soon come around again. The players have the strength of friendship that can only be built when facing challenges collectively in an unfamiliar context. This is particularly evident in the cliques between players from the South East, who make regular references to home, whilst embracing the place which has given them an opportunity to shine on the national stage. On an academic level a huge lacuna in the literature is the state of mental health of women footballers – given the precarious contracts, living conditions and discriminatory treatment many face. Only in the context of COVID has the topic begun to be recognised (Clarkson et al., 2020). Nonetheless, at training it was evident that the players were determined to turn this negative into a positive or at least put a brave face on each day.

In this vein, Priscila Back, who is from the interior of Paraná recalls making the move to Manaus. Crucially, she recalls unconditional support from her parents – a support that not all players have had and which is more likely to be present in places like the South East where women's football has long been on a better footing. She began, as per most players, joining games with male players, but moved to a women's team as soon as the opportunity presented itself. In spite of this, Priscila is clear that prejudice against women players is omnipresent: *'Acredito que toda mulher que joga futebol já tenha sofrido algum tipo de preconceito. Sempre tem aquelas perguntas desnecessárias... mas temos que ser educadas e responder* (I believe all women who play football have suffered some kind of prejudice. There are always the unnecessary questions....but we just have to be polite and answer them)'. Such is the ferocity of these reactions, she admits she has even considered quitting on multiple occasions. She emphasises that: *'Já pensei e penso até hoje sobre parar de jogar futebol, principalmente por ter que ficar longe da minha família'* (I have already thought about and still think about quitting, mainly because of having to be so far from home). Priscila's career has taken her to Paraguay and even to Trinidad & Tobago, two countries where she struggled with the language as much as other adaptation issues. From numerous similar conversations over the course of this fieldwork it seems Priscila typifies the determination and sacrifices of women players, along with the soul-searching they do about whether it is all worth it. The continued presence of the players, at training each day, in the stadiums where they face discrimination, and their continued willingness to uproot to new cities and even countries, suggest that they ultimately believe it is worth it.

Laudably, Iranduba is a club that has tried to compete in the youth tournaments in order to create a base for the senior squad and to develop future players. The lack of youth opportunities been a long-standing problem which stunted the growth of women's football in Brazil – a problem many of the *clubes de camisa* have not done enough to address. In this

context, Iranduba has given much needed opportunities to developing players – though once again these are mostly recruited from states where women’s football is on a better footing at youth level. Running a team of largely fifteen, sixteen or seventeen-year-old young players from various parts of the country clearly comes with some duty of care, particularly when bringing them to a region where they cannot easily return to family at weekends, or at all during the season. Players reach the club at a very early age and are expected to adapt to entirely new surroundings away from family, with minimal help. Clubs often house players together in large groups to save on expenses. This is true of both major women’s clubs in Manaus – both 3B and Iranduba. The excellent spirit within the group notwithstanding, the experience of adapting to communal living arrangements in Manaus must be extremely tough for young players. Monalisa Belém, from the interior of Tocantins explained how she joined at just sixteen before completing secondary education. More recently one of the country’s most promising young players Júlia Beatriz, migrated to Manaus from Teresina, Piauí at just seventeen. The CBF introduced Under 18 and Under 16 women’s tournaments for the first time in 2019. Iranduba reached the semi-final of the Under 18 tournament. Indeed, the ‘senior’ Iranduba squad, which reached the semi-finals of the senior women’s Brasileirão in 2017, and the quarter-finals in 2018, was comprised of a remarkably young squad with only occasional senior professionals who shoulder the burden of working as surrogate coaches and mentors. Mirroring a long-standing problem of men’s football, the moral issues attached to separating players from parents and family at a young age are not given sufficient attention either by clubs or by the academic literature to date. Indeed, particularly at clubs like Iranduba, provision to deal with issues of welfare is wafer-thin. The mental health of women footballers, and indeed male footballers, is a delicate area where research is urgently required. Many clubs build squads of thirty plus players, meaning that at any given time more than half of the players are not even playing games, leaving them with time on their hands to reflect or



indeed to fall into depression and anxiety without the support of family or even friends from their hometowns. The following section suggests that these circumstances provide fertile ground for fast-growing religious groups, particularly evangelical, where players often find solace while away from home.

### ***Banal Religiosity***

I am immediately struck by the omnipresence of prayer and religion at each training session. Nobody kicks a ball until every player has gathered in a team huddle for the morning prayer. The person who leads this changes each day, but every day the prayer will last between two and three minutes and will take in a multitude of themes from wanting hunger and poverty in Brazil to reduce, to simply wanting to win the next match. Beyond this, away from the training ground one of the most common meeting places for players is the church. Away from home this gives players a social outlet and a sense of routine that provides a coping mechanism in an unfamiliar place. Given that, added to this, many players have emerged from particularly troubled backgrounds in the first place, it is unsurprising that many turn to religion as an outlet. This has been termed ‘banal religiosity’ in reference to the fact that religious practices or gestures form an unacknowledged part of routine (Rial, 2012, 2013c). From interview material, the absence of communal prayer before a game is one of the first aspects which Brazilian women players who have played abroad first note. Beyond this, banal religiosity is also often present in goal celebrations, pre-match huddles, before and after penalties and during after-match celebrations. One of the players who is particularly devout is the goalkeeper Rubi. She explains that ‘antes de cada jogo, fico mais quieta conversando com Deus e pensando nas situações que podem ocorrer durante o jogo e como tenho que me portar diante de cada uma delas. Isso facilita na hora das tomadas de decisões que às vezes tem que ser tomadas em fração de segundos (before each game, I like to be quiet, speaking with God and thinking about situations that could happen during the match and how I need to deal with them.

This makes it easier to take the kind of decisions that need to be made in milliseconds). In the absence of parental or authority figures the players tend to look for surrogate versions. In addition, the deep political polarisation of Brazilian society and the accompanying recent surge of Pentecostalism mean that it is unsurprising that players look for a consistent moral cosmology with which to order their fragmented lives. Players seem attracted by the comforting presence of moral absolutes which help them to make sense of the situations in which they find themselves. Beyond this, it gives them a routine outside of training sessions and an opportunity to meet others with similar interests. Other than Rial (2012), there has been very little research to date that deals with the confluence of football and religion. Further research as to how religious beliefs dialogue with the day-to-day struggles of women players would contribute greatly.

#### ***A Flechada – Evoking/Appropriating the Amazons***

Early on in my stay with Iranduba I became aware of a popular pre-match ritual whereby the players mimic firing an arrow (see figure 17 below). It is a shtick often repeated when the club signs a new player.<sup>42</sup> My immediate instinct was to believe that this formed part of a wider strategic instrumentalisation of indigeneity emanating from the club's hierarchy (already responsible for *o clube do coração da Floresta*, the name Iranduba, the Amazon green kit). It would appear that whilst the club hierarchy has appropriated the gimmick, using it for official photoshoots, the gesture originated with the players themselves, referring to indigenous stereotypes of the Amazon which remain pervasive.<sup>43</sup> This manifestation of player agency was particularly interesting as a body of work testifies to the multifarious ways women players use strategies from their own creativity to promote themselves in the absence of significant media or institutional support. The players engage in what Pooley (2010, p.78)

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<sup>42</sup> For example, when the club signed Yoreli Rincón from Atlético Huila in January 2019 (@yorelirincon, 2018c)

<sup>43</sup> Stripped of its cultural context the *flechada*/arrow motion also appears to mimic the gesture popularised by Usain Bolt

calls ‘calculated authenticity’. In other words, consciously or otherwise, the players are ‘constructing themselves as empowered, in-control and can-do subjects at the nexus of post-feminist discourses that celebrate women’s self-production and the broadcasting of *authentic* female identities’ (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b, p.18).

One quiet morning at training, I broached the topic, sensing it to be of significance in terms of the players’ integration here in Manaus. Various players were keen to talk about the *flechada* (arrow-motion) as they felt it represents the way in which they, as outsiders to the region, had both embraced and been embraced as being representatives of Amazonas.



Figure 15 Iranduba players make the ‘flechada’ prior to a game at the Arena da Amazônia in Manaus (taken from Globo Esporte)

The *flechada* (shown in Figure 15) became part of that feeling which clearly goes beyond football – mocking the racist stereotyping and the reductionist way the Amazon is imagined by the rest of the country. The consensus is that it began at an away match in Araraquara, São Paulo state when a small but vocal group of Ferroviária supporters put their hands in front of their mouths and began making ‘Indian noises’ and shouting ‘*índias*’ at the Iranduba players. Upon scoring, the Iranduba players spontaneously celebrated in front of the home fans with the *flechada*. The gesture has been repeated ever since, especially at home games where the Manaus public, acutely aware of how Amazonas is portrayed and imagined, has instinctively

embraced this burlesque performance of ethnic identity. The players are clearly aware that it is delicate territory and whilst they laugh about it, they are savvy in realising its symbolic significance. A number of players from the South admitted that the Brazilian social imaginary tends to depict Manaus and the Amazon in backward terms. *'Ainda no 2018 os brasileiros acham que Manaus é um lugar culturalmente atrasado'* (Even now in 2018 Brazilian people see Manaus as a culturally backward place) one of the players added at training. Having experienced the reality of Manaus – composed largely of migrants from various regions of Brazil who came after the introduction of the 1967 Free Trade Zone – the players' spontaneous reaction to the racism of the crowd was not aggression or anger, but rather to mock it in an ironic way.

One of the more popular players with fans and within the club alike is Giselinha Teles. Whilst she is another of the players who followed director Lauro Tentardini from Kindermann, Giselinha and teammate and close friend Mayara Vaz actually hail from the Atlantic gateway to the Amazon: Belém do Pará<sup>44</sup>. Both players are of *mestiça* (mixed-race) appearance, which allows them, in a sense, to personify more convincingly the Iranduba Esporte Clube which has been constructed. Much of the discrimination players face justifies the need for an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1990), in particular one that takes into account the particularities and partial visibility of racism against indigenous peoples in the Brazilian context (Rocha, 2021). Moreover, there is a particular need for a nuanced approach in the case of football where recent research has discovered women players are often black and tend to come from poorer backgrounds (Martins et al., 2021).

Giselinha remembers another moment important in the consolidation of the *flechada* as part of the club. She dates it back to the club's run to the final of the 2016 Women's

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<sup>44</sup> The city was used to export the vast quantities of rubber emanating from the Amazon during the boom phase. It has a similar tropical rainforest climate to Manaus.

Under-20 competition. There was an impressive attendance for a youth game – 8,413 for the visit of Vasco da Gama (one of the prestigious Rio clubs) to the Arena da Amazônia (Amazonas Governo, 2016). Giselinha recalled that the crowd was fairly divided with approximately two-thirds supporting Iranduba but with the remaining third cheering for Vasco da Gama. After an extremely close penalty shoot-out Iranduba prevailed and went to celebrate with the local fans who had helped them to victory. At this point, in frustration one of the Vasco fans hurled a trainer from the second tier of the stand at the Iranduba players. Luckily it did not hit anyone. Spontaneously, the players celebrated with the shoe as a ‘trophy’ of victory and began making the *flechada* motion at the Vasco supporters to show that the prestigious *clube de camisa* had been picked off by the Amazonian team. In recounting the story, Giselinha recognises that it could be seen as a ‘brincadeira de mau gosto’ (A joke that was in bad taste) but feels strongly that most people would have understood that the players were parodying racist attitudes stigmatising the Amazon region. There is another version recounting the birth of the *flechada* motion. By performing both football, an activity inextricably linked with tropes of modernity, and simultaneously mocking the Amazon of the Eurocentric imagination, the players immediately gained the respect of a public who had previously regarded them as outsiders. Indeed, according to the players I spoke to during fieldwork, even the Manauarans who had come to support Vasco acknowledged that the expression of how their region is portrayed elsewhere was realistic and thus worthy of being parodied.

### ***Regional Pride at the Copa Libertadores 2018 Manaus***

From the moment I first set foot on the training ground in Manaus, all the players talked about the hosting of the 2018 Women’s Copa Libertadores. The club hierarchy was hell-bent on not only successfully hosting the largest continental club competition in women’s football,

but actually winning it to prove a point.<sup>45</sup> At one point the ambitious hierarchy of the club even made enquiries about loaning six-times-world-player-of-the-year Marta Vieira da Silva for the duration of the Copa Libertadores tournament (Dantas, 2018; Lima, 2018). This endeavour never got off the ground.

The 2018 Copa Libertadores tournament brings a number of hitherto unseen journalists to the Iranduba training sessions I attend. Club officials do not seem to know who many of them are. There is no one to check their credentials. At some training sessions members of the public are allowed to watch – mostly children – so they can get photos with their favourite player when the session finishes. Each day seems to bring more members of the public and a larger huddle of eager journalists reporting on preparations for the tournament.

When the actual matches begin, the extent of the bond between players and fans becomes clear. Each team is only allowed a squad of twenty-two players for the tournament. This means a good dozen of Iranduba's players are left out of the tournament squad. Rather than sulk about this, the players mingle with the fans to watch the game, happily signing autographs and posing for photographs. This level of accessibility to players is unthinkable in men's football, where a well-known player would rarely be seen out in public and if he was would be flanked by bodyguards. This allows a relationship to develop between players and fans that belongs to a bygone age in men's football. Speaking to fans is easy, so I can easily corroborate the strong desire to take on the traditional sides that the players cite as a main reason for the club's success. Indeed, many of the fans' anecdotes usually include a fierce battle with a team from São Paulo or Rio. They include an enmity with those cities and usually, for my benefit, it is clarified that Manauarans feel those places look down on them.

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<sup>45</sup> To contextualise a little it is worth mentioning that, prior to my visit in 2018, teams from São Paulo state had won seven out of nine editions of the continental tournament the women's Copa Libertadores since it began in 2009. The other two editions were won by Colo Colo of Chile and Sporting Limpeño of Paraguay.

Clichéd social representations of the region have created a dyadic relationship between the perceived centre of the nation (particularly São Paulo and Rio) and a supposedly barbaric and backwards periphery (ethnically Amazonas and in more racialised terms the Northeast).

The engagement of players with the crowd is clearly sincere. Especially in Manaus the players are acutely aware that '*a gente que assiste paga nossos salários*' (The public pay our salaries). This thought is not a natural link to make at other clubs, in Brazil or Colombia for example, where women's football remains free. These elements are important in allowing a full professionalisation to happen, which means that women's football can offer genuine career opportunities. The game finds itself in a transitional period – but already there are signs that players from extremely underprivileged backgrounds are benefitting from its gradual growth. The following section considers two such cases.

### **Football and Social Mobility**

#### ***Coming Up Tough: Brenda Woch***

Whilst there is a lot of work to do with regard to player welfare, it is clear that football provides a much-needed distraction from, or even a lifeline for, players who have grown up in the violent unforgiving world of the Brazilian periphery. Listening to tales of the urban periphery reminds me of another non-geographical centre/periphery divide in Brazil. The urban periphery of any sizeable city is as far removed from comfortable middle-class Brazil as São Paulo is from Manaus. My experience of the Brazilian periphery is non-existent or at best anecdotal. I could have visited the diluted versions of favelas which have been commodified for tourists but felt there would be little point. The players' recollections give me much needed insight into the extent of social division in the country. One such case at Iranduba is that of Brenda Woch. Brenda, like many women players of this footballing generation in Brazil, began playing mixed gender football in the street at the age of six in her hometown of Maceió, Alagoas. From an early age her talent was recognised and Brenda saw

the game as a potential route out of the grinding poverty which characterised her youth.

Through sheer insistence at the age of twelve she found herself in a boy's team called Parma Brejal. Tragically the same year her mother was murdered. Brenda recalls the day her life changed: *'Minha mãe vendia drogas para sustentar a família, somos oito filhos. Ela entrou no mundo do crime para nos dar de comer. Quando eu tinha doze anos, invadiram nossa casa e atiraram na minha mãe. Eu estava ao lado dela, presenciei tudo, vi eles tirarem a vida dela. Depois de um ano, meu irmão Diego, que era usuário de drogas, também foi assassinado. E no ano seguinte, mataram meu pai'* (My mum sold drugs to pay for our upkeep, there are eight of us to support. She got involved in the world of crime in order to put food on the table. When I was twelve they broke into our house and shot her. I was by her side, I saw everything. I saw them take her life. A year later, my brother Diego, who was a user, was also murdered. And the following year they murdered my father). In the absence of the state, of any kind of formal therapy, Brenda took refuge in football:

*não deixei me abalar, sempre segui meu sonho de ser jogadora de futebol. Minha fé em Jesus e a vontade de orgulhar minha mãe me deram forças.. Passei muitos anos sem conseguir falar sobre o assassinato da minha mãe, que vi com meus próprios olhos, porque doía muito. Mas hoje quero contar, por saber que posso ajudar muitas meninas que necessitam e que me têm como espelho. (I didn't allow myself to give up. I always followed my dream of being a footballer. My faith in Jesus and wanting to make my mum proud gave me the strength. I spent years without being able to talk about the murder of my mum, the murder that I saw with my own eyes, because it hurt so much. But today, I want to tell the story, because I know I can help so many others that need it, and that see me as a role-model).*



After these tragic events, Brenda led a nomadic existence, living with various relatives for short-term periods. At fifteen she joined another local neighbourhood team, Craques do Futuro. Similar to many other women players Brenda was first spotted by scouts when she was playing futsal. She was playing in an indoor tournament organised by the SESI when she was seen by San Francisco do Conde (a team from Salvador, Bahia). She moved there at seventeen but struggled to settle. For this reason she returned to Maceió where she joined União Desportiva competing in the Serie A2 and in the futsal league. Finally, Woch shone in this team and was called up for the Brazilian Under 20 national team. From this moment forward she became a regular in the Brazilian under 20 team and was signed first by 3B and finally by Iranduba. Brenda managed to adapt to Manaus and is a popular player within the group. While representing the under 20 Brazil team she won the Copa America in Ecuador. She recalls that ‘para uma menina que perdeu tudo, foi muito importante ser campeã’ (for a girl who lost everything, it was so important to be a champion). Football’s importance also goes way beyond the pitch. Brenda explains that one of the most abiding memories in her young career was visiting an orphanage of Ecuadorian children with the Brazilian national side that year. She speaks passionately about it making her grateful for the family memories she has and of it making her want to help disadvantaged children after her career. Brenda adds that owning a house where all her family can stay is among her greatest ambitions. The growth of women’s football is such that these ambitions, whilst not easy to fulfil, appear more possible each day.

### ***Koki: Between Generations***

Renata Costa is another prominent Afro-Brazilian from an underprivileged background. Better known to teammates as Koki, Costa is clearly respected on the training ground owing to her multiple achievements wearing the famous yellow shirt of Brazil. She played three World Cups and three Olympic tournaments for Brazil, partnering Aline Pellegrino, as well

as winning the Copa America and Panamerican games. Despite all these achievements, Koki explains how she represented Brazil at the World Cup in 2003 before she received her first salary as a player in 2005. Before receiving a paid position, Koki played for Portuguesa Londrinense and Marília. Like many players Koki began playing futsal and street football, in the absence of other outlets for women players. Similar to Pellegrino, when asked whether women's football has advanced, the transition during her own career tells her it clearly has. Nonetheless Costa believes that much needs to be done at all levels to really establish women's football. Unlike many less experienced players Koki is quick to point out that the experience of women's football is not significantly different or better in many European countries. Koki's travels took her to Denmark, Sweden and Russia. Costa explains that she played in Denmark in 2008, Sweden in 2009 and finally Russia in 2014 and 2015. She points out that Denmark only had two strong teams but otherwise was characterised by amateur conditions and competitive imbalance. She is most complimentary about Sweden, pointing out that Marta remained there so long she is now a Swedish citizen and finally said that in Russia, though the pay is a lot better, the level is actually considerably lower than that of Brazil. This is an insightful comment which warns against the danger of reductionist analysis which only takes economic factors into consideration. In the cases of the two Scandinavian countries she emphasises the manner in which the supporters and club hierarchies treat women's players seriously. She now criticises the fact that in Brazil most clubs do not charge to get into women's matches (not the case with Iranduba). Similarly, she notes an almost banal gender differentiation in the way *clubes de camisa* hype *clássicos* (derbies) in the men's game but don't even count the female equivalent games as *clássicos*. Koki insists that those small details make a huge difference. In this respect she believes the marketing of women's football within *clubes de camisa* must improve drastically. Despite her reservations about the current situation, Koki is confident that greater changes are coming. She concludes

that the presence of women's football is going to become more normalised and that from there people will see women's football 'com outros olhos' (in another way). Koki is at the back end of her career and like many senior women players fully intends to continue in football. A generation of women of Koki's experience in coaching roles would surely make a difference in the treatment of players. She is among the last of the players who can remember women's football being an unpaid activity, and thus is well placed to comment on the ruptures and continuities in the women's game. The following years will be crucial for players like Koki who want to formalise their vast experience and, in her words, 'give something back' by coaching others. It is hard to imagine how these experienced figures, who already act as surrogate coaches, could do more. The question is whether the doors will be open for them when they apply for positions. This leads to the next section which considers the final barrier or glass ceiling that has yet to be broken – the incursion of women en masse into positions of authority within the game. There are a few pioneers, like Emily Lima, who managed the national side, and Aline Pellegrino who now oversees women's football for the CBF. Will they become the rule rather than the exception?

### **Continuities of a Gendered Social Order**

#### ***Male Coaches and Mansplaining***

One of the most notable aspects of Iranduba is the dominance of male figures in technical roles. The deficit of women coaches has been covered amply but usually in other countries and in other sports (Norman, 2008; Lavoie & Dutove, 2012; Norman, 2010; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). The club employed women to carry out media work on behalf of the team, and obviously women players. Beyond this there was no other female representation – this is an important factor as it surely affects self-perception and maybe even causes the players to devalue themselves. For that reason pioneering women coaches like Emily Lima and Tatiele Silveira from Brazil and Vanessa Arauz from Ecuador are so important in

breaking the cycle. While I was with Iranduba the team manager was Igor Cearense. He gained experience at the top level, most notably Flamengo, Coritiba and Fortaleza before winding down his career with Peñarol and Nacional.<sup>46</sup> After gaining some managerial experience with fourth division amateur male teams in Manaus he was placed in charge of Iranduba. To date Iranduba Women have never appointed a female manager. This is clearly problematic for the aspirations of a player like Koki.

The career of Andressinha, one of the current stars of the national team, is located within the next generation. By the player's own assessment conditions are improving. Andressinha is the first to admit that there are more opportunities now and that she has had things easier than some of the more senior players. She is similarly quick, however, to cut short the notion that prejudice has somehow disappeared. Referring diplomatically to male gatekeepers Andressinha explains that: 'talvez alguns possam ter esse receio de que a mulher não vá entender sobre o que está falando, mas na parte tática aí eu me garanto' (perhaps some of them have this fear that women are not going to understand what they are talking about, but talking about tactics I feel more than confident). This chimes with experiences of watching players on the training ground. A tendency towards simply playing full-scale matches rather than focusing on tactical areas on a more micro-level could be seen as merely a primitive or underdeveloped tactical understanding of the game. Nonetheless, there is a convincing case, backed up by a number of other players' remarks, that machismo or a sense of male sporting superiority is at the root of this. There is a clear tendency for male gatekeepers to treat women's football entirely differently to the men's game (or as a deeply inferior sub-division of men's football) and not to engage in detail with tactical issues. There is an overly jovial atmosphere at times on the training ground, which detracts from the seriousness of the task-

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<sup>46</sup> Two of Manaus' major clubs Peñarol and Nacional are named after Uruguay's two largest clubs. Coritiba of Curitiba was named so by the German immigrants who formed the club, as per the old name of the state capital.

in-hand. When tactical matters are touched upon, it is generally in a superficial way, with a tone that subconsciously or otherwise, suggests that the female player receiving the explanation is likely to understand only partially what was being explained. Andressinha clearly recognises a certain tendency towards mansplaining in the current coaching team-player relations, which at Iranduba are always male-female and in many cases hierarchical in tone and language. This appears to constitute one of the principal barriers that the new generation faces. Male coaching staff and managers appear as a final bastion of male hegemony in football. Until a critical mass of ex-women professionals are involved on the coaching side, there is a fair chance that consciously or otherwise, there will not be sufficient technical development for players, or that the players will feel talked down to. The problems do not stop at mansplaining. The following issue is perhaps exacerbated by the media – but can also happen on the training ground.

### ***Foregrounding Whiteness***

During my stay another persistent factor was the objectification of certain players. This is a long-standing problem in Brazil – to the point where a tournament took place where only players considered beautiful were encouraged to join teams (Knijnik & Horton, 2013a). Little appears to have changed in this regard. There is a strong sense on the training ground of an idealised type of player. The two players who receive by far the greatest attention are Djene Becker and Andressinha Machry – both now part of the senior international squad. It may be coincidence as the pair are without doubt two of the best midfielders in Brazilian women's football, but there seems to be a strong bias towards players of European appearance as well as name. The players who have played abroad also garner greater prestige, though they do not always happen to be those of European appearance. The training ground today makes me think of Brazil's bid to host the 2023 Women's World Cup. From the early stages, the bid made nominal mention of Manaus as the capital of women's football without giving any

sense of how or why. Moreover, the bid chose an Iranduba player for the front cover (FIFA, 2020b).



*Figure 16 Djenifer Becker from the 2014 Canada Under-20 World Cup (used as front cover of CBF Women's World Cup 2023 bid)*

Rather than using the image of any of the best-known experienced senior players who had taken Brazil Women to World Cup and Olympic finals, such as Marta, Formiga, Cristiane, Maurine, Formiga and Érika, the cover page foregrounds Djeni Becker (shown in Figure 16), playing at The Women's World Cup Under 20 tournament in 2014. The foregrounding of Djeni appears symptomatic of framing players within a heterosexual male gaze and detracting from their athletic performance (Wood, 2018, p.576). A similar tendency occurs in US women's football where Alex Morgan (also an extremely accomplished player) receives similarly sustained media attention as an idealised type of American femininity. A regional documentary about Iranduba consistently foregrounds Djeni Becker (Majestic Produções Multimídia, 2016) and, in addition, the club hierarchy consistently choose her to give media interviews and to advertise the club, to the point where the player often spends prolonged periods of training tending to media work.

Even bearing in mind that Djeni Becker is the captain of the team, the frequency with which she is foregrounded in interviews, documentaries and promotional material provides a telling counterpoint to the appropriations of indigeneity harnessed to garner support for the team. The club carefully cultivates and invokes an oppositional ethnic identity, against the perceived centre and Europeanness of the South in order to galvanise local support. However, within the club, and the local and national media and football institutions, there are clear manifestations of the very Eurocentric imaginary Iranđuba uses as an oppositional force to garner support. As international team mate Andressinha explains ‘o que mais me incomoda, é quando focam mais na beleza do que no que está fazendo, como está jogando, o que está desenvolvendo dentro de campo. Falam mais da beleza do que sua própria vida, que é o esporte’ (what makes me most uncomfortable is when they focus more on beauty than on what we are doing, how we are playing, what is happening on the pitch. They talk more about beauty than about your life, which is the sport). Andressinha in this statement emphasises the extent to which players are reduced to appearance, to the point where the very activity to which they have dedicated their entire life is placed as secondary. The players’ views are often politically savvy and show an awareness of the issues at hand that can only come from experience. Beyond this, it is notable that across nine months in the field I could not discern any divisive consequences of the privileging of certain players – players seem to accept things ‘how they are’ and do not dwell on the issue. It is testament to the maturity of the players that they largely recognise the fundamental problems as being the result of wider institutional and structural discrimination rather than allowing the issues to divide them. Nonetheless, whilst I did not bear witness to any such animosity, it would be naïve on my part to believe that players openly express all their feelings about such matters or that I, particularly as a male researcher, would be likely to hear anything of such tensions.

In a similar vein, the players recalled another moment when Iranduba found themselves under the media spotlight. When they had a surprise run to the semi-finals of the women's Brasileirão in 2017, the sports program Globo Esporte Espetacular carried out a long feature on the secrets to the team's success (Globo Esporte Espetacular, 2017). The players recalled the frivolous fun nature of the feature. My personal interpretation was that the frivolous tone would never have been used in a feature on men's football and ultimately sought to diminish the importance of women's football. The feature begins with Djeni telling the now mythologised story of how the Iranduba *flechada* came into being, followed by an explanation of the club's popularity in Manaus. With the help of figures from the club hierarchy, the film then narrates the match day atmosphere: '*O vestiário com som, ambiente é o salão de beleza do Iranduba. A capitã Djenifer só joga cheirosa – passa perfume, desodorante, creme. Ela e todas.* (The boisterous Iranduba dressing room is like a beauty salon: The captain Djenifer always smells good when she plays – she puts perfume, deodorant and cream on herself and all the team). The final line betrays the way Djeni is made to personify the team as a sexualised figure. The treatment of Djeni owes as much to media coverage and is even mirrored by institutional representations – as the CBF World Cup bid showed. However, on numerous occasions the club reduces the player to body and appearance (Langton, 2009), instrumentalising her to generate the image they consider necessary to increase the club's popularity.

### ***Instrumentalising the players***

The feature touches upon another specificity of being a player at Iranduba. Players are expected to 'chip in' with extra-football duties aimed at promoting and helping the club. For example, for players who are not playing, the film narrates: '*enquanto isso a artilheira Gláucia, que está lesionada, vende picolé nas arquibancadas*' (while this goes on Gláucia, the striker, who is injured, sells lollies in the stand). Gláucia then adds '*temos que ajudar o*



*Irاندوبا vender picolé* (we need to help Irاندوبا sell lollies) with restrained enthusiasm. Gláucia is used beyond the usual contractual obligations of a footballer.<sup>47</sup> It is almost inconceivable that a male player would be asked to do the same. In some sense Irاندوبا being a ‘small recent start-up’ gives the club a pretext to ask players to carry out extra duties. Nonetheless, I’m not aware of the male team being asked to do these things. The club’s willingness to use women players to sell lollies, tickets, shirts and merchandise shows a sense of the club’s perceived absolute ownership of the players, a willingness to instrumentalise them and a denial or lack of concern for the players’ feelings. This usage of players beyond simply playing football, is explained by the director of marketing for Irاندوبا Adriano Pereira. He explained how the club goes about promoting its matches. He points out how the club ‘became aware’ of the popularity of ‘certain players’ and said that they were approached to help sell tickets for the club’s matches on their social media account. Pereira explains *‘queremos o público perto do clube, temos aberto as portas para o torcedor enxergar o time como um clube que representa o Estado do Amazonas e fazendo que o povo se sinta orgulhoso’* (we want the public to feel close to the club, we have tried to let the supporters see that the club represents Amazonas state and for people to feel proud of it). Giselinha explains how she used to help the club by selling its match tickets to fans in person *‘Pego a imagem do ingresso, com local, horário e coloco no meu Face. Eles passam o telefone e marco um lugar para entregar os ingressos. Pedem para tirar fotos, dar autógrafos, conversar’*. (I post pictures of the tickets with the place and the time on facebook. They pass me their phone numbers and I arrange a place with them to meet. They ask for photos, autographs and to chat a little).

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<sup>47</sup> In 2019 Gláucia, playing for Santos, would finish as the leading scorer in the Brazilian women’s championship.



Figure 17 Iranduba training at the Barbosa Filho training ground

As Bauer argues (2011, p.128), women will always have reasons to succumb to the temptation of objectifying themselves. In the case of players, there are multiple opportunities to make much-needed extra income advertising products for example. Nonetheless, it is worth noting players are often vulnerable to this kind of objectification as they are alone in a new environment away from their parents as young as sixteen, as the following section explains.

### **Ruptures with a Gendered Social Order – Manaus: A Perfect Storm?**

#### ***Home Match Culture/Public Interest***

At all the Iranduba games I attend, it is quite clear that fans identify strongly with, and recognise individual players in a way that is extremely rare in women's football. This is not matched by tannoy announcers who consistently get players' names, goalscorers and substitutes wrong to the point of it seeming intentional. With Iranduba as the central attraction at the Arena, the fans naturally go out of their way to get to know the players' names and to become familiar with their playing style. This stability is a given for men's

teams, however in many cases women's teams play at more than one venue, sometimes behind closed doors and also games can be moved at short notice. Attending games, it is clear that Iranduba has a 'home-match' culture and familiarity which is an example that must be repeated for women's club football to really establish itself in Brazil and indeed globally. Fans shout players names and are familiar with players' styles, strengths and weaknesses, temperaments, favoured foot and everything else that goes with genuine interest. The fact this is relatively rare in women's football speaks to the lack of social capital the women's game has accrued within many established male clubs.

Speaking with Iranduba players there is little doubt that they feel something unique about playing football in the city of Manaus. Indeed, such is the strength of this feeling, whilst carrying out another part of the fieldwork in Santos, São Paulo state, Tayla, a Brazilian international who has played football in a variety of settings, recalled fondly a short three-month spell with Iranduba. Despite suffering an unfortunate injury which curtailed her stay, her recollections were overwhelmingly of how positive the stadium atmosphere was and how valued she felt as an athlete there.

Among the numerous factors that have made the club so welcoming to players is the permanent home at the Arena da Amazônia and the position of being the premier sporting attraction in the city. Santos Women play games at numerous venues including its own training centre and the home stadium of another local club Portuguesa Santista. Similarly, rather than using the Arena Corinthians, Corinthians Women have played numerous games in the industrial area of Osasco in the past. The stability enjoyed by Iranduba players imbues them with a sense of importance that is denied women players who are shifted from stadium to stadium and allows a routine to develop among fans who know where games will be played and when games will be afforded importance (*visits of clubes de camisa*). Similarly, whilst the CBF has the habit of scheduling games for eleven in the morning while most

people are at work, Iranduba has repeatedly requested to play its games in the evening making it possible to attend. The identification of the fans with the stadium has begun a process which must continue if women's club football is to become an established part of everyday life in the country and beyond. Various players reported being stopped in the street for autographs or approached at games for autographs, and of all the teams I visited during fieldwork, Iranduba was the only one at which (even male) supporters regularly wore shirts with players from the women's team printed on the back.

Players consistently gave me the impression that their level of engagement and their sense of belonging corresponds to an unplanned coincidental set of circumstances. When the club perceived interest in Iranduba women they started promoting women's football with vigour. Whilst a club like Iranduba springing up is not actively encouraged by the institutional model of keeping women's football in check by placing it in a relationship of dependency to men's teams, it is certainly insightful as to the potential of women's football were it not straitjacketed in every way possible. Players regularly attested to feeling 'something different' about the atmosphere in Manaus. It does appear in keeping with the notion that the extreme popularity of the men's game in certain areas makes this kind of perfect storm more difficult to achieve in areas or countries where men's football is deep rooted (Saavedra, 2003b). This sense of Manaus providing a special atmosphere is typified and felt deeply by defender Monalisa Belém, who explained that playing for Iranduba she often felt compelled to run the length of the field to celebrate goals energetically with teammates and fans. Monalisa explains: 'no futebol tem que ter união e a gente é uma família. Independente de quem faça gol a gente tem que sair de onde estiver e comemorar, até as meninas no banco (you need a togetherness in football and we are like a family. Regardless of who scores, we all have to come from wherever we are and celebrate, even the girls on the bench). She leaves a slight doubt as to whether the players are 'obligated' to celebrate like

this or do it of their own volition. Naturally, the moments which generate the most exuberant reactions are those perceived to be of higher importance to supporters and players alike. This exuberance in Manaus is generated by a number of factors that cannot be artificially engineered: the sporting and economic sense of centre-periphery antagonism; the importance that this confers upon players representing Iranduba; and the particularities of Amazonas and the way it is imagined among others. All of these factors create an atmosphere of fierce pride which the players clearly feed upon. The gradual establishment of rivalries in men's football, to an extent, hinged on similarly contingent factors. Whilst rivalries are taken for granted, exploited and commodified now, the conditions in which they were created were often accidental. It could be argued that many of these rivalries were subsequently embellished or even to an extent invented, aided by the social capital men's football accrued over time. The experience of Iranduba shows the potential and indeed the contingent factors upon which rivalries depend.

### ***Investment in Women's Football: Iranduba***

One of the defining features of Iranduba is that players perceive an attempt to place women's football within the same market logic as the men's game. This consolidation depends firstly upon the amount of effort made by club directorates, federations and the media to promote the women's game and secondly upon the pre-existing social and economic conditions and interrelationships between places within a given country. The entire coaching staff of Iranduba are male, as are all the decision makers at the Amazonian Football Federation and the great majority at national level. Mayara Vaz, another native of Belém do Pará who has migrated to Manaus for the opportunity to earn a living from the game, sees the consolidation of the women's game as hinging upon the demography of institutions – namely more female representation. She notes the lack of multiple competitions (customary in men's football). Mayara is keen to point out a positive aspect of life with Iranduba – to some degree the club

breaks with the vicious circle between a lack of marketing and serious investment and the lack of public interest. The interest generated by Iranduba has disproven the prevailing assumption (or pretext for inaction) at institutional level that the public are not interested – one that is also disproven by a billion people watching the women's World Cup.

### ***The Best of Both Worlds?***

During the Libertadores tournament in particular, it strikes me that Iranduba in a sense, benefits from the best of both worlds. The meeting of teams from different countries brings to the fore the national importance the Brazilian crowd attach to football. For a fleeting period the Manauarans who struggle to identify with other regions of Brazil become more Brazilian. On the one hand, Iranduba are not encumbered by having to compete with large established male clubs with a large fanbase locally. This means the club has the (almost) undivided attention of the Manaus sporting public. On the other hand, the club does benefit from the established nature of football in Brazil because it is from the social capital of the Rio and São Paulo clubs that the will to defeat the centre is derived. In this way, Iranduba benefits from being from a non-footballing city in the country of football. This cultural capital places the club's potential on a different level to clubs in the USA for example. In the USA the club game always faces the central fundamental problem of its lack of history.

Nonetheless, Duda Pavão, a Brazilian player who has spent a number of years both studying and working in the United States, most notably for NWSL team Orlando Pride in the Communications and Marketing department, is keen to emphasise what she sees as the clear relationship between the efforts made by the club and the attendances which they have achieved. Having experienced the marketing of women's football in the United States she is well placed to comment on the level of interest which Iranduba generates in its local community. Asked about differences between the experiences in both countries, Duda emphasises how well developed communications, the marketing department and the training

facilities were in Orlando, but maintains that there is ‘something about the environment here (in Manaus)’ that is impossible to imitate or recreate in Orlando. Pavão is unable to describe exactly what she means. The growth of North American club football (both male and female) has met with the obvious barrier of a lack of social capital and prestige within largely newly-formed clubs. Without historical football antagonisms or points of reference it has been difficult to forge rivalries and thus to grow a sizeable fanbase. Despite the runaway success of the US women’s national team, the lack of social capital of its clubs means that most Americans would be at a loss to name where its star players perform – and perhaps more importantly the club league has not been a runaway success by any means. Indeed, it has been aborted and re-launched on occasions. This footballing social capital which is lacking in the United States is abundant in the Brazilian and Latin American case – though the hidden history of women’s football within clubs remains an area requiring urgent attention. As Pavão points out, women’s football is the same game as men’s football – what is different are the cultural meanings attached to it.

### **Conclusion**

The Iranduba players have been able to invoke a particularly passionate response from the local people. This appears to be due to a perfect storm of circumstances which allows women’s football to grow beneath the radar of the country’s footballing centre. The club has been successful in positioning itself to leverage ethnic identity and invoke regional pride. The centre-periphery dichotomy that the club mobilises (via its appeals to an Amazonian ethnic identity) parallels the power imbalance between the men’s and women’s games – which the club is also contesting. In this way, the club has also been a vehicle for the promotion of a more dominant mode of thinking which wants to promote a ‘celebration of athleticism and female empowerment’ (FIFA, 2020b, p.5).

There are few (if any) other sites in the world where the women's team command far and away the most media attention and whose highest attendance of the season is nine times higher than those of male teams. The case of Iranduba cannot be understood in a unidimensional way as the club generates multiple meanings for different actors. The *flechada* has been commodified as part of the club brand and its attempts to sell itself internationally as a success story, however it also represents the players' bond with the Manaus public and their enjoyment of representing the city of Manaus against the *clubes de camisa*.

These players have proved over a long period of time to be among the most consistent players in the country, and when Iranduba fans wear their names on the back of their shirts, they recognise their undoubted footballing ability. The story of the Team from the Heart of the Amazon speaks to the position women's football occupies in Brazil in the second decade of the twenty-first century – a position where progress is as clearly discernible as the multiple and stubborn obstacles which remain. Furthermore, it hints at the possibilities for women's football in cases where it is uncoupled from its dependency with male football. Iranduba displays problematic aspects whereby players are objectified, but it also allows women's football to grow independently in the kind of unpredictable way football institutions are not prepared to countenance.

In order for a serious reconfiguration of the country's footballing hierarchy to take place in women's football it would be necessary for ten or fifteen well-funded and vigorously promoted Irandubas to emerge. This does not seem to be the model being promoted however. *Obrigatoriedade* is centred around making the large (men's) clubs comply and will perhaps consolidate the sub-categorisation of women's football.

The level of support and interest Iranduba has generated since the club began in 2011 suggests that another way of imagining a future for women's football, both in Brazil and



more globally, is possible. Stripped of the structural imbalances that ensure an unequal playing field in other regions, the case of Iranduba shows that women's football can and will be commercially viable. It suggests that with relatively modest public and private investment, relative to the sums of money bandied about in men's football, a model of growth, that is not tied into a relationship of dependency with an already illustrious male club, could also be viable at the very least alongside the mainstream model of integrating women's football into larger more established clubs.

## Chapter 5 –Mermaids in the Land of the King

### Introduction

As I walk towards Santos FC training ground I see several murals commemorating the rich tradition of the club and its importance in establishing Brazil as the country of football (Helal et al., 2001; Bocketti, 2016; Goldblatt, 2014; Kittleson, 2014). I am particularly taken with a quote from the great Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade which says ‘*o difícil, o extraordinário, não é fazer mil gols, como Pelé. É fazer um gol como Pelé* (the most difficult thing is not to reach a thousand goals as Pelé did, but rather to score just one with the style of Pelé’). With Pelé unambiguously on a pedestal above all mere mortals, I wonder: what space is there for women to dislodge such mythology and establish themselves within the discursive tradition of these clubs? The question of how women’s contributions to Brazilian club football can be recognised and incorporated into such hyper-masculinised club discourses and traditions has been neglected thus far. Santos FC is an ideal case study insofar as it has both a significant but undervalued history of women’s football and, owing to the Pelé era (see figure 18), it also has international recognition as an emblematic club in the country of football which arguably exceeds that of other Brazilian clubs



Figure 18 Mural commemorating Pelé (own photo)

As I finally negotiate my way past security I am greeted by my contact: general manager (for women's football) Alessandro Pinto. He introduces me to some of the players who have arrived early for training. I meet Erikinha, Sandrinha and Kelly Rodrigues briefly as they warm up ready for training.<sup>48</sup> Just before the session begins, I also glimpse Rosana dos Santos Augusto. I momentarily feel slightly starstruck to see a player who has contested World and Olympic finals. With none of the reticence and apprehension of the other players she greets me in confident English and immediately enquires as to what exactly I am doing here. Rosana quickly disappears with the air of someone not given to wasting time. I notice other faces I recognise – Maurine, a player with a similar international pedigree. Next I recognise Ketlen, who despite little fanfare, has recently become Santos Women's all-time leading scorer and the first player to score 100 goals for them. This underplayed achievement reminds me that whilst it is well-documented that the Santos of Pelé were the first Brazilian club to win the continental title (in 1962 and 1963), it is less well-known that the Santos of Marta was the first Brazilian club to win the women's equivalent in 2009 and 2010 (Rial, 2013a).<sup>49</sup>

The identity of Santos the city is bound up with that of Santos FC. For that very reason, the discursive significance of Santos in the emergence of Brazil's gendered footballing identity make it a particularly attractive case study. Indeed, beyond this, the way in which football dramatises wider cultural shifts (Da Matta, 1982c, p.40) is exemplified by Santos. The city experienced its formative boom years between 1820 and 1880 as a coffee port. At this point over half of the population were black slaves (Read, 2012). Without their labour it is inconceivable that Santos would ever have come to be Latin America's largest and most modern port (De Mello, 2008) and by extension, without their labour Santos FC as one of the

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<sup>48</sup> Erikinha, Sandrinha and Kelly Rodrigues are three of the mainstays of the women's team. Each participated in the first Copa Libertadores Feminina in 2009. The tournament was held in Santos and Santos won it unbeaten.

<sup>49</sup> Marta Vieira da Silva is the only player to win the FIFA World Player of the Year award six times.

country's prestigious *clubes de camisa* would probably never have come into existence. In one sense, it took the generation of Pelé to finally invert the cultural stereotypes left behind by this legacy. For example, as late as 1950, black players were scapegoated for the 1950 World Cup loss at the hands of Uruguay (Skidmore, 1974; Filho, 2003; Buarque de Hollanda, 2014).

Whilst an ongoing struggle with no final victory in sight, football can certainly be said to have provided an arena in which the residue of racism and slavery can be contested. It seems conceivable that similar gradual shifts in the way Brazilians understand gender can be discerned via the optic of a deeply masculinised part of its sporting identity. Vibrant movements like #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo foreground clamours to re-define the gender order in more equitable terms (Else, 2018). This chapter examines the embeddedness of male hegemony within a large club and consequently considers how gender stereotypes are contested and reproduced. It is based upon three months of ethnographic fieldwork spent with Santos between October 2018 and February 2019. The results section presents several vignettes capturing episodes symptomatic of the strength of the masculinised invented tradition of the club and places them in tension with the everyday experiences of players. It differentiates between how, on the pitch and the training ground, the players, by definition, are sometimes able to challenge hegemonic representations by emphasising their athletic performance. This struggle continues off the pitch where players are still deployed to promote a gendered vision in keeping with the club hierarchy's sexualised branding of the club as Sereias da Vila. These narratives are challenged by players own agency and by a burgeoning alternative media exemplified by Dibradoras, as covered earlier in the thesis.

### ***The Land of the King (King Pelé Training Facility)***

Nearing the conclusion of the session at the King Pelé training ground (CT Rei Pelé in Portuguese) another animated discussion between backroom staff ensues with players clearly

within earshot. A congested and disjointed end of regional, national and continental competitions awaits. In just one week, they will face Corinthians in an evenly balanced two-legged final of the Paulista Championship 2018. With barely time to draw breath, Sereias da Vila then travel almost 4,000 kilometres to Manaus for the Copa Libertadores tournament in November 2018.<sup>50</sup>

Watching the hi-tech nature of a training session here, it is clear the infrastructure is on a different level to the other clubs I have visited. I am told the facilities match any available elsewhere in Brazil, and probably across the entire continent. Whilst a variety of cutting-edge training techniques take place, a number of drones fly disconcertingly above our heads assisting the computerised devices attached to each player to monitor their individual daily performance across a range of metrics. The pristine surface of Santos' training pitch feels befitting of an ensemble of top-level professional women footballers, many of whom have accrued a range of experience both nationally and in many cases beyond. The King Pelé Training Ground has three official full-size pitches. The first is the smallest pitch, used largely for youth matches with space for up to 5,000 spectators. The second intentionally has the same dimensions as the Vila Belmiro (Santos' stadium) while the third matches the size of the municipal Morumbi in São Paulo. The impressive facility even includes a five-star hotel where the Santos (men's) first team often stay before big games, and a sizeable, purpose-built space where journalists are able to conduct interviews and press conferences with the players in a professional environment. Beyond the training facilities, way in the distance is a steep incline scattered with precarious tenement style housing stacked one on top of another. The view from the comfortable confines of a complex guarded by numerous

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<sup>50</sup> Santos Women had won the Brazilian championship in 2017 to earn the privilege of representing Brazil at the continental tournament.

security staff typifies the stark social divide which characterises the country and, in various and often unacknowledged ways, is foregrounded in many of its social interactions.

An escalation in the initially good-humoured discussion diverts my attention back to the issue at hand. Team manager Emily Lima and some of the players appear somewhat irate. It appears that after just three days training on the impeccable surface at the CT Rei Pelé, the women are being moved on to make way for the usual custodians of the Kings' quarters - Santos FC (men). I confirm I heard correctly whilst endeavouring not to look too obviously aghast or surprised. With the quality of the facilities and the number of pitches available there seems no rational reason why both the men and the women could not train here simultaneously or, if necessary, be scheduled at different times of the day. Nonetheless, the prevailing power relations here seem still to not only negate this possibility but render the suggestion of outright equality unconscionable. Football remains an area so eminently masculine that this type of gender differentiation is often hidden in plain sight, not even acknowledged by those perpetrating it, although they surely know. The return to a status-quo where the women's team are sub-categorised at the same level as children within the club is symptomatic of this.

***The Land of the Kids (Meninos da Vila Training Facility)***

For the time-being, it would appear, Santos Women are being moved back to where I am told they spend most of their time - CT Meninos Da Vila (Vila Belmiro Boys' Training Ground). Whilst some of the players clearly recognise this as a demeaning affront that trivialises their hard-earned status as professional footballers, there is also a common-sense resignation underpinned by the club's own insidiously patriarchal self-presentation and organisation. I have heard plenty, in confidence, about these facilities. The grass tends to be a few centimetres or even inches longer. They warned me the surface was full of bobbles, causing unpredictable bounces on the ball, or much worse, a higher likelihood of incurring injuries.

Upon arrival I realise immediately that, if anything, my informants had understated the case. The facilities at Meninos da Vila are rustic at best and certainly not befitting of professional athletes. The training pitch has the kind of surface upon which technical training on cohesive zippy passing are out of the question. This inevitably further stymies the development of players who often started later and with less infrastructure and facilities available than their male counterparts in the first place. Many of the players' touch appears a little more erratic than when they were training at the King's training ground. The exceptional players are still able to pull off the difficult touches – Maurine manages a perfect lob over the keeper at pace and then nonchalantly wheels away as if nothing happened. She tells me later in an interview that, like so many of her generation, she grew up playing alongside boys on far worse surfaces in her native Rio Grande do Sul.

Emily Lima, noting my downcast countenance, is quick to do what comes naturally to her every day in her job. She turns a negative into a challenge or into something which would have some value in the longer term. She tells me it is a good thing that I will see the full reality of Santos FC and not a falsely tamed experience designed to impress a visitor. Lima, I realise early on, is intent on ensuring that just this happens and is always forthright and sincere about the things the club does right and those which she would change tomorrow given the chance. The dissatisfaction with the situation at Santos owes much to knowing that it does not have to be this way at such a well-resourced club. These are political decisions made within the club and it could be stopped immediately were there sufficient political will to do so. The players play their part keeping the club, regional, and national hierarchies under pressure in numerous ways, but the final say still disproportionately rests with people distant from the reality I am witnessing. Despite undeniable strides made by women's football in recent years, in terms of priority at club level, professional grown women players are placed on a par with boys as young as eleven. I wonder what are the meanings and power relations

which have naturalised and legitimised such obvious and violent gender differentiation?

What are the players' lived experiences and impressions of this state of affairs? How have they contested it thus far bringing us to the point we are at today?

At a quieter moment some weeks later coach Emily Lima would make an incisive passing remark which stayed with me. Lima noted that women's football is always seen as something additional, artificially grafted onto the deep-rooted tradition perceived and portrayed as all-important. My contention in this chapter takes note of this by exploring an unacknowledged tension at play – the way in which the agenda for equality is significantly encumbered by the rootedness of what I explain in the following section and refer to as *banal patriarchy*. This tends to dilute any notion of outright equality into something far less radical and more akin to inclusion (Elsley & Nadel, 2019, p.10).

### ***Banal Patriarchy***

It struck me during my fieldwork that many of the most deep-rooted attitudes and practices at the club often manifest themselves in banal and often unperceived ways, akin to the concept of *banal nationalism* elaborated by Michael Billig (1995). For example, the countless references to being bi-champions of the world on club merchandise commemorated by two stars above the Santos club badge (figure 19 below).<sup>51</sup> Billig's concept refers to everyday representations of national symbolism which contribute in often unacknowledged ways to buttress a shared sense of national belonging. This concept lends itself well to football fandom, which is also rooted in a perceived sense of collective identity. In this sense, this chapter registers less visible, everyday forms which are deeply ingrained and, in insidious ways, contribute more to upholding a gendered social order than more extreme or overt outbursts of sexism. Female participation in football, by definition, comes into tension with

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly for many years the Brazilian women's national team played with five stars above the club insignia commemorating five men's World Cups. In the case of Santos' two 'World' championships, this in reality commemorates an intercontinental play-off including only Europe.



this and in many cases indeed subverts it. Nonetheless the manifest power imbalances provoked by a lack of female representation in positions of power mean that banal patriarchy and the perceived masculine hegemony over club football can only be eroded gradually, particularly as much of the presence is often unacknowledged and unperceived.



Figure 19 The façade of Santos' Estádio Urbano Caldeira, Vila Belmiro

### ***The Santos FC Invented Tradition***

To conceptualise the longevity the club discursively presents, Hobsbawm's notion of invented traditions is also insightful in providing a further theoretical frame. It helps explain the selective omissions, inclusions and embellishments of the club's history. This discourse, clearly, is subject to analysis, contestation and re-shaping from a range of interested actors. As Hobsbawm (2012, p.1) argues, 'traditions which appear or claim to be old are quite often recent in origin'. This is arguably the case with Santos FC. As of 2020 the club is 108 years old, having been born in 1912 within hours of the sinking of the Titanic. Hobsbawm's conceptualisation of invented traditions incorporates 'traditions formally instituted within a brief and dateable period which establish themselves with great rapidity. He continues to state that they are 'often of a ritual and symbolic nature, which seeks to inculcate certain values

and norms of behaviour by repetition, automatically implying continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm, 2012, p.2).

In this vein, much of the mythology dates back only as far as the period in which Pelé starred for the club, largely in the 1960s and 1970s and not belonging to a bygone era as club discourse would have us believe. This was concurrent and interrelated with the establishment of Brazil as the gold standard of men’s football. Counting these friendlies, often against non-professional opposition in novelty matches, King Pelé scored over a thousand goals for Santos FC – a round figure often invoked to claim his superiority over other football legends (Goldblatt, 2014; Knijnik, 2018).

A section on the club website entitled ‘*muito além do futebol*’ (way beyond football) sets out a manifesto. The words constitute an attempt to express a creeping (corporate) social responsibility ethos in poetic form. The first verse begins as follows:

*Somos santistas, o time do Rei.*

*Fabricamos sonhos e craques há mais de 100 anos.*

*Com os pés no gramado, paramos uma guerra*

*Com ousadia e alegria, globalizamos moicanos*

*(We are Santistas, the team of the king*

*We’ve made dreams and star players for more than 100 years*

*On the pitch we stopped a war*

*With daring and happiness we globalise mohicans)*

The central discursive plank within Santos' tradition is always Pelé as explained earlier. He is the player all others are measured against, be this the recent *moicano* Neymar referred to in the poem, or the Pelé in a skirt moniker used to trivialise Marta (Moreira, 2014a). Moreover this situates it in a certain period (1956-74) which coincides with much of the mythology surrounding the national team and its *futebol arte* tradition (Knijnik, 2018, p.28) but gives the lie to the longer tradition claimed in the manifesto. As Hobsbawm argues (2012, p.2), the club tradition invokes attempts to 'structure parts of social life as unchanging and invariant'. That is to say, the figure of Pelé is used 'to legitimise a status or relations of authority' (Hobsbawm, 2012, p.10) – in this case the elevated status of men in a hierarchical relationship which places women as a sub-category. Were there to be any serious political will to redress this, the club could do more to celebrate the most emblematic player in women's football history and her role in establishing Santos Women as a continental force as a counterpoint. The poem then references the mythical day Pelé and cohorts temporarily halted the Biafra War.<sup>52</sup> In defence of the poem, there is some gender awareness later in the poem when it names the fans as 'peixinhos and peixinhas' (male and female fish), though this is only an acknowledgement of female fandom. This appears to delineate the limits of the acceptable incorporation of women into the club's mythology.

### **The Obscured Tradition – Women's Football at Santos FC**

The previous section explained how the masculinised tradition at Santos FC is discursively rooted in a relatively short period whilst insinuating itself to have a far longer history (Hobsbawm, 2012). Similarly, the gendered tradition is accentuated by systematically obscuring the hidden history of women's football in Brazil, thus encouraging the misconception that women's football is something relatively new against a long tradition of

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<sup>52</sup> This myth of Santos stopping a war is refuted in detail using sources from local newspapers and radio in Nigeria and beyond (Aiyegbayo, 2015).

men's football. A growing body of work recuperating the hidden history of women's football in Brazil (Franzini, 2005c; Goellner, 2005e; Salvini & Marchi Júnior, 2013a) and elsewhere on the continent (Else & Nadel, 2019) emphasises these historical and structural injustices. Whilst part of the embellished tradition of the club is trying to elongate its glory period, realistically the main golden period of Santos, upon which its embellished tradition is based, occurred while women's football was prohibited and from 1964 onwards under military dictatorship.

Nevertheless, it does not take much digging below the surface to realise that Santos Women have accrued plenty of their own cultural capital which could easily be highlighted more if the political will existed within the club. Structural inequalities often mean that the club's significant women players often spend less time with the club before flying the nest. Nonetheless, a significant step forward would surely be acknowledging the protagonism of women players and the significance of Santos in giving the Brazilian national team a base from which to build. From the team which reached Olympic and World Cup finals, Marta, Cristiane, Maurine, Aline Pellegrino, Érika and Maurine gained valuable competitive and formative experience with Santos. This is to say, Santos could easily note the symmetry of having had arguably the best-known male and female player having played for them. Marta even achieved significant honours for the club forming part of the Santos squad that won the inaugural Copa Libertadores tournament.<sup>1</sup>

Traditions, imagined or otherwise, accrue currency over a period of time. In 2020 it is abundantly clear that Santos FC is still imagined within the club as a masculine space, to which as Emily Lima suggests, the women's team is merely a precarious appendage. There are certainly precedents in the club's recent history which suggest Lima's analysis is not an opinion but a fact. In 2012, Santos Women were performing well on a national and continental level. They had won the 2009 and 2010 Copa Libertadores and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the

2011 edition. They were reigning Paulista champions. The club's response to this success was to produce a raunchy calendar of the women's team, ostensibly to make the players 'more marketable' (Joras, 2015, p.84) before proceeding to disband the team just three days after the calendar finished in 2012, coinciding with efforts to retain Neymar (Goldblatt, 2014; Knijnik, 2018). The commonly spun narrative around this is that the team was disbanded in order to fund Neymar's salary, but as Nicole Ramos pointed out to me, the salary of one male player could fund the entire female team. Seen in this way, dispensing with one male player could have made the same contribution to retaining Neymar. It seems more likely that the decision to discontinue the female team at that point was an ideological rather than economic decision.

In spite of the club hierarchy consistently undervaluing women's football, it does have a particular pull at the Vila Belmiro since the inaugural Women's Copa Libertadores was held in this stadium. They brushed aside rivals from across the continent scoring 42 goals and only conceding two across only six games. Large local crowds flocked to these games as Marta, at that time, was the reigning world player of the year, with Cristiane also nominated in the top three in the world. It is lamentable that this accrued social capital is not celebrated more. It is symptomatic of the sub-categorisation of women's football and of the threat having another continent-conquering team poses to the deeply masculinised invented tradition of the club.

Each episode is coloured by the unacknowledged influence of the club's invented tradition. For example, even the club's own branding has sought to feminise the team as sirens or mermaids (see figure 20 below), differentiating them from the hegemonic male version of the team. The gendering choice of Sereias as the team name is telling. Sereia is defined in the dictionary as being 'da mitologia nórdica, representado sob forma de metade peixe e metade mulher, ambos com cantos muito suaves que atraíam os navegantes para a praia ou para os rochedos, com o objetivo de matá-los; sirena' (Michaelis, 2020) or more

figuratively as ‘qualquer mulher muito atraente (any very attractive woman)’ (Michaelis, 2020). In both definitions there is a clear focus on the physical appearance of women which continues a long tradition of the objectification of women playing football (Bonfim, 2019).



*Figure 20 The Mermaid design on the back of the Sereias da Vila shirt for 2018 (own photo)*

### **Living and Challenging the Invented Tradition**

The following sections consider the players’ experiences of women’s football at Santos FC. It considers both how their agency is gradually effecting changes, but also foregrounds the extent to which manifestations of banal patriarchy found within the club continue to throw up considerable obstacles. From their behaviour on the training ground to their involvement in formal and informal activism their presence consistently runs into tension with the invented tradition at Santos FC. This means the invented tradition is subject to constant (if gradual) modifications which take account of the presence of women players.

#### ***Women’s Paulista Championship Final***

Upon my arrival, the team faced an important end of season challenge - the final of the 2018 Paulista championship, predictably against Corinthians. The game typifies the vicious circle the women’s game finds itself in. There is definitely interest on the part of the public, but due

to arcane federation rules the clubs are not allowed to charge entrance for nominally ‘amateur’ games. This typifies what young midfielder Karla Alves identifies as double standards between the male and female arms of Santos FC. She points out that many of the male clubs have large debts but ‘a gente acha que são rentáveis (people believe they are profitable). She notes that the comparison of economic performance often used between the male and female teams is flawed from the beginning as the women’s team is structurally straitjacketed by policies like this one. Nicole Ramos adds that ‘com investimento a gente acredita que sim daría certo mas temos que brigar por nossos direitos Sem brigar a gente não vai mudar (with the right investment players believe women’s football would work economically, but we have to fight for our rights. If we don’t do this, they are not going to change). Anecdotally, speaking to some of the crowd that night, a good number said they would pay to attend the match and had been looking forward to it.

The players placed particular importance on this game, as it marks the end of an unwieldy tournament with two group stages, which were routinely dismissed as a ‘phoney war’. Corinthians’ and Santos’ goal differences of +36 and +37 from a group of just seven teams suggests two dominant teams and thus for most of the league there have been a lot of dead rubber games. The players complain consistently about this as they realise that the lack of truly competitive games is detrimental to their development. In this vein, Maurine, one of the leading figures in Brazilian women’s football over the past two decades, notes that ‘*agora as jogadoras mostram menos debilidades básicas, mas igual a falta de balance competitivo ainda existe e causa problemas*’ (now the players make fewer basic errors, but still the lack of competitive balance is there and continues to cause problems). The number of Brazilian clubs large enough to have a competitive women’s team in the São Paulo region is certainly higher than two, but at the time of carrying out the fieldwork the dominance of Corinthians

and Santos was a reflection of the lack of willing of other large clubs in the region to open a competitive women's team.<sup>1</sup>

The much-anticipated final was played over two games. The first game was played at Santos' Vila Belmiro stadium with the decisive second leg played at Parque São Jorge, part of Corinthians training facilities. Both games were free to the public attracting considerable crowds.<sup>1</sup> The game in Santos attracted the larger crowd with 13,867.<sup>53</sup> This was a record for the Women's Paulista Championship. Players felt that this reflected improved efforts on the part of the club to publicise the game and the level of interest in equally balanced games. All over Santos in the week before the game there were posters and flags advertising the game.

During half-time, rather than concentrate on the game, some of the Santos substitutes are made to shoot numbered balls out into the crowd. Each number wins a prize. The prizes are tickets to a Santos men's game, a Santos men's shirt signed by the players, three visits to the King Pelé training ground, various club merchandise and then almost as an afterthought a signed Sereias da Vila shirt. Rather than taking the opportunity to promote solely the women's team at the Sereias game, the players are reminded once again that they are a sub-category of the club. It appears a small detail – perhaps going unnoticed by some fans, but the players' faces tell a story. Clearly, with the women's games structurally obligated to be free, it is not possible to offer tickets for the women's games as a prize. The occasion could have been used to celebrate a tournament which is much coveted by women players on the continent. Instead, this small detail concentrated on the tradition that fans are more familiar with a visit to the King's training ground and tickets to see the men play. The way the game is used as a sideshow with which to promote upcoming men's games detracts from the

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<sup>53</sup> Clubs are prevented by law from charging for games in the Paulista Championship as it attracts funding from a federal program fomenting the practice of sports, the Lei de Incentivo ao Esporte.



importance of a final. Nonetheless, Sereias da Vila would go on to win a joint-record fourth Paulista title, bringing them level with Juventus da Mooca and Ferroviária.

### *Sereias da Vila in the Community and Recycled Lives*

Like most Brazilian clubs Santos is involved in the community in which it operates. The following section covers two initiatives – a visit to an NGO called Recycled Lives and a project to promote girls playing football called Girls on the Pitch. Both in distinct ways are heavily gendered and are telling of the way the women's team is imagined and cast by the Santos FC hierarchy. Early during my visit I was invited to accompany the players to an engagement with *Vidas Recicladas* (Recycled Lives). *Vidas Recicladas* is an NGO which takes in (often-abandoned) street children for a period of time, and offers them wide-ranging psychological, emotional, social and economic support. Several women players are enlisted to visit a large home in the city of Santos, where interviews will be carried out for television and photos will be taken for the press. Some players are more inclined than others to participate and say a few kind words. Others appear a little overwhelmed by the experience. Most of the larger Brazilian clubs now have active CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) policies or are aware of the need for the club to undertake a social role within the communities in which they operate. From the players' perspective, visits like this are felt on a personal level particularly for players who have grown up in difficult circumstances.

Engaging in community work of this nature clearly has a function and gives something back to the community which makes Santos the large club it is. Nevertheless, I ask myself if this particular activity is knowingly or unknowingly rooted in gendered thinking. Perhaps perceptions of traditional gender roles were taken into consideration when choosing to send the players to a home of orphaned children. Nevertheless, in the absence of sufficient exposure which highlights the women players as athletes, this type of work could be the only glimpse television viewers or newspaper readers see of the players – and thus inadvertently it

could reinforce gender stereotypes rather than challenge them. In defence of the club, players were involved in a number of other events which were more directly related to their athletic performance and fomented the notion of women as athletes.

### *Girls on the Pitch (Meninas en Campo)*

Clearly the problems regarding technical level go beyond the lack of major teams involved. The team's teen prodigy Angelina Costantino has become a regular at just eighteen. She points out how important it is to be able to develop technique from an early age. She was able to do this growing up playing alongside male players, but there are scarce opportunities for young girls at all in Brazil. This feeds into the technical deficiencies identified.

In this vein, for example, I also attended an event where Santos FC signed an agreement together with the University of São Paulo and the Girls on the Pitch project (Meninas en Campo) committing the club and its partners to help develop female players in the 11-17 age range.<sup>54</sup> Without doubt this places Santos FC as a pioneer offering provision for these age groups. Elsewhere, this type of initiative remains almost non-existent. This reminds me of various players' comments. Tayla, for example, casually explained she is the 'typical' example of a player who learnt her trade playing on the streets.

From one perspective I am clearly receiving a sanitised version of Santos FC but from another it is clear that there is a progressive force that is pressing larger clubs like Santos into taking some of the necessary steps to grow youth team football for Brazilian girls. There is a possibility this type of initiative will have a snowball effect as competing clubs do not wish to allow Santos an easy propaganda victory. The competitive instinct of clubs in not allowing their rivals to achieve something before them may cause further positive action. In this regard, Santos were the first to get involved and were not cajoled or blackmailed into doing

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<sup>54</sup> For more information see the following website [www.meninasemcampo.org.br](http://www.meninasemcampo.org.br).

so. This reminds me that each club, even when they have an embellished tradition which systematically privileges masculinity, is influenced by progressive actors inside and outside who push quietly for this type of gradual progress. The project places emphasis on social formation as well as football, an aspect which has traditionally been much neglected during the growth periods in men's football. Beyond this it is an area which is of fundamental importance given the backgrounds many of the players come from. A football career is relatively short and there are no guarantees of further employment after finishing as a player – particularly for women, who until recently have been systematically excluded from coaching roles in the game. Again, Santos uses the players to promote itself as a progressive institution. Carrying out work in the community is clearly a valid function however sending the players to a children's home like Recycled Lives feels gendered and more importantly places the emphasis outside of promoting the players' athletic performance – the area which truly undermines and/or destabilises male hegemony.

### **Undermining Banal Patriarchy**

My time with the players on the training ground gave me the strongest indication of the plural realities of women's football, outside of cliched representations. The remainder of this chapter considers how the players undermine the banal patriarchy the club presents. Through collective organisation and their everyday behaviour and athletic performance the players are gradually producing counter narratives which destabilise male hegemony.

### ***Sereias on the Training Ground***

Each morning on the training ground there is an atmosphere of joviality. These clear attempts to differentiate and present the women's team as qualitatively divergent from the men's team defends hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1993). In the words of Butler (2011, p.17), 'the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex

and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender’. This explains the playing down of players’ athletic performance. It explains why the club invites prize-winners to see the men train but not the women. In this vein, the following sections highlight how the everyday behaviour, self-image and aspirations of the players present a more heterogeneous picture of reality, breaking with clichéd feminised narratives and thus, if given due attention, have the potential to de-stabilise dominant gender binaries.

From the outset, numerous players are larking around prior to the commencement of the training session. One of the players gleefully blasts a ball as hard as they can at the back of another player’s head to uproarious laughter. The lack of surprise suggests this kind of juvenile antics happens quite often. There are 34 players in an unwieldy Santos squad – a mix of highly established internationals who have plied their trade in other countries, players with a solid reputation within Brazil and hopefuls who aspire to break into the first team and make a career from the game. Many of these hopefuls have been uprooted from their home states to try their luck at Santos. There are clearly cliques within the group whereby the more established exude self-confidence, whereas others know their future is far from guaranteed. Some of the veteran players take the time to help integrate the newer ones and offer them someone to confide in when things get difficult.

Whilst at the Copa Libertadores tournament in Manaus the players’ training was based at the facilities of 3B.<sup>1</sup> There is an atmosphere that is slightly different. The change of environment is a double-edged sword. The players each try to feign the calm that is needed at a large tournament. Equally, the team is genuinely enjoying being away from home in a continental tournament. The players laugh and joke through the session. Notably, at the end they ambush the club’s Press Attaché Vitor Anjos. Four or five players grab Anjos before taking out a razor and forcibly shaving off his moustache. Anjos struggles briefly in between laughing before realising he has little chance of breaking free, being overpowered by five or

six players. A few minutes later he is left half-shaven looking somewhat ridiculous. The players explain that this was an agreed penitence of a bet they had (and won) with Anjos. Anjos shakes his head and tries to look surprised or upset. The players are prepared to stand up for themselves. This again seems to typify how distant the reality of the players is from the hyper-feminised club representations of the Sereias. Indeed, the everyday atmosphere with the players is more akin to the detailed description offered by Hunter Davies in his seminal text *The Glory Game* (1973), after spending a period of time with Tottenham Hotspur in the 1970s. The training ground performance is just that – a performance. It is not necessarily representative of how the players would ideally behave as individuals, however it does represent the way they choose to present themselves on the training ground as a collective. They present themselves as tough, but with a sense of humour. In the case of some players, it is only when they are isolated in a different setting for interviews that they break with the matrix of behaviour expected on the training ground. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the tone for this expected behavioural pattern is set by the players themselves.

### *Nomadic Sereias*

One aspect of being Sereias da Vila that appeals to the players is that of belonging to an emblematic stadium with an accumulated cultural capital both in men's and women's football. From interviews and participant observation it was clear the players have an affinity for the club's traditional stadium the Vila Belmiro – a compact intimate ground where it is possible to feel the crowd close to the action, particularly when it is almost full, as it was for the Santos Women-Corinthians Women game. Maurine, in particular, recalls scoring the winning goal in the Copa Libertadores of 2010 in the Vila Belmiro. She recalls the stadium erupting as she scored a final minute free kick. Maurine does not say as much, but it is tacitly understood that such a goal would be infamous had it come from a male player.

The affinity with the stadium is shared by Ketlen, Erikinha, Sandrinha and Kelly Rodrigues who recall growing up watching Santos (men) on the terraces before also appearing in many of the women team's greatest moments there. The chosen epithet Sereias da Vila, then, suggests the women's team are permanent residents at the Vila Belmiro stadium in Santos. Santos Women came into existence in 1997. They have played in various locations but following their triumph in the 2009 Women's Copa Libertadores in which the final was held at the Vila Belmiro in Santos, they have become synonymous with the stadium.

The club's relationship with the Vila Belmiro is complex and for that reason it is worth contextualising. The stadium is the traditional home of Santos FC having played host to a great deal of the most significant games in both the male and female teams' history. It is actually called the Estado Urbana Caldeira but is colloquially always known as the Vila Belmiro named after the *bairro* of Santos in which it is situated. Playing in Santos takes on an extra dimension of meaning as Santos FC is the sole representative club of the city. Rio has four major clubs, São Paulo has three and Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte each have two. In those cities two or more clubs fight to symbolise their respective cities. In Santos the identity is not shared with any other club, and an identity based around Santos is of crucial importance to many Santos born fans who feel strong links to their home city.

On the other hand, owing in large part to the golden era of the club in the 1960s, the club has national support with a particularly high number of supporters in São Paulo, probably greater in number than those at Santos. Against an increasingly commercialised backdrop in Brazilian football, where Santos play their games has become a central dilemma vis-à-vis the future direction of the club. From the modernisers' perspective, the Vila Belmiro appears dilapidated compared to some of the newer stadiums built in Brazil for the World Cup. Moreover, it has a low capacity, fewer facilities and thus generates less income. This

has led the José Carlos Peres presidency to pursue avenues which are intended to modernise the club and bring it into line with the managerialist tendencies of other clubs – most notably Palmeiras and Corinthians who each have brand new stadiums close to strategic metro stations and public transport in São Paulo. In response to an ever more marketised environment and the pretext of catering to the club's sizeable São Paulo fanbase, Santos FC has moved various men's games to São Paulo's Estádio Pacaembu in an attempt to maximise revenue.<sup>55</sup> This has not always suited the manager of the (male or female) teams as it essentially means ceding home advantage to play in another city. In this way, the institution finds itself in a constant war between those who envision the club's future in economic terms, and those who are more interested in defending the tradition of the club, which largely lies in the Vila Belmiro. Tensions over the club's traditional home came to a head when President Peres exclaimed '*Vila Belmiro é um estádio puxadinho. Eu vou para a Vila Belmiro e fico angustiada. Não consigo mudar*' (The Vila Belmiro is a dump, I go to the Vila Belmiro and feel uncomfortable, I can barely move).

With this background in mind, the club allowing Sereias da Vila to use the Vila Belmiro for prolonged periods appears less an act of equality, and more the club allowing the women to use a stadium not considered to be fit for the male team. Indeed, over a period of time, both teams have been moved around considerably with the women also playing tournament games occasionally in the Pacaembu along with other venues like the stadium of Portuguesa Santista, the CT Rei Pele training ground and further into the interior of São Paulo state. Emily Lima was a constant critic of these arrangements, adding that the team had become accustomed to the quality and size of the Vila Belmiro pitch and arguing that it allowed the team to play their passing game more effectively.

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<sup>55</sup> The Estádio Pacaembu is an Art Deco stadium from the 1940s with a current capacity of 40,000

Later on during my stay with Santos, which took place in two parts due to travelling to Manaus to see the team play at the Copa Libertadores, the club brought in a recognised-name coach to revive the fortunes of the men's team: Jorge Sampaoli.<sup>56</sup> This change caused considerable friction with the women's team as one of Sampaoli's first acts was to insist upon only the men's team using the Vila Belmiro. Rather than intervene to ensure the women's team were able to play at the club's stadium, the Santos president Jose Carlos Peres claimed meekly that 'his hands were tied and that they had allowed Sampaoli his way as the *club* [my italics, read men's team] desperately needed to win a trophy' (Cardoso, 2019a). Here it is tacitly understood that the priority and organising principle of the club is the men's team. The overarching aim is to win trophies for the men's team. Moreover, even the club president and maximum authority, claims to be unable to overturn the prioritisation of the men's team. This clear sub-categorisation of the women's team meant a series of haphazard arrangements for the Sereias' games making it difficult for the women's team to gain momentum or feel any sense of home advantage as they ended up travelling at least as much as the nominal away team.

Many of the players I spoke to were acutely aware of the double standards at play when considering the economic aspects of the game. Clearly at large clubs like Santos the women's team is tied into a relationship of dependency whereby the money to fund women's clubs comes from the revenue of the men's club. Given the structural dependency and disadvantages, it is problematic to jump to any conclusions as to how popular women's football might be given the requisite support. Nonetheless, a commonly cited argument is the unsustainability of women's football. This transition from dealing with more overt social discrimination to the pretext of market forces has been noted (Elsley & Nadel, 2019, p.6).

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<sup>56</sup> Jorge Sampaoli has managed a range of major South American clubs in Ecuador, Argentina and Chile and has also won the Copa America with the Chilean national team.



Indeed, when Sereias da Vila was closed in 2012 this very pretext was used. Santos FC as an institution, like all the other large Brazilian clubs, finds itself heavily indebted, stuck between two models which seem unsustainable: paying to be tenants at the Pacaembu or losing revenue at the Vila Belmiro.

The day-to-day struggles of players are certainly influenced by the wider political environment in Brazil. I get a strong hint as to one of the major barriers to tackling some of these instances of clear gender differentiation– the stigmatisation of so-called ‘gender ideology’ - within national political debate. Whilst talking to Karla Alves, one of Santos’ young stars, she suggests that complaining about inequalities has become problematic and polarising in Brazil owing to the wider political malaise. Just a couple of weeks into my stay in Santos, Jair Bolsonaro comfortably won both rounds of the presidential election which consolidated the country’s lurch towards the right. The mere usage of the word ‘gender’ immediately triggers the visceral fears provoked by an unprecedented campaign of digital mudslinging.

### ***The Street Football Route to Sereinhas da Vila (Youth Teams)***

The systematic privileging of male youth teams has only served to exacerbate deep inequalities of opportunity between male and female players. Conversely, the lack of official channels for girls to play football in Brazil has produced a generation of players who grew up playing street football rather than in any structured way. Santos and Brazil defender Tayla is just one of hundreds of players who have developed from street players into professionals. Tayla told me she began playing in the street at just eight years old (younger than many girls in her country according to the official statistics cited above) and that she only began playing in a team officially at the age of 15. We can only speculate as to what the Marta generation may have achieved had they not faced a panorama of such stark institutional neglect and

failure. Tayla, for example, has earned contracts playing outside Brazil, and has made an excellent career from football in spite of, and not because of, the support of Brazilian institutions. Whilst the history of the prohibition of women's football during the dictatorship is now well-known, policies which address its essential injustices have been gradual at best and in many cases non-existent. The perceived essentially male tradition has certainly continued at youth level, where opportunities have remained scarce for young girls.

There is a well-developed network of youth teams at any large male club with teams operating at under-11, 13, 15 and 17 at most large clubs in the São Paulo region. The CONMEBOL obrigatoriedade policy stipulates that a (one) women's youth division must be in place but the devil is in the detail. It does not specify how professionalised or formalised this needs to be, nor the age group it must cater for. Santos, in this regard, represents one of the more developed female youth teams in the country. This is a recent development. When I spoke to a number of players, they explained in a matter-of-fact way that their story was that 'same familiar story' that is true of so many other girls in Brazil. They grew up playing in the street as no formal outlets were available, and often until a certain age they grew up playing alongside boys. This is not to be confused with mixed gender games with proportionate numbers. This often meant being the only girl on a field of boys – with all the social stigma and immaturity that comes with it.

Days later, on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2018, I head back to the CT Rei Pelé, this time to see a youth match between Santos FC Under 17 girls and a team from Guarulhos named Barcelona. The Santos girls team are referred to as Sereinhas da Vila (Little Mermaids of the Vila Belmiro). Santos run out easy winners 9-0 (if my counting was correct – there was no scoreboard and no-one seems sure or bothered). The general consensus seems to be that being part of the Santos youth ranks affords players a great opportunity to 'make it' professionally but that the problem of many of these games is a lack of competitive balance. There are

approximately a hundred spectators, many of whom seem to be the families of the players. They all seem willing to chat. The general consensus appears to be that the under-17 Paulista girls league could be vastly improved by limiting it to the four or five teams which are truly competitive. I checked back post-tournament to see that winners São Paulo had amassed a goal difference of +44 during eight group games. The obrigatoriedade policy, which comes into force during my fieldwork in 2018, ought to force larger clubs to open at least one female youth division, which should result in an increase in standards and competitive balance. The Under 17 tournament is the only one involving professional teams in the state of São Paulo. This situation is generally worse in other states, rather than better. In this context, players are forced to dive in at the deep end playing their first football in the ‘professional’ ranks of their respective clubs. Inevitably this diminishes the quality of the spectacle, as players have not been through the entire cycle of development and thus do not reach their full potential, and thus it contributes to the sexist notion that lesser football ability is genetic or that women’s football is of poor quality when the audience first glimpse female first-team games. Conversely this bolsters male hegemony and acts as a justification for further de-funding women’s football as it is deemed to be commercially unviable.

The lack of women’s youth divisions is such that Natalia Pereira, a 9-year-old player in Santa Catarina province, attended trials and has been allowed to join the Under 10 boys team there. A recent study shows the highest percentage of young Brazilian girls only begin playing sport between 11-14 years old, at which point their male counterparts have probably already played a number of years in youth divisions of clubs or at least in school teams (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2018).

### *Collective struggle on and off the pitch*

Football, by its nature, offers varying levels of job stability dependent upon previous experience and accrued agency within the game. Goalkeeper and Activist Thais Picarte is the

first to admit that the conditions at Santos are superior to those at many other clubs in Brazil in this regard, however she continues working tirelessly for players across the region. Picarte is a director for the FENAPF (National Federation of Professional Athletes) and is also the Vice-President of SIAFMSP (The Union of Professional Athletes for São Paulo). Beyond this she is involved in the Guerreiras project. Guerreiras is an international movement aimed at fomenting gender equality and challenging discrimination by bringing together activists, academics and athletes (Aguiar et al., 2018).

In her work for FENAPF Picarte is engaged in the gradual struggle to professionalise Brazilian women's football. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, Picarte is quick to underline how the Brazilian tournament, whilst improving, is still a long way from being a professional tournament. It allows amateur teams to compete, some of whom pay the players badly if at all. Picarte laments how only two teams – Santos and São Paulo – entirely register their players, allowing them to accrue pension benefits and suchlike. Others tend to only register certain star players and then fill up the rest of the squad with amateurs. This type of practice is clearly divisive and has the effect of diverting players from their common interest. Picarte is absolutely clear that the common interest must come first. She realises that whilst elite players can forge a more comfortable career outside Brazil, that the great majority of Brazilian women players are subject to the conditions within the country. Picarte believes firmly that the debate in Brazil has moved on. She summarises that it is now much less about 'being a lesbian or not' and she argues that prejudice has taken refuge in the logic of the market. Contractual conditions have remained stagnant for two decades she argues, with the justification always being the vicious circle that claims women's football does not generate sufficient income as it is never promoted enough to do so.

On the training ground there is appreciation of the type of work Picarte does, but also a barely disguised trepidation as to how such activism would be perceived were younger

players to get involved. Similarly, players often cite the advances made to the Paulista tournament under the control of ex-Santos player Aline Pellegrino. Regarding union struggles, it is difficult to build the level of solidarity necessary with players, on one level, competing with one another for short flexibilised contracts. Conversely, given the divisive contractual situation, the sense of solidarity between the players is all the more admirable. Many of the players know that they are ultimately playing a long game and that real change will only come with further representation from ex-women players and/or more allies on both the boards of federations and clubs.

### *Moving into coaching/Formalising Experience*

From the first training sessions at the Rei Pelé one of the first players who looks out for me is Rosana dos Santos de Augusto. She has played alongside some of the best players in the United States, in Scandinavia and has won the European Champions League with the prestige women's club of European if not world football, Olympique Lyon. At international level she has played in a World and Olympic final for Brazil. Like many women footballers, during her experiences abroad she has gained a functional grasp of various languages and cultures. Conscious of the experience she has to share Rosana has already taken the Brazilian federation's A and B licenses and also possesses similar UEFA qualifications. Similarly, Emily Lima continues attending CBF coaching courses, even when she is the only woman on the course. By any objective measure, if she were to achieve her aim of moving into coaching she would add a wealth of knowledge to the technical setup of any women's team. Other players clearly look up to her and treat her almost with deference. Were the opportunities to materialise, there is no doubt Rosana would be able to command the same respect that Emily Lima has from the players. There is a clear sense from the players that those who are familiar with the curious transitional state of women's football are best placed to negotiate its various

complications and also to fight their corner in the frequent battles between club hierarchies and players.

Despite all this, the overwhelming majority of coaching staff remain male and predominantly, without this experience in women's football. This does not preclude them from making a valid contribution. What it does mean, however, is that at times, players perceive in them an indifference to women's football. In line with the findings from the survey in Chapter 1, almost all the players interviewed felt the lack of women coaching players was of grave concern. Rosana is teaming up with Emily Lima for at least a third time. Lima managed Rosana at São Jose and also as manager of the Brazilian national team. For this reason, Lima knew Rosana's attributes and knew the player had the adaptability necessary to play as a centre-forward rather than a second forward. The trust between the two meant that Rosana was prepared to try, at 36 years old, to play as a back to goal striker rather than front to goal. This type of in-depth knowledge of women footballers appears thin on the ground at a lot of women's clubs. In the absence of appointed scouting teams and mass televised games, much of the process of searching for players can be hit and miss. Like many of the Santos players Rosana acknowledges that the conditions at the club are favourable relative to most other clubs in Brazil. Rosana mentions that having a *carteira assinada* (a formal contract offering social security benefits), the support of the club and the benefits of the structure which the club offers are all beneficial. Many players across the age-range concur about the benefits Santos offers, ranging from senior players reaching the end of their careers like Thais Picarte and Maurine, to the new generation coming through such as Angelina Costantino, Karla Alves and Nicole Ramos. Santos has certainly been quicker off the mark in starting to professionalise women's football in Brazil, hence the remark about officially recognised contracts from Rosana. It is certainly encouraging that players like Rosana are looking towards moving into coaching or further roles in football. In the

immediate term, however, there are other battles that need to be fought. I quickly realised that Thais Picarte was the figurehead player trying to offer collective representation to an often fragmented group of players.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has considered how the rootedness of male hegemony affects everyday practice within one of Brazil's prestige clubs Santos FC. It has argued that the omnipresence of banal patriarchy within the club has meant that the incorporation of women's football has always felt like – in the words of Emily Lima – 'something extra grafted onto the male tradition' of the club. The strength of male hegemony – largely personified by the King Pelé – means that even a women's team which has achieved significant honours and is a pioneer at a national and continental level is barely incorporated into the club's mythology. The strength of the Santos FC invented tradition is such that using the women players to hand out prizes to watch men's games goes relatively unnoticed on account of its perceived banality rather than be seen as just the type of action which creates a hierarchy of importance – an action which is overtly discriminatory and demeaning towards the women players. Similarly, reserving the best training facilities for the men's team and sending the women's team to train with children has also long been a normalised occurrence rather than plainly prejudicial. Moreover, the women's team are habitually given more than an 'equal opportunity' when it comes to promoting Santos in the community. Indeed, duties involving children seem to be disproportionately allotted to the Sereias. On the other hand, players are acutely aware of these aspects and do use their agency to draw attention to them.

Clearly, the players' athletic performance inherently destabilises the matrix of male hegemony. By being involved in a sphere still seen as eminently male, they inherently weaken certain limits of an activity seen as exclusively male and they also break with the idealised image of femininity which the club attempts to present with its Sereias branding.

Secondly by continuing to campaign for further recognition through activism they challenge the assumptions of institutional figures. Players are achieving representation at federation level, within clubs, and on the coaching side of their respective clubs. The previous couple of decades have seen women gain a toehold within Brazil's clubs, through the policy of obrigatoriedade and through societal pressure and the players' own efforts. For this to become further consolidated clubs will need to proactively incorporate women players into their discursive mythology. One of the clubs where this is most feasible is Santos, which has in some sense been more proactive than other clubs in the past couple of decades. Nonetheless, their significant role in providing players to the Brazilian national team which reached Olympic and World Cup finals are significantly underplayed. Instead of being emphasised as outstanding achievements of a generation that achieved so much with so little, women players are ignored at the expense of the hegemonic masculinised tradition.

When I spoke to Angelina Costantino, an 18-year old prodigy who is already a first-team regular for Santos and a fixture in Brazil's under-21 setup, she inversed the habitual pessimism about the potential of women's football asking me to imagine how much Sereias had achieved in spite of all the barriers and wondered just how much further they could go with the right conditions. Revealing of both the barriers that remain and of the potential of the women's game, Angelina asked rhetorically 'imagine how popular we could be if we were treated equally'. Tellingly the provocation had a conditional structure that suggested it was not on the cards in the foreseeable future, however, it did seem symptomatic of a newly emboldened type of player, benefitting from the struggles of the previous generation.





Figure 21 Ketlen Wiggers throughout her career with Santos FC (Dibradoras, 2020)

This chapter has argued that there is a need to commemorate a growing tradition of women's football at a club like Santos FC. Having invested in women's football two to three decades earlier than many of their rivals – it seems a missed opportunity not to celebrate more widely the achievements of Sereias da Vila. A clear example of a milestone moment for consolidating the growing tradition of Santos FC Women in the officialised era was the moment Ketlen Wiggers (shown above in figure 21) became the first player to score 100 goals for the Sereias. Rather than reaching the milestone in a period of continuous service like Pelé, Ketlen had achieved it in spite of a fragmented Santos career which is symptomatic of the wavering support for women's football during that period. For example, Ketlen was left without a club when the club was discontinued in 2012.

In fact, after I returned from the 2018 Christmas break, I noticed one of the most familiar faces in the squad was missing. Ketlen Wiggers had decided not to re-sign with the club and was spending a period of time with family in the United States. I knew Ketlen was far and

away the club's all-time leading scorer and had expected her to continue with the team in the following season. Ketlen became one of the two youngest scorers ever in Santos' history when she scored for the first team at the age of fifteen. She was chosen to play for the club from 800 girls who attended trials. Having moved from Santa Catarina at such a young age, she lived at the family home of then team manager Rene Simões in order to help her adaptation.

After my departure from Santos FC, Ketlen did re-sign for the club for at least the third time and continued figuring in the first team. At the onset of the coronavirus crisis Ketlen had scored 97 goals for Santos. In a stadium without supporters Ketlen scored the 100<sup>th</sup> goal which was celebrated both by her club Santos and also in the Brazilian media. I wonder, how many other women players reached 100 goals but never had it commemorated because of the lack of records. I also wondered how the club would celebrate it. At the next training session Ketlen broke into tears after receiving a Santos shirt signed by the most emblematic icon of Santos FC and of Brazilian football – the king Pelé.

On 5th December 2020 Santos FC announced the inauguration of a dedicated new training facility for Sereias da Vila named Campo Sereias da Vila at the Rei Pelé facility together with the foundation of a Santos Social Responsibility Institute. Three days later Santos paid homage to Ketlen placing her image on the wall of the Rei Pelé (figure 22 below) alongside other idols from the club's history.



*Figure 22 A mural of Ketlen unveiled in December 2020 (from GloboEsporte)*

## Chapter 6 – The Champions of South America

### Introduction

My first contact with Atlético Huila was at the Da Vinci hotel in Adrianópolis, Manaus where the team were staying for the duration of the Women's Copa Libertadores in December 2018<sup>57</sup>. The club arrived in Manaus as winners of the Colombian league and left with the historic achievement of becoming Colombia's first winners of the continental women's championship. Despite this monumental feat, prior to the tournament the players told me they had very modest hopes about the impact such a victory would make. Their worst fears have been proved right - since winning the tournament the players have not gained the visibility of other Colombian sportswomen. Some seventeen years earlier, the Colombian sociologist Beatriz Veléz (Vélez, 2001, p.39) lamented how masculine social representations of football had entirely escaped the attention of academics in the country. Conscious of the importance of the sport to the country's national identity Veléz continued '*La carencia de estudios sobre el juego de género en el fútbol de Colombia, se hace más preocupante, toda vez que el balompié se identifica a la sola actividad que cohesiona el sentimiento de nacionalidad* (The lack of studies about how gender plays out in Colombian football is even more worrying when football has been identified as the only activity that unites us as a nation) (Vélez, 2001, p.40).

The decision to play down the considerable achievements of Atlético Huila, beyond any reasonable doubt, owe much to the perceived encroachment into territory delineated as socially masculine in Colombia (Mina & Goellner, 2015b). Indeed, before Huila's victory the achievements of Colombian women footballers have been consistently and systematically downplayed, including two trips to the women's World Cup, even reaching the second round

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<sup>57</sup> Atlético Huila stayed at the Da Vinci with rivals at the tournament Santos FC at the expense of CONMEBOL for the duration of the tournament

despite little institutional support (Mina et al., 2018, 2019). Two of the key players, talismanic midfielder Yoreli Rincón and defender Carmen Rodallega, both later told me the players had felt they had to win the tournament merely to safeguard the existence of the seemingly precarious Colombian women's league for another season. Paraguayan midfielder Fany Gauto agreed 'fuimos con la mentalidad de tener que salvar el fútbol femenino en Colombia – aunque es absurdo la amenaza de acabarlo (we went there with the mentality of having to save women's football in Colombia – although it is absurd that it was under threat).

This thesis, thus far, has covered the Brazilian domestic season in progress, with the Copa Libertadores 2018 in Manaus falling in the middle of this. In the previous cases the teams involved in my study were fully focussed on winning their regional and national competitions along with most prestigious prize in South American women's club football. I went to Iranduba and Santos before the tournament, and I went to Neiva immediately after it, and so this chapter deals with an entirely different but equally valid period of the women's club football calendar – the long months of inactivity caused by inadequate and gendered provision for women's football. The Colombian Professional Women's League was launched in 2017, using FIFA Forward funds as a considerable step towards meeting FIFA Statutes recognising gender equality (FIFA, 2016). From the beginning the implementation of this on the ground has been problematic for numerous reasons. This chapter examines the considerable gulf between the professionalisation of women's football claimed by the Colombian federation DIMAYOR and the lived reality on the ground for Colombian women players. My intention here then, is not to cherry-pick the best moments, but rather to get an indicative sense of the day-to-day reality for players throughout the year. The way in which gender discrimination takes refuge in the logic of the market is foregrounded in much of this chapter, leaving women's football as a neglected sub-category which many refuse to acknowledge.

My initial contact at Atlético Huila, the affable Head of Media for the Women's team Vanessa Diaz, looks slightly bemused as I run through the aims of my investigation about women's club football<sup>58</sup>. 'But wouldn't it be better if you came to visit us in Neiva when the women's league begins, so you can see the players in competitive mode and see just how good this team is?' she suggests. 'But when would that be exactly?' I ask slightly disingenuously knowing full well from interviews with institutional figures that even Colombian Professional League DIMAYOR's officials are yet to define what they clearly see as a secondary priority at best. A decision will (have to) be taken soon – the fact it is being continuously deferred for a later date or emergency meeting speaks volumes. I've already seen, in Manaus, that Atletico Huila Women are an extremely well-drilled, balanced and adaptable team at the Copa Libertadores. Seeing more of this is not my fundamental objective. 'The season will be sometime in the first semester this time they're saying', Diaz exclaims vaguely and hopefully. It's the first time I have heard semester used outside an educational context. It appears to have become a serviceable euphemism used by institutional figures in Colombia to explain the woefully inadequate calendar. Arbitrarily, last 'season' had been held in the second semester of the year – the period directly preceding the Copa Libertadores in Manaus, meaning Huila arrived match-fit and ready for action giving them a significant advantage over teams whose season had long since been concluded. The failure to expand the pilot four-month season along with the lack of a fixed calendar for the Colombian Women's Professional League speaks to the low priority Colombian authorities give to women's football. They are clearly paying lip-service to women's football (exemplified by a half-hearted bid to hold the 2023 World Cup) rather than acting with any genuine conviction

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<sup>58</sup> I later discovered Diaz, as Head of Media for the women's team reported largely to Diego Perdomo, an outside benefactor for the women's team, not officially part of the Huila hierarchy. Perdomo funded all the salaries of the women's team.

that there are structural and historical injustices that urgently need addressing<sup>59</sup>. The length of the tournament in its opening two years has been four months and three months respectively. This means many of the participating clubs cut their cloth accordingly, employing their women players for the minimum time necessary to allow for pre-season and the possibility of reaching the knockout rounds. Upon being eliminated early, players' verbal contracts (which are often not even legally binding) can be cut short (ACOLFUTPRO, 2019, 2020).

As a result of these institutional conditions, from a thirty-strong squad the continental champions find themselves down to the bare bones – just thirteen players upon my arrival. supplemented by local players Daniela Narváez and Anyi Bonilla promoted from Valkyrias, a local amateur women's club with whom the club enjoys an informal but fructiferous relationship. This is the closest the club comes to having a youth division, an aspect crucial to developing players which is sadly still lacking in Colombian football. This arrangement is barely formalised, however, and shows clear gender differentiation considering the resources the club devotes to developing its own players for the men's team. Indeed, this problem goes far beyond Huila. The Colombian national women's team depends heavily on just two schools which produce younger players – the Escuela Carlos Sarmiento Lora in Cali and Formas Íntimas, until recently an amateur club from Medellin. Along with this the national team is supplemented by players who develop within the US university system – another factor for which the country's national federation cannot take any credit .

Much of the literature to date has made valid claims about the low level of media interest or pejorative coverage of women's national teams both in Europe (Ravel & Gareau, 2016b; Agergaard, 2019; Black & Fielding-Lloyd, 2019) and North America (Christopherson et al., 2002; Burch et al., 2018; Pegoraro et al., 2018) and in the South American context

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<sup>59</sup> The first pilot season was held with the idea of enlarging the competition to cover more of the year. The exact opposite happened. It has in fact become shorter each year.

(Dos Santos & Medeiros, 2011; Ferretti et al., 2011; Mina & Goellner, 2015b). In chapter 2 the prize-money scandal post-Women's Copa Libertadores 2018 problematised the notion of one-way traffic in the production of meaning, arguing that stories often begin online through the social media accounts of players themselves. However, national team football of a sufficient quality to arouse mainstream interest, hinges upon a mutually beneficial relationship with club football, where players, in theory, stay fit and at a competitive level throughout the year. In the case of women's club football in South America, this relationship is hugely problematic. In the case of Colombia this lack of continuity in the club calendar has been matched and exacerbated by the sparse or non-existent calendar of the national team over previous years (Else & Nadel, 2019, p.252). Despite visible advances in national team women's football, such as equal pay in a number of nations (Glass, 2020; Taylor, 2020) and record television audiences (Economist, 2019), it is my impression that the real story resides in the permanent state of limbo of women's club football which prevents players from reaching their full potential in various ways.

With this in mind, part of the reason I chose to investigate the everyday experiences of Atlético Huila was the particularity, at the time of carrying out fieldwork, that the club trained all-year round as opposed to many of their rivals who disband their women's team for months on end and only re-form a couple of weeks before the annual three-month tournament comes around. The wage bill for the women's team is bankrolled by local businessman Diego Perdomo, meaning they are one of only three clubs whose women's teams train all-year round. The other clubs cease to exist for large chunks of the year, before re-appearing to present a healthier picture than really exists at the onset of each three month 'season'. I explain to Diaz, then, that my intention is to produce as faithful a record as possible of the everyday experiences of women representing Atlético Huila. When she explained to me that these periods, characterised by uncertainty, are in fact the norm, that only reinforced my



conviction that this was, in fact, a fairly indicative period in the lives of women footballers. If players are facing perpetual instability, looking for offers elsewhere so they can begin practising their profession again as quickly as possible then this should be on the record as an issue which urgently needs addressing.

## **Locating Atlético Huila**

### ***Football in the Provinces***

Two of the three case studies in this thesis are located in places in which football is not an established part of regional identity. A footballing map of Brazil or Colombia would not traditionally include Manaus and Neiva respectively. However, the emergence of women's football in these places has a common thread – the possibility of constructing a provincial oppositional identity around antagonism towards the perceived centre of the country. In the case of Huila, the region has long been viewed as backward, in opposition to an enlightened elite in Bogotá – just five hours away by road but much more distant in the country's social imaginary. Restrepo (2012, p.130) argues that the discursive hegemony of the centre and its accompanying undervaluing of provincial Colombia is discernibly buttressed by 'la política del chiste' which has *costeños* as lazy, *paisas* as vivos, *santandereanos toscos*, *pastusos* as stupid (bobos) and finally *opitas* (the region of Huila) as slow in opposition to '*capitalinos ingeniosos*'.

The existence of this antagonism facilitates the growth of local interest (as argued for Manaus in the previous chapter). As many of the provincial and subtly racialised stereotypes refer to the rural nature of the province of Huila, it is perhaps for that reason that the team name chosen is that of the province rather than the more normalised practice of naming the club after the city. It is open to conjecture whether Atlético Neiva would have appealed to local pride in the same way. At various points in history the region produced more coffee than any other in the country (Ortiz, 2012), and yet the stigma which has Huilenses as 'gente

sin iniciativa, mayordomos' persists (Restrepo, 2012, p.134). Players were often aware of these nuances – though as per the Manaus chapter, the great majority of the squad were recruited from across the nation and beyond, meaning a period of adaptation to Huila.

### ***The Lack of Invented Tradition at Atlético Huila***

Santos, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, could also be described in some sense as provincial, but has come to be of profound importance to the Brazilian country of football identity. Atlético Huila provides a counterpoint to the discursive weight of the Invented Tradition described in the previous chapter. Atlético Huila was only formed in 1990 meaning it has had less time to accrue the considerable cultural capital of many of its rivals. Atlético Huila women are a sub-category of the men's team, who have established themselves as a respectable top division team. They also differ from Iranduba, where the women's team takes social and economic precedence over a fledgling men's team. Even as continental champions, the Atlético Huila women's team had to engage with the same unacknowledged assumptions as elsewhere – namely the sport is viewed as socially masculine and that the women who play the game are viewed as inferior to and subordinate to the men's version.

### ***Promoting the Women's Team***

In spite of these institutional and ideological obstacles discussed here, and previously, the Huila public did engage with the women's team. My contact, Vanessa Diaz explained to me at training how the social media accounts of the women's team reached parity in terms of followers, engagement and posts with those of the men's team. Diaz is modest in omitting the extent to which her own endeavour and determination rather than club policy is responsible for this. She created accounts solely to promote the women's team. It is telling that these women's football specific social media accounts quickly amassed 30,000 followers, slightly more than the men's team as of April 2019. Of equal import, the club was quick to delete the accounts when the women's team was discontinued in June 2020. Interest in the club's

success was consolidated by winning the Copa Libertadores 2018 in Manaus. Whilst many clubs have only one social media account, a practice which tends to marginalise women's and youth football, under Vanessa Diaz, Huila opened separate accounts to promote the women's team. The players' recognition of this is clear from observing the close relationship between them and Diaz.

### **Arriving in Neiva**

I arrive in Neiva on an overnight bus that takes in several police and military checkpoints. After a lethargic day, around 8pm on Friday night in Neiva, I receive an unexpected WhatsApp message from the captain of Huila's Copa Libertadores winning team Gavy Santos. Vanessa Diaz had passed on my number in order for Santos to contact me. This was over and above what Diaz needed to do, but she is obviously fiercely committed to the women's team and makes a real effort to help. The message is concise. Santos is exhausted from today's training, but is happy to meet for the first time in person tomorrow. She seems genuinely enthused that the club has a visitor and tells me there is a training game at 8am at the Candido artificial surface, a municipal facility, in the city centre which I can watch tomorrow (see figure 23 below).



*Figure 23 Atletico Huila Women at training camp (own photo)*

### **Visible and Invisible Realities**

From my first days with Atlético Huila it is abundantly clear that day-to-day lived experience with the team paints a different picture to the media and institutional representations described in earlier chapters. The disconnect between those narratives and lived experience is stark. I arrive at the Candido synthetic pitch expecting to be greeted by the entire Atlético Huila coaching and backroom staff as I was at the other two clubs. There seem to be two men's six-a-side teams playing on one side of the pitch. In the distance I glimpse the continental champions for the first time since being at pitch-side for their coronation as champions in Manaus. Or at least I see what remains of them. As they emerge from the changing rooms I already know that many of the heroes of Manaus are now elsewhere. It appears the coaching staff too are somewhere else, as only the players appear.

### ***Intergender Practice Match***

Despite being severely depleted on account of the lack of football, a nucleus of the squad remains, key players without which the club would never have won the continental championship. Those who are left behind, I would learn later, are generally the more senior players with fewer years of football left in them, or players with emotional links to the region. Captain Gavy Santos, for example, has set up her own football school for girls in neighbouring Ibagué. Goalkeeper Maritza Lopez grew up in a nearby town in provincial Huila. At the present moment it needs those kind of circumstances or ties to keep a player at Atlético Huila as there is no official confirmation that a new Colombian women's season will even take place this year. Rather than depend on faith alone, a number of players have taken the proactive step of looking for a guarantee of football in another country. Those left behind wait hoping each day that a date for the new season will materialise triggering the arrival of players capable of defending the double they won the previous season.

It suddenly dawns on me that the training match will be against the men's team who were training frantically when I arrived. I enquire of one of the staff about the age and pedigree of the male players. I'm told implausibly that the grown men, who appear in their early to mid-twenties, are all in fact under fifteen. They are apparently a successful youth team that plays in a local regional league. Nobody seems to know much more. Upon later questioning, official figures remain tight-lipped too, almost as if it wouldn't do for people to know that a women's team regularly trains and has success against a male team. These are just the kind of practices which, if visibilised, have the potential to destabilise the matrix of male hegemony (Lugones, 2007; Butler, 2011). In *The beautiful game* Williams argued (2007, p.183) that US women footballers are represented according to sex-appropriate characteristics. They ought to be 'wholesome, smart, ethical and collaborative'. This girl-next-door image of the players discursively denies them of their key sporting characteristic – namely being steely and competitive on the field. In this way, by differentiating discursively between appropriate characteristics of male and female players, the heteronormative matrix (Butler, 2011) is held together. Practices like mixed gender football undermine this and thus are hidden away.

After the first ten minutes or so, the men's team take the lead. I'm told by a member of staff sat alongside me at the training ground that a goal for the men was inevitable given the biological differences. The goal has come against the run of play - the men's team haven't been dominating the game, and scored on their first attack. At this point, I notice a young woman in a Huila tracksuit barking instructions at the women from the sidelines. I realise it is Jorelyn Carabali, a promising young Colombian international player who has recently suffered a horrific injury. During a training session Carabali collided with a teammate and suffered a fractured femur which has kept her out of action since April 2018. Carabali, like many of her teammates a product of the Escuela Carlos Sarmiento Lora, had been uprooted

from her native Valle del Cauca at nineteen to try and progress her career by playing at the highest available level. Watching the game Carabali is visibly frustrated. She yells comments at her teammates which seem far removed from the image of wholesomeness and gratitude projected upon women footballers like her. She tells her teammates not to let up for a second and to be 'duras con ellos' (tough on them). Soon enough they take Carabali's advice by flooring a couple of the men's team with fair but crunching challenges. Huila Women soon draw level and within fifteen minutes are comfortably three-one ahead. Atlético Huila women claim every throw-in even when they know full well it isn't theirs, incessantly appeal to the referee for fouls, bookings and anything else that may be to their advantage. Whilst working within clearly gendered conditions, the players achieve the level of ruthlessness and efficiency you would expect from professional players.

Insofar as professionalism has been achieved in Colombia, it is found in the determination and resilience of these players who turn out unsupervised to play a game like this early on a Saturday morning. In the absence of organised competition for much of the year these games are all the players have. The way they play the game reflects their determination to be as good as they possibly can, in spite of the structural disadvantages they have compared to a country where there is a regular club and international calendar. In fact, the way they are playing brings to mind the ruthless streak of the U.S. women's national team – whom many of the players say they admire. Liana Salazar, for example, who has represented Colombia at two World Cups and the Olympic Games, says Megan Rapinoe is her hero as someone who '*siempre ha luchado por el desarrollo del fútbol femenino* (she has always fought for the development of women's football). Maybe the next generation of players will adopt players like Yoreli Rincón and others in this Huila side. In the same way as Rapinoe, the players have not only achieved on the pitch but also have worked tirelessly to improve the collective cause of women footballers in Colombia. Arguably, they have done

this faced with far greater social stigma in an even more challenging social context than their North American counterparts.

The unnamed men's team, on the other hand, are now visibly irritated at being 'manhandled' (sic), as Jorelyn Carabali puts it, though they don't look altogether surprised about the scoreline<sup>1</sup>. Their women opponents are used to playing against the lexicon of football itself, as well as another team, as its phallogentric language bolsters the heteronormative matrix which privileges certain characteristics for each gender (Butler, 2011, p.41). Their embodied practice serves to contest the hegemonic masculinity and in turn to problematise terms like 'manhandled', and phrases like it, rather than through discourse. The despondent but knowing expressions of the male players betray a sense of *deja-vu* – these games are a frequent fixture and I later learn that the men are used to losing the games, and that '*se portan bien por lo general, pero cuando se enojan, se enojan* (they behave well generally, but when they get wound up they really get wound up) as Jorelyn Carabali explained to me. I spoke to a couple of the male players after the game and they confirm that they frequently lose these games. The member of staff who had smugly declared that the physical difference was telling after ten minutes has long since disappeared. The second half brings more of the same with Huila women eventually running out 7-1 winners with the men's team down to ten players after a professional foul. Rather than slow up having won the game, the women continue mercilessly as if every goal counted for goal difference. At this point I recall an anecdote from Beatriz Veléz (2001, p.43) about the *Fútbol por la Paz* initiative. Veléz recalls how women and men played exhibition games together with a number of fixed rules like the first goal had to be scored by a woman player. She recalls firstly how the media applauded the exercise choosing to exalt the image of women footballers in this context. However, they remained virulently opposed to women playing in any competitive context. Moreover, Veléz recalls a condescending attitude from the male

players who would say after the first goal by a woman player – ‘ahora si vamos a jugar en serio! (now, let’s play seriously). My mind wanders as to how the media would explain the men being beaten so comprehensively.

The experience of this game on my first full day in town flies in the face of club and institutional representations of women’s football. With a superior first touch, more accurate passing and even bullying the male team physically for large periods, Huila Women come out on top in every respect. The division of men’s and women’s football is defended vehemently by clubs and institutions. Indeed, women’s teams are often presented as being qualitatively different from the men’s game and it is an unacknowledged assumption that they would be unable to compete with their male counterparts. There are no serious injuries during the game and nor does there appear to be any greater risk of injuries than there is in an all men or all women game. Men and women sharing a pitch for a competitive game is certainly not on the cards in the near future, but this experience makes me think deeper about why, and think beyond the often-invoked reason of physical difference. The reasons for maintaining gender division in sports and leisure activities vary according to the particularities of each discipline, but even in an activity like chess for example, a strict gender division is maintained. In this case, it has little to do with physicality and everything to do with protecting male hegemony. One similarity between chess and football is the overwhelming participation of men and historical marginalisation and derision related to female participation.

At the conclusion of the game, I go over to meet the players for the first time and they welcome me by sharing their post-match snacks and drinks. They quickly change from the gnarly competitors who won the game to convivial hosts welcoming their new visitor. There is no formal introduction from anyone at the club so it is left to Gavy Santos to introduce me. Initially she is busy on the other side of the pitch signing autographs for a group of around ten young supporters. The players are laughing and joking and Nelly Córdoba provides the music



from a beatbox that will become a familiar fixture in the coming months. The musical choices are eclectic – anything from old school salsa to urban and reggaeton, all of which seem to trigger choreographed comedic dancing from the more outgoing players to much laughter from the rest.

An unintentionally damaging myth about women's football is that of saintly behaviour on the pitch. It is extremely common to hear how refreshing it is that women players don't simulate fouls or take advantage of grey areas in the rules in the same manner that men's teams do. For example, it is often argued that women players behave better on the football pitch (Evans, 2019; Casal et al., 2020), never try to get one another booked or claim throw-ins or corners when they know it not to be correct. Broadly speaking, this clichéd observation is meant as a compliment to women's football as well as an opportunity to admonish the perceived morally distasteful millionaires that some modern male players have become. Nonetheless, this false dichotomy does, in some sense, reinforce a binary of competitive win-at-all-costs male players set against women players who naturally tend towards less competitive fairer conduct. When men play football they are metaphorically going to war as the pride of their nation or the region is at stake. By reducing women players to beacons of decency, this competitive edge is taken away and with it goes some of the interest that competitive sport generates. Furthermore, the notion of fair women players naturally not given to cheating or bending the rules is rooted in our social imaginary of what constitutes femininity. Merely by participating in competitive sports women are breaking with this binary. Watching them push every rule to the limit, claim every throw-in and corner regardless of whether it is theirs or not, and engage in psychological warfare with the male players makes it abundantly clear that many of these stereotypes stand up to little scrutiny. This confirms Jean Williams' findings in *The Beautiful Game* (2007).

Santos tells me she'll pass me the schedule for the following week when she knows it herself, giving me an acute sense of deja-vu from the nomadic training arrangements of the first two clubs I visited. This, by now, feels unsurprising and even banal. I need to remind myself that whilst these kind of practices are highly normalised they are also discriminatory and reflect the gendered order which continues to prevail in football. The unwillingness of clubs to provide a stable home for women's teams is symptomatic of their attitudes.

Gavy Santos kindly offers to drive me to training each day but explains she won't be able to do that next week as she hasn't been able to fill her car with petrol as they haven't been paid yet. The way she tells me this leads me to believe the players' monthly pay is often late. This, it appears, is life with the continental women's champions, symptomatic of how even continental success does not bring the players sufficiently onto the radar to receive the courtesy of being paid on time.

One notable feature of the morning's activities worth remarking upon was the complete lack of any coaching staff. Presumably instructions for the game had been given at a previous training session, but the team was left to fend for itself. This meant that numerous experienced players like Carmen Rodallega, Jennifer Peñaloza and Gavy Santos would need to tell other players what needed to be done when defending set pieces or organising the formation. There was enough evidence to suggest the players had the competency to develop into managers or coaching staff after their careers, if and when, the doors were open for them.

### ***The Coaching Team***

At Atletico Huila, the entire coaching staff are male, despite the club having a wealth of experience from a range of countries, settings and levels among its playing staff. Players are guarded with their views on this, for obvious reasons, with a male researcher such as myself and in the presence of all-male coaching staff. The anonymous survey material presented earlier in the thesis suggested a clear preference for female coaching input. The head coach is

Albeiro Erazo and he is supported by physical trainer Robinson Ossa, physio Cristian Bustos, club doctor Oscar Sandoval, and goalkeeping coach Javier Buitrago.

Erazo provides a much-needed link between the all-male hierarchy of the club and the female players. He is not by nature authoritarian yet manages to command the players' respect with what they perceive as his homestead wisdom and humility. His daily repartee tends to involve imparting an anecdote or a joke from his youth in Gigante, a small provincial town in Huila province. Some of the players listen attentively while the usual suspects are already playing kickie-uppy or warming up in the background. Erazo is not a stickler for things like this and just lets it go. It is my perception that shared social class is a clear facilitator of the relationships. The great majority of players are from humble backgrounds and instantly relate to the calm homestead wisdom of Erazo. Indeed, watching the way players relate to those they perceive to be 'their own' underlines the importance of an intersectional approach which is not solely gender-based, but rather takes into account the crucial nuances of race and class which are at play (Crenshaw, 1990). This is enhanced by Erazo having suffered a stroke a few years ago which has significantly changed his outlook on life and has given him a different perspective, he says. The stroke has left him with motor skill limitations and with a slower speaking style. Rather than let this be a problem Erazo uses it to his advantage – he loves holding court with the players in his protracted provincial Spanish, knowing the players relate to his humble beginnings and what he has achieved in spite of various obstacles. All of the players are acutely aware of Erazo's plight and indeed are inspired by him, they say. 'El profe es bien comprensivo, y siempre está pendiente de nosotros (el profe is very understanding with us and always looks after our needs)' commented Nancy Madrid during training. This is clearly the case, inverting in some sense the patriarchal relationship prescribed by clubs and more conventional male managers. The specificities of the relationship between Erazo and the players, whilst not horizontal exactly,

evade some of the typical patriarchal hierarchical dynamics which are often present in women's football. It has been argued that aesthetically, structurally and culturally football serves as a prime site for the legitimation of men's power over women (Giulianotti, 1999, p.298). The presence of an all-male coaching team suggests a continuation of this, however the lived reality of how the players relate with the key authority figures at Huila suggest shifting attitudes. Players like Fany Gauto and Carmen Rodallega both expressed a desire to manage in the future, along with a confidence that they would be equipped to do so. It is open to conjecture how they would manage. A perfect storm of coincidences created the circumstances by which Erazo manages by consensus. Whether the players may wish to imitate this or use a more conventional authoritarian style is an interesting question for the future which may be linked to destabilising male hegemony.

*'Los sacrificios que nos tocan (The sacrifices we have to make)'*

Earlier in the chapter I discussed the exacting standards the team imposes upon itself. By the same token, the lack of a professional calendar, a sub-categorised status within clubs and the precarious contractual conditions are also emphasised across the thesis. One day, midway through a training session, upon arriving late to training on a motorbike, having made the 30 kilometre trip from USCO (la Universidad Surcolombiana), one of the players exclaimed wearily 'los sacrificios que nos tocan' before quickly getting ready and getting involved in the training session. This made me think about the ways in which the players themselves bridge the gap achieving a semblance of professionalism despite unfavourable circumstances. Players have actively sought out places to develop at youth level, often meaning uprooting at an early age. Upon arrival they are often forced to live communally in cramped conditions on a short-term basis, and then move from club to club and city to city sometimes numerous times in a calendar year. Similarly, in the absence of economic security given the precarity and low-pay on offer, players have shown determination living a kind of double life to

continue pursuing their dreams. They have continued to study alongside playing football. Furthermore, they have withstood societal prejudices and in many cases managed to become a footballer in spite of insurmountable odds. The following section considers some of these instances which came to light during the period of fieldwork.

### *The Lived Experience of the Professional League*

Unlike the experience with Iranduba and Santos, who trained relatively close to their respective stadiums, the training facilities of Atlético Huila are some 40 kilometres from Neiva in rural Campoalegre. From the centre of Neiva to the training facilities it was necessary for me to travel each day on the official team bus with the players. This allowed me to get to know the level of comfort players had for travelling to training and a chance to chat in a more informal context before training began. When I say the official team bus, it is probably worth adding that it is considerably older than the brand new equivalent that the men's team have. In an incident that seems par for the course, on one occasion I was recruited to help push start the rickety team bus. I can hear mutterings in the background that this never happens with the men's team bus. Another player wonders if it is going to start at all. The players, however, are not at all surprised. It takes seven or eight staff and players to get it moving again – triggering wild cheering and a few minutes of singing. This is the life of women footballers one of them tells me. Another quips that this is not true - they actually play in a *professional* league, causing more eye-rolling and laughter. The players are acutely aware that the nomenclature 'Colombian *Professional* Women's League' does not necessarily mean exactly what it says but rather hints at a discursive battle to convince the public that assertive action is being taken.<sup>60</sup> The institutional narrative, covered in an earlier chapter, is that the Colombian Professional Women's League is the first of its kind in Latin America, providing a significant leap forward towards meeting global goals (set by FIFA) for gender

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<sup>60</sup> It is redundant to say it is professional in, for example, Serie A, La Liga, the Bundesliga or the Premier League.

equality. Colombian football is organised by two federations, DIMAYOR for professional tournaments and DIFUTBOL for fútbol aficionado (amateur football). For this reason, by definition, any tournament organised by DIMAYOR ought to be professional. Also for this same reason, the women's league coming under the auspices of DIMAYOR represented a significant step. From the moment the league started, headed by a savvy group of activist players like Yoreli Rincón, Daniela Montoya and Vanessa Córdoba, Colombian women players have consistently tried to hold DIMAYOR to account for the many loopholes and problems which have characterised the opening years of professional competition. Of course, definitions of football professionalism are slippery and open to numerous interpretations – in England (Taylor, 2001b, 2005b; Curry, 2004) and Argentina (Frydenberg, 2005b, 2011) for example. In the context of Argentina the grey areas between amateurism and professionalism have been labelled as '*marronismo moderno*' (Frydenberg, 2005b, 2011; Garton, 2018).<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, in Colombia professionalisation was linked to migration, nationalism and political upheaval bringing about a uniquely marketised polity linked to national unity (de Souza Gomes, 2012, 2021). Professionalism in Colombia began with a pirate league outside of FIFA in 1948 which offered lucrative salaries without much regulation or consideration for the welfare of players, social security and due process in registering players with the federation (de Souza Gomes, 2021). In a similar vein, a December 2019 report by ACOFUTPRO, the Colombian sub-division of FIFPRO, noted that a third of players had no contract nor social security cover, and many clubs had more amateur players than professionally registered and contracted ones. There were even clubs that had only 5 officially contracted players. Allied to this, precarity in terms of contract length meant that players could be moving on after just three months (or even less if their teams were

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<sup>61</sup> *Marronismo* refers to informal incentives offered to players which are unofficially tantamount to being paid but escape sanction. Also in glossary

eliminated early). Information supplied anonymously to ACOLFUTPRO by players explains that most clubs only contract players for the length of the Colombian Professional Women's League, meaning they are unemployed for 8 to 9 months each year. Added to this, it has been reported that as the tournament operates on a knockout basis, upon not advancing from the group stage players' employment has been terminated by 'mutual consent' after just one or two months of the three month 'professional season'. Finally, only 11% of players' contracts were longer than six months and the majority (58%) were for only three months (ACOLFUTPRO, 2020).

The state of the team bus is symptomatic of the second-class status of the women's game and of the begrudging provision offered by clubs to accommodate it. The inclusion of professional in the name is symptomatic of the way equality is watered down to inclusion (Eley & Nadel, 2019, p.12) or put in other words what Williams (2007, p.183) calls the 'negative integration' of women's football under an 'equal but different' model. Players know that they are incorporated into clubs on deeply unequal terms and that they won't get a contract length that offers them any life stability nor will they be treated equally within the club. As Jennifer Peñaloza puts it 'jugar solo dos meses no es aceptable, la federación y los clubes tienen que hacer muchísimo más no simplemente cumpliendo sino comprometiéndose de verdad (playing just two months a year is not acceptable. The federation and clubs need to do much more, not just doing what they have to, but showing real commitment).

### ***Double Lives***

As a basic requirement, a professional would need to dedicate themselves exclusively to their chosen vocation. The current state of women's football in Colombia certainly does not allow for this. Nancy Madrid, the player whose late arrival to training begins this section, is a typical example of a high-level player who is also studying a full-time university course. She is studying Physical Education at the USCO in Neiva. Madrid points out that it is a practical

decision to both study and try to be a footballer based on the understanding that being a women's footballer in Colombia brings no financial guarantees and thus continuing to study and safeguarding a future outside the game is vital. Madrid is pleased at least to be exempted from writing a thesis for her bachelors' degree because she has become champion of South America in her field. She feels grateful for this, but balancing the two activities brings difficulties. In the worst case scenario, missing a certain number of classes means repeating a semester and losing all the time you have put in. These are the challenges of the *semi-professional*.

Similarly, teammate Daniela Narváez is getting used to reconciling studies with training. On the bus home after training, Narváez tells me that her route into football was playing alongside boys. She explains that she was always a first-team player for the Huila municipality and felt well treated playing alongside male counterparts. Narváez was pleasantly surprised when the opportunity to join Atletico Huila women came, but noted that the demands of training in an amateur girls' club compared to those of Atletico Huila are hugely different. She joined together with Anyi Bonilla, another Valkyrias player. In the case of Narváez, she wasn't as lucky as Nancy Madrid, and one consequence of her joining Atletico Huila full-time has been that she has had to forfeit a semester at university where she studies engineering. This means, ultimately, that it will take her longer to graduate in the case she doesn't continue as a professional footballer. I ask to what degree she feels okay with this. She just shrugs and says '*pues, es lo que me toca, ¿que se puede hacer?*' (well that's just the way it is, what can I do?). Players who are leading this difficult double life regularly use the bus ride to the training ground to have a short nap to catch up on lost sleep – no mean feat given the loud salsa music and the bumps in the road. Narváez has just turned eighteen and thus has difficult choices to make about whether to dedicate herself to life as a women's professional football or to go for a safer bet through her university studies. Understandably,



given she says that the '*tiempo de prueba sin periodo fijo no tiene garantías*' (the open-ended trial period with the club comes with no guarantees). This situation typifies the precarity which must discourage a great number of young women players. Narváez began playing at just five years old, like many serious players, and obviously genuinely loves the game. Clearly, the current institutional arrangements are not propitious for such a player to pursue a career in the game.

The issue of leading a double life comes up in a discussion between a number of players on the bus. Nancy Madrid, normally a fairly shy player in the group setting, begins by explaining how the situation came to a head in her case. She faced a particularly difficult dilemma when the club was about to travel to Manaus for the Copa Libertadores. She faced having to repeat an entire semester for the sake of missing a couple of exams which clashed with the period of the tournament in December 2018. Luckily, at precisely the moment when the two crucial engagements fell, the university staff went on strike and thus the end of semester exams were deferred. This lucky coincidence meant that Madrid was able to travel to Brazil with a clear conscience ready to take on the best players on the continent, rather than being penalized for missing her exams in order to do so.

### ***The Itinerant Lives of Women Footballers***

On the training ground I hear numerous regional references such as 'opita' (Huila region) 'cachaca/rola' (Bogotá), 'paisa' (Medellin/Antioquia), 'chama' (Venezuela) or 'costeña' (from the coast). These labels, each loaded with the stereotypes mentioned earlier in the chapter, serve to provide a sense of identity to the players a long way from home. The shared cultural references between the players give them a sense of familiarity. This is particularly important as players are often forced to relocate multiple times in order to find a salary and games.

After winning the Copa Libertadores in Manaus many of the club's star performers received offers to play elsewhere. In light of the unstable shifting three-month season on offer in Colombia players have, on the face of it, nothing to lose in listening to any offers whatsoever. Nothing to lose economically and in terms of their playing careers perhaps – but this neglects the brutal adaptation difficulties many players face when starting a new life in a country where they do not know the language or cultural references and where they do not have any contacts.

Paraguayan midfielder Fany Gauto told me about the difficulties of '*comenzando de cero*' (starting out from nothing) in a new setting. When she was just 21 she relocated to Israel and felt daunted by the language and culture. Gauto recalls the move to Israel as a sink or swim moment – '*tuve que adaptarme super rápido y incluso me tocaba expresarme en inglés, que no era el primer idioma ni para mi ni para ellos*' (I had to adapt really quickly, having to express myself in English which was neither my language nor theirs). Despite the obvious culture shock this caused for a young player, it has imbued Gauto with the confidence she has today. She wears Paraguayan nationality as a badge of honour, with a Paraguayan flag on her *tereré* container. The other players are generally accepting of this and even make occasional attempts to say words in Guaraní.

Two of the outstanding players from the Libertadores-winning team, Yoreli Rincón and Jaylis Oliveros, led the exodus by signing for Iranduba in Brazil. There they could continue playing football immediately in the Amazonian championship in January and look forward to a much longer season. Another leading figure, Aldana Cometti left for Sevilla in Spain, where a much longer season runs from September through to May and where a great number of South American women players have moved in the last two or three years.<sup>62</sup> The

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<sup>62</sup> This mirrors the historical tendency for South American male players to move to Spain and Portugal, and to a lesser extent Italy, for practical and cultural reasons.

less obvious moves were those of penalty shoot-out hero goalkeeper Daniela Solera, who left to try her luck in Finland and Liana Salazar and Ysaura Viso, who both moved to China.

Eliana Stabile and Fabiana Vallejos returned to their native Argentina in order to continue playing competitive football. Clearly, with a World Cup approaching for the latter two players, months upon months without playing any competitive games made no sense and thus uprooting and moving away once again was the only option – in this case softened by going back ‘home’ at least. The way in which players engineer a full season of action by moving around is symptomatic of the structural problems and the lack of synchronicity of calendars for women’s football. The following diagram (Figure 24) sets out an indicative but not exhaustive list of some of the Huila players movements during the period of my fieldwork (August 2018 to February 2020):

### Player Movement During Fieldwork

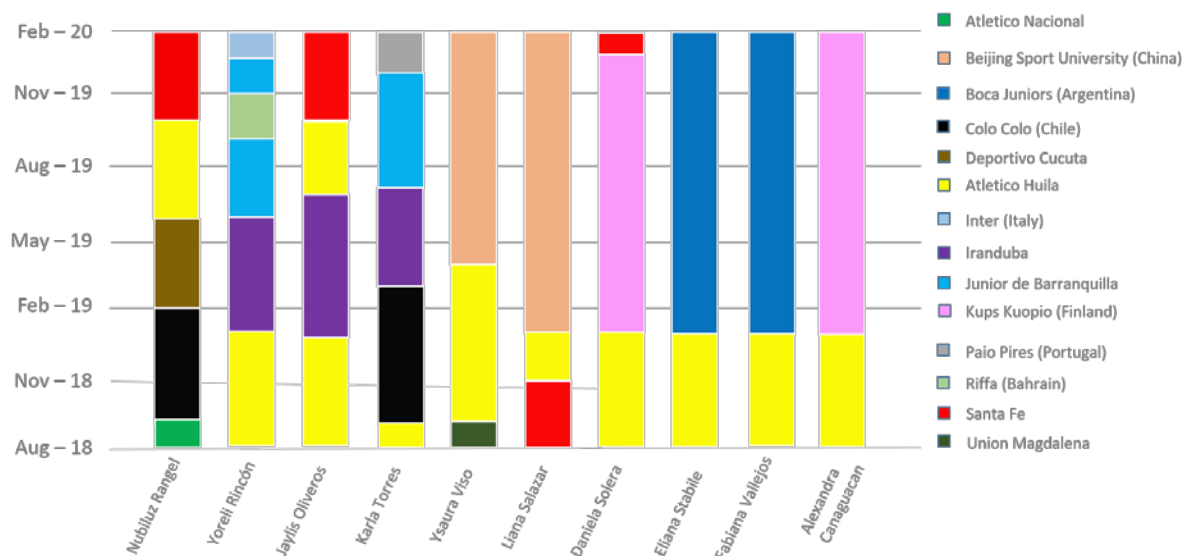


Figure 24 Indicative examples of player movement during fieldwork period

Within Colombia, it is notable how many of the Huila players are from either Antioquia or Valle del Cauca, and have been through the Formas Íntimas club in Medellin or the Carlos Sarmiento Lora school based in Cali. The dominance of these amateur endeavours in the

production of successful young footballers demonstrates the dearth of opportunities for young girls elsewhere in the country.

### **The Real Picture**

This lack of opportunities clearly has a marked socio-economic dimension. Spending time with the players enabled me to come to understand the extent of over-representation of whiteness in the media and institutions. Within a neoliberal polity there is a marked tendency to emphasise players perceived to be more marketable to the national image of white mestizaje being promoted. As mentioned earlier, ex-FIFA president Sepp Blatter was keen to follow this type of promotion suggesting tighter shorts for players may attract more (sexual) interest. More broadly in the case of Colombia, both Alvaro Uribe and Juan Manuel Santos have sought to brand the Colombian nation as a product to be sold internationally. This market-logic is often discernible in attempts to promote women's football. On many occasions this branding has had markedly gendered layers to it. For example, it has been argued that Colombian beauty queens have been presented as natural national resources and as an antidote to the dated but hypermasculinised Pablo Escobar narrative (De La Torre, 2013). This gendered exportation of the country has spilled over into areas beyond the beauty contest into a wide array of other spheres promoting a neoliberal Colombia. I was in Colombia when the 2005 *Colombia es pasión* campaign began. This campaign was symptomatic of the ways in which a mixed nation is almost always presented in terms of a 'very whitened mestizo' (Wade, 2012, p.38). In more recent times this type of branding has become all the more obvious with the increased usage of promotion on digital media. When the launch of the women's professional league is placed in this context it does not seem strange at all that DIMAYOR has tried to present the league as something qualitatively different from men's football from the beginning. Much of its publicity has tended to

emphasise the whiter idealised type of mestizo Colombian referred to by Wade – meaning more commercial opportunities for such players (see figures 25 & 26 below).



Figure 25 Official 2023 Colombian World Cup Bid, (FIFA.com, 2020, p.9)



Figure 26 Advertisement for the 2018 season. Fany Gauto and Liana Salazar

On the other hand, all the structural disadvantages women's football has are exacerbated by the very same logic which saw the 'pioneering' professional women's league introduced - one of conformation to a marketised vision of modernity.

On the training ground one of the more gregarious and considerate characters is Jennifer Peñaloza. Peñaloza always lends me some high-strength insect repellent and warns me several times that I will be eaten alive by mosquitos if I don't use copious quantities of it. 'The mosquitos like gringo blood' she jokes to the rest, to uproarious laughter. She's another likable character and a fierce and determined player on the pitch. A constant across all the clubs I visit is the presence of players who have had difficult upbringings. As in the men's game, the demographic who play women's football is tilted heavily towards those from poorer backgrounds. All of the heroines in women's football could be said to be unsung - but there can be few for whom this is more true than Jennifer Peñaloza. Peñaloza played the inaugural Copa Libertadores in 2009 and has returned to contest it on a number of occasions - three more times including a semi and a final for Formas Íntimas and latterly as a champion with Atletico Huila. Despite passing under the radar in ways that betray the heteronormative racialised preferences of Colombian society, she was a player who was never going to be overlooked on footballing merit when the technical staff at Huila began putting together a team capable of challenging firstly for the Colombian title and later for continental honours.

The backstory of the player is symptomatic of the ills of Colombia's development model, which has ingrained structural inequalities and left the poorest sectors of society to struggle. Peñaloza grew up in the Belén barrio of Medellin. She was actively discouraged from playing football by her father, who was vehemently opposed to her playing. Nonetheless, with the support of her mother and her brother she began forging a career as a footballer. Her brother would watch her play and see her establish herself with Formas Íntimas. Formas Íntimas were the most important club in Colombian women's football prior

to DIMAYOR's professionalisation. Many of the players who represented Colombia at the 2011 and 2015 Women's World Cups were developed by this amateur club, playing in the national team alongside a more privileged, whiter contingent who were based in North America. Peñaloza has thrived in Colombian club football but has been consistently overlooked by the national team. During the third occasion that Peñaloza participated in the Copa Libertadores, in Brazil, she received a call from Medellin and discovered that her brother had died of an overdose. He had been suffering long-term depression and had taken his own life by swallowing 80 tablets prescribed for his mother's heart condition. Peñaloza immediately returned home from the tournament and also, as a result, sank into a depression and a cycle of drinking. Peñaloza describes this period as the most difficult in her life and readily admits that she will never entirely be over the experience.

It is clear that Atletico Huila has given Peñaloza a new lease of life. Having come so close to the continental championship with Formas Íntimas, and having experienced personal tragedy during the tournament, there is no moment more cathartic than winning the Copa Libertadores with Huila. I asked her if she felt she had proved a point to anyone – to the managers of the national team, to those who run the league or whoever it might be. Peñaloza shrugs with genuine indifference. The meaning of the championship is profound to her: profoundly personal. As for those so removed from the struggle that has been her life, in her words 'no tengo que mostrar nada a nadie' (She doesn't have to prove anything to anyone). Their reality and hers are like night and day.

When asked about who she looks up to we stumble upon the question of her own nickname – La Cuadrada. The nickname references national team midfielder Juan Cuadrado as a point of comparison. Peñaloza is clearly delighted at the comparison. She expresses how grateful she was to receive a congratulations video from him and says that she would love to, one day, share a pitch with him. This implies that Peñaloza, like many players across the

continent that I carried out a survey with, is not entirely averse to the idea of mixed gender games. It is worth noting the relentless need to compare players with male counterparts, thus turning the attention back to male players and trivialising female protagonism. The same tendency is present in referring to Marta as ‘Pelé in a skirt’ or in numerous other comparisons to male players (Moreira, 2014b). Similarly, the use of a diminutive can be seen to belittle the female player in comparison. I realise immediately, however, that in Peñaloza’s mind these considerations are trumped by something far greater – a sense of having gone through the same rites of passage associated with emerging from the Colombian underclass. Peñaloza identifies significantly with the travails Cuadrado went through on the way to becoming one of Colombia’s leading footballers.

There is a certainly a deeper reason for Peñaloza’s affinity for Cuadrado, who had a similarly difficult upbringing to Peñaloza. Both were born in the state of Antioquia, a region of Colombia shaped by particularly marked social inequalities. Whereas Peñaloza grew up in an underprivileged sector of Medellín’s urban sprawl, Cuadrado grew up in a small village called Necoclí. His youth was marked by the familiar sounds of shootouts between narco-traffickers and paramilitary groups. Cuadrado would habitually hide under his bed when he heard the sounds of gunfire. One day when he was only four Cuadrado hid, following the instructions of his parents, as a gunfight ensued outside. His father, a truck driver delivering soft drinks, was caught in the crossfire outside and died of his injuries. Without his father, Cuadrado grew up very close to his mother. Peñaloza (or La Cuadradita as she would prefer it) also grew up extremely close to her mother, for the reasons described above. Nonetheless, the example of Cuadrado certainly inspires her. She sees in his story the possibilities that football offers to turn a rigged social order on its head: the opportunity for those from the poorest barrios to be idolised and to be known across the country. The visible and invisible barriers which have meant that these possibilities for social mobility are significantly



gendered are slowly being dislodged by footballers like La Cuadrada. Peñaloza clearly identifies shared class and race obstacles to those overcome by Cuadrado. These are areas where common ground can often be found between male and female players.

The story of Levis Ramos combines the deep social inequality experienced by Peñaloza with a further difficulty of accessing places to play, given the complete lack of women's football provision in the area where she grew up. Levis Ramos is one of the few players who have come from the Caribbean coast, where the infrastructure for women's football appears most threadbare, perhaps because this is where there is most resistance to women competing (Llanos & Accorsi, 2002). Ramos had a difficult childhood in Cartagena and was separated from her mother at the age of just twelve. Around this time, despite significant social alienation, Ramos began playing football with male players. Ramos never felt at risk playing with male players. The only significant barrier was the social pressure not to participate – they frequently told her that she should not be playing alongside them even though she always held her own.

All of this meant that Ramos' route into professional football was beset with difficulties from the beginning. To make it even more complicated, she had a child when she was still a teenager, who she was left to bring up alone. Owing to the lack of opportunities in her region Ramos had to re-locate, with all the adaptation issues this brings, in order to continue playing. She recalls vividly that just to be able to afford the ticket to Bucaramanga, where she had the opportunity to play, she had to 'pedir limosna' (ask for charity). Nonetheless, she does not regret this move and considers it the moment when her football career really started. She goes as far as to say that without leaving Cartagena she would never have become a professional footballer. At the time of carrying out the fieldwork Ramos was located in Huila with the team, while her son continued living with family, more than 20 hours by road away, in

Cartagena until he could finish secondary schooling. This, once again, underlined to me the level of sacrifice being made by women players.

### **Sudden Departures – ‘Thanks for Everything’**

The atmosphere on the team bus is jovial – it’s now late April and the Colombian Women’s season has been confirmed to begin in the next few weeks – exact date as yet unknown, but at least it will definitely be happening, according to a new announcement from DIMAYOR. A mix of salsa and reggaeton blare out of a beatbox belonging to Nelly Córdoba and players frequently get up from their seats to dance provocatively to hoots of laughter from the rest of the team. Other players are more withdrawn burying their heads in their mobile phones or covering their heads with a tracksuit top and attempting to sleep. The journey to the training camp some 30 kilometres from Neiva is usually fairly raucous, whereas the journey home after training almost everyone either nods off or zones out exhausted. There is still joking on the way home, but a bit more refrained and less in-your-face.

Suddenly, the usual light-hearted fun atmosphere seems to have disappeared. The quasi-carnival atmosphere is replaced by a decidedly sombre one. Players look downcast and even bitter. There is conversation aplenty but it has taken on a suddenly serious tone. Whatever has happened I realise that I am among the last, if not the last, to find out. In Colombian vernacular ‘me quedé gringo’ (I was behind the door or slow). When a convenient moment eventually presents itself I ask Vanessa Diaz, who brings me up to date. Diaz is clearly irritated and insulted by the way the club has handled things. It transpires that news reached the players by text message that the club has ended the contracts of three of their most experienced players. Carmen Rodallega, Jennifer Peñaloza and Darnelly Quintero. This is with immediate effect and thus today, the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019, will be their final session.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Rodallega is one of Colombia’s most capped female players. Peñaloza played a pioneering role with Formas Íntimas and Quintero was part of the Huila Libertadores squad in Manaus.

Quintero, Rodallega and Peñaloza understandably decide it would be pointless to go through the motions of the training session now they are suddenly unemployed. At this point, a peculiar scene of awkward impromptu goodbyes takes place and each of the players hug one another. They say goodbye to 20 year old Jorelyn Carabali, who Quintero describes as '*la hija*' (my daughter). There is a due sense of sadness at losing three players so crucial to the national and Libertadores triumphs with so little fanfare but also a sense that they have been here before. The players are beyond angry and the news takes the wind from their sails for the rest of the day's session and the rest of the week. I am speechless at the level of disrespect, given that these players are the first continental champions in Colombia's history. I can only surmise that those involved in the decision do not value the work and the effort the players have given. It appears again I am just about the only person surprised.

At this point, an unreal and absurd reversal of what I feel the roles should be occurs. Rather than me offering any words of consolation to the players I had shared so much time with, one of them – Carmen Rodallega – comes over and reassures *me* not to worry as this is not a problem. This happens all the time and they always find a new club, she says. Nonetheless, there is clearly a lingering feeling that something is not right here. The players know they have proved themselves to be the best in their country and have just won the continental title. Moreover, they continue to want to believe that this is a football league which offers professional conditions which will aid the players' development.

The club's callous goodbye to its continental champions is in tune with the disregard they receive from the Colombian state. Following on from recent sporting successes, the Cruz de Boyacá has been awarded to each of Colombia's ten medal winners from the London Olympics and Paralympics.<sup>64</sup> Two coaches of the Colombian national men's football team

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<sup>64</sup> These were Mariana Pajón, Caterine Ibargüen, Oscar Figueroa, Rigoberto Urán, Jackeline Rentería, Carlos Oquendo, Yuri Alvear and Óscar Muñoz together with Moisés Fuentes and Elkin Serna at the Paralympics.

have received the Order (Francisco Maturana and José Pekerman respectively) merely for qualifying for a men's World Cup. Similarly, name players like James Rodriguez and Radamel Falcao have also received the awards despite only negligibly greater achievements in the Colombian national team shirt than their structurally disadvantaged female counterparts. Outside the sporting arena Tony Blair, Joe Biden and King Felipe VI of Spain have also all received the order. The Order is yet to recognise a Colombian female footballer. Instead of recognition for bringing home the continental championship Atletico Huila women face the annual doubts about the continuation of the short Women's league (always couched in economic terms) and the consequent lack of commitment from Colombian clubs. Carmen Rodallega, Jennifer Peñaloza and Darnelly Quintero are all departing with a bitter taste in their mouths, just months after the glory of Manaus. Their departure leaves Huila with just nine remaining players training – there will be a lot of close control practice using just a third of the pitch, I thought. From a self-centred perspective, I was disappointed because I had planned to interview all three players but this appears a trivial concern and an unlikely prospect now. Much to my surprise, however, bearing in mind what has just happened, Peñaloza and Rodallega both again take the time to tell me they haven't forgotten I wanted to interview them and invite me to their house in the days before they leave.

### **Communal Living and Adaptation**

I arrive in Los Cámbulos, a working-class barrio of the city close to the airport, in search of the players' house. Rodallega spots me from a distance and shouts me over. I thought that just Rodallega, and maybe her daughter Maria (who is also a footballer, aged seventeen) would be there. Unbeknownst to me, however, Maria Rodallega is in Cali with family undergoing trials to play for Deportivo Cali women. Meanwhile, Carmen Rodallega, one of Colombia's most

capped women players, is temporarily residing in communal digs sharing with enough players to make a very competitive six-a-side team.<sup>65</sup>

In order to economise and for the benefits of company away from home, I learnt that many of the players live together in a minimalist house in Los Cábulos. Clearly the precarity of working on contracts which only cover a third of the year outside most players' home cities means the players have to make do with conditions which are far from ideal. In one sense, there is an excellent sense of camaraderie between the players, but in another this is clearly not propitious to dealing with the multiple adaptation problems that come with living away from home. Sometimes this is a first experience away from home, as in the case of goalkeeper Paola Rincón, who was just eighteen when I was in Neiva. At the other end of the scale, Rodallega is the most senior member of the club at 35 years old, and as of September 2020 is Colombia's most capped female player. Her age never shows on the training ground – she still moves at the speed of a player ten years younger and retains a remarkable level of stamina. Rodallega is admired by the other players on and off the pitch and commands their full respect. Moreover, Rodallega's experience provides an excellent conduit between the male coaches and some of the younger players. The experience of communal living is another sacrifice even senior players make in pursuing a career as a professional footballer. Finding short-term accommodation is often left to the players – and it often falls upon senior players to make the arrangements – once again working in a surrogate role in the absence of proper provision from the clubs and football institutions.

### **Down to the Bare Bones**

Following the departure of three more of Atletico Huila's title-winning side, there is much laughter about the form training is going to take with just nine players. One jokes that

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<sup>65</sup> These type of accommodation arrangements are common, with the clubs often arranging communal accommodation for players. This very practice contributed to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in March 2020 at Manaus club 3B.

they could play 4.5 players a side. ‘What do you think we will be practising today?’ another asks. ‘I would guess we’ll be practising *espacio reducido* (reduced space exercises) in a third of the field’ another replies with a knowing look. Clearly, when later they are expected to put on a ‘professional’ spectacle this kind of disadvantage is not going to help. Close control in small areas of the field may improve but many elements of a full-size game are clearly lost.

Indeed, there is a sense within the group that the champions have now been effectively disbanded, and that when the new season begins it will be an entirely new start. Two of the nine now remaining are first-year professionals (Daniela Narvez and Anyi Bonilla) and one of the group is Jorelyn Carabali, who is returning from a long injury. At this point, another practice match is announced with the men’s team who the Huila women convincingly defeated just a few weeks ago when I first arrived. This time the men’s team look notably older – perhaps eight to ten years older – yet when I ask how old they are I am told, once again rather implausibly, that they are an under-sixteen team. The men’s team clearly feel scolded from the first game and have regrouped recruiting numerous new, older and more physical players. The arrogance from the first game is long gone, and this time it is all about winning. The men’s team win the game this time, with more than a few dubious challenges that escape sanction in the absence of a qualified referee. I quickly lose interest and spend my time talking to some of the coaching team about what is to come. The coaching team promise me there are some big name players on the way.

True to their word, just days later a raft of new signings are announced. Using Diego Perdomo’s contacts the club brings in a number of current national team players as of April 2019. The number of players coming in seems to be a statement to the rest of the league. Another possible explanation is that by continually moving the players on after short periods, there is less chance of the players having time to build a sufficient bond as to collectively organise around the areas where they are clearly discriminated against. Any notion of

defending champions Huila having any advantage owing to stability in holding together the previous year's squad is certainly misguided. Five Colombians Manuela Gonzalez, Marcela Restrepo, Carolina Arias, Lizeth Ocampo and Kenia Romero arrive, together with two Venezuelans who have played together briefly in Brazil - Cinthia Zarabia and Lisbeth Castro. A Puerto Rican Delyaliz Rosario returns for a second brief spell. Some clearly know each other from their national teams. Whatever the rationale behind the dramatic wholesale changes, so close to a tournament starting, immediately there is an entirely different atmosphere in training. My departure ends up coinciding with the onset of the new women's season which has just been confirmed. The club has therefore, once again, brought in a number of players with international pedigree and is ready to appear in a tournament that will be promoted explicitly as being the 'Liga Professional Femenina' once again. On the positive side, the players' larking around, laughing uncontrollably and joking returns, and the sombre faces and existential doubts have disappeared again for a few months. It reminds me once again that all they want is to have a competitive team that can train properly, play the game they love and compete for the highest honours in their chosen field.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the considerable gulf between the professionalisation of women's football claimed by the Colombian federation DIMAYOR and the lived reality of intersectional discrimination faced on the ground by Colombian women players. Many of the players have faced significant hardships in pursuing a career in football which are intertwined with the racial and class cleavages respectively. Nonetheless, it has been the players themselves who, with determination, resilience and sacrifice, have created and maintained the façade of professionalisation by continuing to perform admirably in national and international competition. Nonetheless, the potential to move the women's game in Colombia onto a new level can only be realised with greater economic support brought about by institutional

change at the local and national level. This in turn would trigger further positive media involvement, something that is already occurring sporadically and arbitrarily at a few clubs – as with the exemplary work of Vanessa Diaz as press attaché at Huila.

Spending time with players it was clear that the role of intergender football, both in producing players at youth level and in the everyday training practices of teams, is an aspect which is conveniently invisibilised by largely male-controlled media and institutions. It remains a silent factor because the implications of admitting its use would clearly destabilise the matrix of male hegemony. Furthermore, the importance of informal street football and/or football played at schools and universities, which emerges from the life histories of these players, serves to once again expose the lack of work done by federations in producing the players of this generation.

It is worth remembering that the panorama at Atletico Huila, like Santos in Brazil, represents the best contractual arrangements (year-round contracts in most cases) available rather than, as this chapter may have suggested to the uninitiated, the worst. That is why players are attracted to leave families behind in order to live and play in Neiva. In spite of this, women players still have to lead an impossible double life, trying to keep up with the rigours of university life whilst carrying out intensive physical training each year. Moreover, the level of commitment from Atletico Huila as an institution was negligible, with the club's success dependent upon one outside benefactor, and perhaps even more than this, upon the undervalued sacrifices of players themselves, and especially the experienced players whose contribution is much more than just playing the game.

### **Epilogue – Success moves to Santa Fe**

Subsequent to my fieldwork with Huila, Diego Perdomo left the club in June 2020 after a disagreement with the directors, and has since funded the Santa Fe of Bogotá women's team. This meant that Santa Fe could be one of only three clubs who were able (or willing) to



continue paying their women's team during the COVID pandemic. Furthermore, it meant that the nucleus of the Huila squad moved to Bogota with Perdomo, meaning Santa Fe benefitted from not only a number of international calibre players but also from the stability of players knowing one another on and off the pitch. Indeed, even the coaching staff from Huila largely made the move to Bogota to join Perdomo's new venture.

The 2020 tournament was played entirely behind closed doors owing to the COVID pandemic, rendering many of the questions about how best to promote and attract an audience to women's football temporarily redundant. Even with Colombian football in a deep financial crisis, women's football continues to be played as the federation and league bodies realise how unpalatable it would be to their international reputation were they to renege on their commitment to the women's league at this stage. This commitment is not matched at a local level where Atlético Huila and other clubs such as A, B and C have decided to discontinue women's football indefinitely. The national league has a responsibility to comply with FIFA policies to grow women's football together. Moreover, its ideological commitment to presenting Colombia in a modern progressive light runs into clear tensions with what is happening on the ground – a continuation of amateurism presented as professionalism, precarity and the utmost disrespect for women footballers.

Following the Women's Professional League this year, a short eight-team event organised by the Colombian Ministry of Sport took place. A team representing the municipality of Huila, made up of largely amateur players who had never previously been involved with Atlético Huila, won the tournament wearing Atlético Huila official shirts despite the club having no input whatsoever into the venture.

## Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has broadened the existing literature on women's football by foregrounding the experiences of players and bringing those into dialogue with academic debates. Players are acutely aware of a lack of female representation and the implications of this. Policy both nationally and continentally has tended to pay lip-service to the global growth of women's football and the continental prominence of feminist movements rather than deliberate thoughtfully about what these two developments mean for the future. The trickle down from the continental federation CONMEBOL to national federations and leagues and finally to clubs is symptomatic of prevailing vertical relations between men's and women's football at institutional level.

The ethnographic chapters (4,5 & 6) reflect the tensions between pressure to grow women's football and the persistence of male hegemony within football's institutions. Moreover, they expose a gulf between institutional representations seeking to portray progress and conformity with global growth and the stubborn reality for women players at a local level. The day-to-day existence of women footballers is much harsher than many would imagine, and the sacrifices players must make to pursue a career as a footballer much greater. In the introduction to *Futbolera*, Elsey & Nadel ask (2019, p.1) 'why would they keep playing?'. And yet so many do – a stoic determination to do what they love impels them to carry on in spite of the considerable obstacles and discrimination they face. Further ethnographic work on the motivations of players, the mental health issues some suffer, the identities they develop and how those come into tension with institutional representations would all build upon the work this thesis has begun in earnest.

In the opening chapter, 'Surveying the Field from the Players' Perspective', I intentionally set out to refine my agenda feeding upon the concerns of players themselves.

Players' survey responses revealed their acute awareness of insidious but often blatant exclusions and shape how they are incorporated into their clubs, how women's football is organised by federation structures of their respective countries and how they are covered or not covered by mass media among other factors. Moreover, players were aware of their own agency along with the attendant power imbalances which snub out their attempts to highlight inequalities at every turn. The opening chapter sets the scene for the rest of the thesis by highlighting the complex interrelations between football clubs and football institutions, the media and players. These actors have a significant role in visibilising it and effecting a shift in public attitudes. Across participants' answers, whether experienced first-hand or derived from an awareness of developments elsewhere, there is a sense of the ever more prominent profile of the women's game and the potential for significant change in the coming years.

Shaped by the opening chapter, the second chapter builds upon the media representations paradigm in research on women's football by bringing the power of mass media corporations into dialogue with the agency of players. Citing a particular instance at the 2018 Women's Copa Libertadores the chapter considers how Atlético Huila's Yoreli Rincón becomes a lightning rod both for those looking to gain more exposure for the plight of women's football and also for more retrograde and patriarchal strains of thought which attack the player for highlighting significant gender inequalities in terms of travel arrangements, prize monies and the level of incorporation the women's teams have within clubs in Colombia and beyond. The vitriolic and defensive response to Rincón is instructive insofar as it feeds into ongoing debates about the divergent visions of what the sport means to Colombians. In this chapter mass media output shows little concern for accurately portraying the issues Rincón wished to highlight. Their attempts to deflect attention from Rincón's agenda appear to have been partially successful. Nonetheless, Rincón also achieves some media recognition for her teammates and also a financial agreement whereby the players are

rewarded for having won the tournament. The findings from the media chapter confirmed my own suspicions and backed up claims made by players in the opening chapter. Both felt that media representations of women's football were disingenuous at best and that despite improvements in the form of sympathetic alternative media outlets covering the game, overall the media portrays a misleading picture of the women's game which not only does not help its growth but actually goes a few steps further and actively attempts to denigrate, trivialise and disrespect it at every turn.

The third chapter, once again, pays particular attention to one policy which is insightful in terms of how the continental federation envision women's football. It concludes that nowhere in the *obligatoriedade* policy are there any mechanisms ensuring the professionalisation of the women's game. Moreover, by wording the policy in a way that allows outsourcing, the practice immediately became common as clubs merely paid lip-service to the letter of the policy rather than engaged with the spirit of it. Once again, players' responses in the survey were savvy and acutely aware of these factors. Tellingly, despite their reservations with the policy, the overwhelming majority of players supported *obligatoriedade* on the grounds that it may trigger a domino effect in the betterment of conditions as large clubs who have recently opened women's teams try to compete with the isolated examples who have already committed significant resources in order to ensure they reach the women's Copa Libertadores year on year and compete to win it.

Nonetheless, there is an overwhelming sensation among players that the achievements of women's clubs have come in spite of the respective authorities rather than because of them. For that reason, the period of nine-months ethnographic fieldwork spent in Manaus, Santos and Neiva brought the most telling insights with regard to the everyday experiences of women footballers in Brazil and Colombia. These ethnographic chapters hint

at the different experiences players have according to the status of the club which they are representing.

At Santos it is argued that a banal patriarchy surrounding the club means that even when there is a will to incorporate women and even a significant history of women's football at the club it is still possible for renowned coach Emily Lima to feel that the women's team is only 'something extra grafted onto the male tradition' of the club. This is balanced against the significant economic and social capital that the club has, meaning that they are able to amass a squad of thirty-five players and to compete consistently on a continental level.

Conversely, the experience at Iranduba presents the opposite challenges. Players feel especially appreciated playing in a city where there is no men's team of note to compete with. The setup of the club has long favoured the women's team as there is 'less distance to travel to reach the top' in the words of the club's president. Consistently playing home games at a large stadium and attracting large crowds hints at the levels of popularity women's football could reach if it were properly legislated for at institutional level. The story of Iranduba is as relevant as the stories of any of the clubes de camisa insofar as it speaks to the wider panorama in which progress is discernible but at the same time is straitjacketed by an insistent neoliberal logic which ultimately favours the larger more established clubs. This, to some degree, negates the possibility of an organic 'home-match' fan culture developing for women's football. As explained in Chapter 4, fans of Iranduba have built up a familiarity with individual players which is the direct result of the players being the star attraction rather than an addendum to the men's team. Moreover the identification with the stadium itself speaks to the need for permanent venues and consistent time slots which allow fans to engage properly. The club has leveraged and even commodified ethnic identity in order to invoke regional pride. Moreover, by not being an offshoot of an existing male club, the centre-periphery dichotomy that the club mobilises so successfully (via its appeals to an Amazonian

ethnic identity) runs parallel to the power imbalance between the men's and women's games – which the club is also contesting.

The case of Atlético Huila sits somewhere between the two polar opposites described above. The club has nowhere near the cultural capital of Santos, but yet systematically prioritises its men's team until the logical conclusion of finally disbanding the women's team altogether as a means to mitigate against the club's financial crisis. The experience at Huila revealed the considerable gulf between the professionalisation of women's football claimed by the Colombian federation DIMAYOR and the lived reality on the ground for Colombian women players, even for the national and Copa Libertadores champions. The players themselves engage with the public and create a façade of professionalisation, however the level of institutional support is threadbare at best. Indeed, shortly after my stay, the club cut all ties with the donor who paid all the expenses of the women's team, and without someone funding the women's team, decided that it was an additional expense they could do without. The wording of CONMEBOL policy 'the solicitant must have a women's first team or be associated to someone that has' is far from inconsequential to what happened at Huila. Effectively, the upkeep of the women's team was outsourced to a willing donor rather than taken on by the club.

As noted within the chapters, one of the three teams I visited is struggling to survive (Iranduba) whilst another has stepped away from women's football (Atlético Huila). With the new financial challenges brought about by the onset of COVID, it is imperative that football institutions act to safeguard the future of women footballers in the medium to long term. The following section lists some practical policy recommendations.

## Policy Recommendations

Neither within academia nor from a journalistic or institutional perspective has a body of ethnographic research of this length been produced about women's football in South America. For this reason, this research is well placed to make a raft of policy recommendations capable of ameliorating the situation of women footballers in Brazil, Colombia and beyond.

As Chapter 3 argues, *obrigatoriedade* has been the central plank of institutional policy on the continent in recent years. Rather than take issue with the principle, I would argue that, if anything, much deeper and more meaningful affirmative action is needed to ensure the considerable struggles of women players thus far are not in vain. Until now, without significant female representation at board/director level at each club, there has been a tendency to fulfil the requirement of having a women's team without apportioning significant chunks of the club's budgets. Policy to ensure that at least a certain percentage (increasing each year) of club's budgets be spent on women's football would be a significant step towards professionalisation. Moreover, a similar percentage of women or gender non-binary representation at board/director level would go some way to providing a counterbalance to the current male hegemony in institutional positions. This could be replicated at regional, national and continental federation level to help ensure women's football has a calendar of sufficient length to accompany full professionalisation, putting the end to the oxymoronic notion of a 2-3 months a year professional league.

To ensure that those who have put the hard yards into growing women's football on the continent are acknowledged, I also recommend formal recognition both of smaller independent clubs who have long provided their respective national teams with players along with key protagonists who have invested time and money into these endeavours. National

federations have received significant funds from programmes like FIFA Forward. With full transparency vis-à-vis how these monies are used, smaller independent clubs with a proven track record for developing women players should be included among a number of centres of excellence for the development of women players. These should be distributed strategically across each country, taking note of areas where insufficient infrastructure currently means that players are forced to relocate at extremely young ages. Given that many of the players interviewed suggested to me that they had learnt to play football on the streets after ten years old, these centres of excellence should cater for a range of age ranges, always prioritising girls' football for under 10s. In a similar vein, greater coordination between national sporting institutions and federal/national government should be encouraged. It is no coincidence that girls football begins at a very young age in primary and secondary schools in many of the most successful countries in women's football. In order to build for the future, regional and national federations should be actively involved in visiting schools to encourage playing women's football. Furthermore, government legislation to make football a part of national curricula for girls should be enacted to ensure that girls have the same opportunities as boys from an early age. With the adoption of these measures women's football would assert itself as a vital component part of national identity in keeping with the speed of change in other areas of society. Football is clearly a key symbolic arena – gradual changes to a deeply gendered polity should be monitored more closely as they reflect wider changes in society.



### **Semi Structured Interview List**

Material in this thesis is drawn from semi-structured interviews which took place with the following players, managers and institutional figures (followed by dates and places):

#### **At Santos FC**

Alessandro Pinto, 20 February 2019, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Angelina Costantino, 27 February 2019, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Karla Alves, 18 November 2018, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Kelly Rodrigues, 31 October 2018, Meninos da Vila Training Ground, Santos

Marcelo Frazão, 1 March 2019, Santos FC Business Centre, São Paulo

Maurine Gonçalves, 28 February 2019, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Nicole Ramos, 18 November 2018, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Rosana dos Santos Augusto, 29 October 2018, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Sandrinha Pereira, 18 November 2018, Rei Pelé Training Ground, Santos

Tayla Carolina Pereira dos Santos, 26 October 2018, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

Thais Picarte, 29 October 2018, Vila Belmiro Stadium, Santos

#### **At Iranduba Esporte Clube**

Amarildo Dutra, 9 February 2019, Arena da Amazônia, Manaus

Andressinha Machry, 14 October 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Camilinha Martins Pereira, 14 October 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Driely Severino, 18 November 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Duda Pavão, 9 November 2018 Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Giselinha Teles, 11 November 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Lauro Tentardini, 5 February 2019, Arena da Amazônia, Manaus

Mayara Andreia Vaz Moreira, 11 November 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Monalisa Belém, 11 November 2018 Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Renata Costa (Koki), 9 November 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Rubi Pereira. 14 November 2018, Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

Yoreli Rincón, 8 February 2019 Barbosa Filho Training Ground, Manaus

**At Atlético Huila**

Carmen Rodallega, 29 April 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Daniela Narváez, 30 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Darnelly Quintero, 29 April 2019, Players' Shared House, Los Cámbulos, Neiva  
 Fany Gauto, 15 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Gavy Santos, 6 June 2019, Álvaro Sánchez Silva Sports Centre  
 Jennifer Peñaloza, 29 April 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Jorelyn Carabali, 15 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Levis Ramos, 14 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Maritza Lopez, 12 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Nelly Córdoba, 15 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Paola Rincón, 15 May 2019, Player's House, Neiva  
 Albeiro Erazo, 2 June 2019, Manager's House, Neiva , 2 June 2019,  
 Carlos Barrera, 22 April 2019, Club Headquarters, Neiva  
 Diego Perdomo, 23 May 2019, Perlun Company Headquarters, Neiva

**At CONMEBOL**

Romeu Castro, 4 December 2018, Hilton Hotel, Manaus

**At CBF**

Valesca Araújo, 21 January 2019, CBF Headquarters, Barra da Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro  
 Vadão, 5 December 2018, Arena da Amazônia, Manaus

**At DIMAYOR**

Katherine Pimienta, 24 April 2019, DIMAYOR, Bogotá  
 Vladimir Cantor, 24 April 2019, DIMAYOR, Bogotá  
 Carlos Lajud Catalan, 24 April 2019, DIMAYOR, Bogotá

**At the Paulista Football Federation**

Aline Pellegrino, 22 February 2019, Paulista Federation Headquarters, São Paulo

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