

Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá:

Constructing National Identity in the case of Jonathan González

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DEDICATION

“El que no sabe de donde viene, no sabe a donde va.” ~ dicho mexicano

(“Who does not know where they come from, does not know where they are going.” ~ Mexican proverb)

I dedicate this thesis project to all the Latina/o/x scholars who have come before me and influenced my work, in particular Dra. Kathy Jamieson, Dr. Jorge Iber, Dr. Samuel Regalado, Dr. Jose Alamillo and Dr. Adrian Burgos, as they have paved the way for future generations of Latina/o/x scholars who are interested in examining the socio-cultural issues Latina/o/x athletes face in the world of sports.

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ABSTRACT

First-generation Mexican-Americans who are born in the US to immigrant parents often find themselves at a crossroad constantly negotiating their ethnic identity. One of those junctions where Mexican-Americans often have to navigate their identity is in the world of soccer, in particular when it comes to rooting for the US national team or the Mexican national team. Scholars call this transnational concept *Entre Dos Mundos*—Between Two Worlds (Bacallao and Smokowski 2005; Campbell 2005; Gutierrez 1996; Menjivar 2002). Jonathan González is one of those Mexican-Americans, who in 2018 announced his decision to play for the Mexican national team instead of the US national team. González’s announcement garnered much media attention both in the US and in Mexico. Using critical discourse analysis, I explain the discourse around González’s announcement to play for Mexico positions González in the *borderlands* (Anzaldúa 1987) and I argue that sport journalists in the US and Mexico construct alternative versions of González’s national identity while neither recognize full belonging in two worlds.

Keywords: Borderlands, Critical Discourse Analysis, Mexican-Americans, Soccer, Sociology of Sport

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 2014, the McDonald's Corporation launched its "*House Divided*" commercial¹ during the 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. The opening scene depicts a young Latino² teenager, dressed in blue jeans with a red, full-zip, hoodie positioning a television monitor on top of a makeshift T.V. stand inside a car garage with his back to the opened garage door. His mother then enters through the open garage and the following dialogue ensues:

Mom: "¡Luis!

Luis: "Ey."

Mom: "*Ándale, ya llegaron tus amigos.*" (Hurry, your friends have arrived.)

Luis: "Okay."

As Luis turns around and stands up to see his mother, she approaches him and zips up his hoodie to conceal the grey t-shirt he is wearing underneath which has the letters USA imprinted at chest level in block font and filled in with the US flag. After zipping up the hoodie, the mother turns and walks away shaking her head in disapproval.

The scene then switches to Luis' father who is standing at the front door of the house, as he has opened it halfway when there is a knock at the door. Without showing who is at the door, Luis' father turns his head around, seemingly annoyed, and yells out to Luis. The camera then pans back around to the door to show a group of White teens all dressed in red, white, and blue attire just as Luis approaches from the background to greet his friends a "Hey, what's up guys!"

¹ See <https://youtu.be/WrYiMc6jvOQ>

² The use of *Latino* in this paper refers to people of Latin American descent. It is used here, as it is used in the Spanish language, to represent all groups of people. The intent is not to exclude gender groups such as Latinas or those who identify as Latinx nor to confound the reader with the complex terminology of Latina/o/x.

One of his friends, a female wearing a USA trucker-style ball cap with a US flag face-painted on her cheek, places an Uncle Sam costume hat on Luis' head but he quickly takes it off and turns to see his father who is wearing a green patterned soccer jersey and still standing at the house entrance with one hand on the half-opened door. The father and son exchange looks at one another, then Luis' eyes turn to the ground as he lowers his head as if to show remorse.

With a two second pause in the background music, one can sense the tension between the father and his son who are at this moment divided by team loyalties. After another two seconds of facing each other in silence, Luis turns to his friends and nods that it is okay for them to come in. Slowly, Luis enters his own home keeping his shameful eyes on his father whose eyes are filled with disappointment as he scans each of Luis friends as they pass him by. The scene ends with the father turning to look at his own friends, who are sitting in the living room wearing red, white and green attire, and looking back at the ordeal with confused expressions on their faces.

Statement of the Problem

While the McDonald's commercial is nearly a decade old, it highlights a dilemma that many US-born Mexican-American soccer fans endure today; do they cheer for the national team of their ancestral roots or to support the national team of their birth country? In this thesis, I argue that this predicament contextualizes the experience of Mexican-Americans, native people of the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987) who are "caught in the crossfire" (ibid:216) living at home yet as a stranger or *Entre Dos Mundos— between two worlds* (Bacallao and Smokowski 2005; Campbell 2005; Gutierrez 1996; Menjivar 2002). To demonstrate this notion of being stuck between two worlds, I conducted a critical discourse analysis on the media coverage of US-born soccer player Jonathan González's decision to play for *la Selección de fútbol de México (El Tri)* instead of the US men's national soccer team (USMNT).

The Case of Jonathan González

Jonathan González was born in the United States to Mexican parents and is one of many modern-day players who has opted to play for a football association outside of their home country. On January 8, 2018, González made headline news when *Univision Deportes* (Lopez 2018) first reported that he had elected to wear the green, white and red of *El Tri*, instead of continuing to play for the USMNT. News of González's swap was covered by numerous media outlets in the United States, Mexico and abroad. While González is not the first footballer to exercise his option to play for another national team (Sciaretta 2018), his switch stirred up quite a controversy. Through this case study, I demonstrate how sports media outlets construct national identity, interrogate national allegiances and further exacerbate the tension Mexican-Americans, like González, face in being stuck between two worlds.

Purpose of the Study

Throughout US history, once non-Anglo³ immigrants began to emigrate to the United States, they and their families have been subject to xenophobia and nativist sentiments (Lee 2019). The sporting world is no exception. Italians were often stereotyped in professional baseball in the early 1900s (Baldassaro 2005), Jews were discriminated against in basketball (Klein 2000), Russians faced hatred in hockey (Farber 2000), and Irish were recipients of prejudice in boxing (Cronin, Doyle and O'Callaghan 2008). Ironically, these various ethnic groups used sport as a method to assimilate into the dominant (Anglo) US culture (Baldassro 2005; Cronin et al. 2008; Klein 2000). In many ways sports has been a vehicle for many

³ As is the practice of Latino/a sociologists, the term *Anglo* is used in this thesis to refer to non-Latino whites, but I also acknowledge that racialization means that those who fall into the category of non-Latino white/Anglo is situational and contextual and changes over time.

immigrant communities' "quest for whiteness" (Gems 2012:486) and inclusion in mainstream society.

The large waves of immigration into the US in the early 20th century gave birth to the "ethnicity paradigm" (Omi and Winant 2015:11), which focused on the assimilation and pluralistic racial projects of such immigrants to establish a White-US identity. While many European migrants and their descendants were successfully able to assimilate into US society due to their whiteness, other non-White immigrants and communities of colors struggled. To this day, newly formed immigrant communities continue to wrestle to gain the recognition, respect and rights like their Euro-immigrant peers once achieved.

The use of racial politics (Omi and Winant 2015) to demarcate who is a United Statesian and who is not, was key in establishing the US nation state or what Anderson (1983) would call an imagined community. According to Anderson, a nation "is an imagined political community" (ibid:6) and *nationalism* is the invention of "nations where they do not exist" (ibid:6).

Furthermore, Bacon (2008) contends that the invention of the US nation was based on "skin color and place of origin and was used to divide society into those with rights and those without them" (ibid:69). For immigrants who are not White, entrance into this imagined community of United Statesians is difficult to achieve, even in sporting spaces.

Since assimilation has been used as a racial project in sports to integrate immigrant communities in the US, we can view Luis' predicament in the McDonald's commercial as his attempt to integrate in a White-US nation. However, not all immigrants or US-born children of immigrants integrate in the United Statesian identity. In a critical essay, Valeriano (2014) addressed the issue of Latinos resisting cultural assimilation in the US who often support Latin American soccer teams instead of the USMNT. According to Valeriano, critics argue that

support for a particular team other than the US reflects Latinos “inability or lack of desire to assimilate into US society” (ibid:291).

Thus, the world of sports also create divisions between people⁴ when they choose to support a particular team rather than another. For Mexican-Americans like González, Luis, and myself, we reside within the *borderlands*, “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa 1987:3). Yet, the world sport, a contested arena that pits one against the other, forces us to choose which side of the border we’re on. Using González as a case study, this study focuses on that challenge in choosing sides.

Significance of the Study

Within academia, Latinos have been written about extensively within higher education (Estrada & Jimenez 2018; Gonzalez 2018; Kiyama 2018; Mireles-Rios & Garcia 2019; Salinas & Lozano 2019), the social sciences (Canino-Arroyo 2003; Cruz 2005; González-López & Vidal-Ortiz 2018; Perez 2017; Serna, Arevalo & Tomar 2017), and in the humanities (García-Avello 2109; Guzmán & Valdivia 2004; Noel 2011; Salinas, Fránquiz, & Rodríguez 2016; Sanchez et al. 2016). However, there is a dearth of existing scholarship on Latinos and sports. Coakley (2017), a renowned sociology of sport scholar, indicates that there is a need for scholarship on Latinos in sports, as they are this country’s largest marginalized minority and “eager to have their cultural heritage recognized and incorporated into sports and sport experiences” (ibid:241). Attempts have been made, like the work of Latino sports historians (Iber, Regalado, Alamillo & DeLeon 2011) who collaborated to produce the first and only comprehensive textbook on Latinos in US sports.

⁴ Anecdotaly, as a young soccer player myself, I grew up watching and rooting for *El Tri* and often clashed with my White teammates who argued that I should root for the USMNT and not Mexico simply because I was born in the US.

As Latinos continue to be rendered invisible and consistently excluded from conversations in sports studies, racial or ethnic issues pertaining to Latino athletes are either not addressed or pigeon-holed into one of the racial binary categories and thus swept under the rug. González's case is one such example. As much of the broader research on race and sports is fixated on the Black/White binary (Coakley 2017), Latino issues such as national identity and selecting a national team to represent are not examined. Nuances like this are missed when race and sports are viewed solely from the Black/White binary. Suffice it to say, there is no more opportune moment to explore Latinos in sport than now. It is time to change the narrative from isolation to inclusion, to champion cultural identity rather than defend, and to pave the way from acceptance to belonging. It is from this ideology that the researcher embarks to complete a timely, necessary and important study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The southwestern portion of the United States, also known as *Aztlán*, has been inhabited long before the sixteenth century (Anzaldúa 1987). An invasion of US forces in 1846 annexed this land through conquest, and after the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed, the borderlands between the US and Mexico was officially created, stripping *Tejanos, Mexicanos and meztizos* of “their land while their feet were still rooted in it” (Anzaldúa 1987:7). According to Anzaldúa, borders were created to delineate the safe places from those that are unsafe; a dividing line whose racial politics are to “distinguish us from them” (1987:3).

Today, the borderlands are occupied by both Latinos and *gringos*. Yet, it is the *gringo* who is viewed as the natural inhabitant of these lands, and now the Latino is the foreign invader. This cultural alignment positions one group versus the other, in which the whites are in power and Latinos subjugated to their dominance. This form of dominance is seen in how Latino immigrants are constructed as foreign invaders, despite the fact that as late as 1846 the Mexican governor of what is now California lamented of US settlers, “We find ourselves threatened by hordes of Yankee immigrants whose progress we cannot arrest” (Burciaga 1993:121). As Bacon (2008) contends, current and early US immigration laws have defined legality and appointed it to “people on a racial basis” (p. 206). As such, the term “illegal,” is a social construct, with nativist roots that separates “those whose status and presence in the United States is legitimate and those whose status is illegitimate” (Bacon 2008:v).

Thus, the *mestiza* and her children bear the weight of the *gringo* assailant who through his white supremacist racial project once again controls the narrative of the nation and is the gatekeeper of who belongs. Indeed, the people of the borderlands and their descendants are still

stuck in the crossfire as Anzaldúa (1987) once wrote, living both at home yet as a stranger. Scholars have come to label this identity struggle as being in *Entre Dos Mundos* or between two worlds (Bacallao and Smokowski 2005; Campbell 2005; Gutierrez 1996; Menjivar 2002).

Dos Mundos literature highlights a unique aspect of transnationalism within Latino culture in that it “links two important aspects of immigrants’ experiences – the formation of families and immigrant communities in the host country on the one hand and, on the other, the continued orientation of these groups to their homeland” (Menjivar 2002:531). Gutierrez’s (1996) edited volume delved deeper with a historical perspective of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans to juxtapose their respective cultures and politics by situating them in the contemporary conditions of living in the United States. This creates a “border culture that includes bilingual, bicultural Mexicans” (Campbell 2005:41). Bacallao and Smokowski (2005) wrote about these bicultural experiences of Latino adolescents and the various acculturation processes they face. Thus, a major theme expressed in the *Entre Dos Mundos* literature is that Latino youth who are situated between two worlds are able to “span both places” (Menjivar 2002:538) due to the uniqueness of being bicultural, and at the same time constantly burdened by having to negotiate their position in both societies, even within sport.

Latinos and Sport

From its inception sport has always been shaped by racial relations (Giulionatti 2016), and scholars have come to agree that both race and sport are contested arenas (Hylton 2009). Indeed, at the time of this writing, England is embroiled in racial controversy after its black players were subject to racial slurs and racist graffiti when England lost to Italy in the UEFA European Championship (Boren and Adam 2021). The notions of “otherness” that were based on phenotypical and essentialized biological differences during the colonial time period have been

employed in sports to racialize, stereotype and discriminate against athletes of color. However, the scholarship on race and sport is not complete. As Giulionatti (2016) suggests the “sociological reading of racism within sport should broaden its geographical and epistemological remit” (p. 94).

One of those geographical areas is *América Latina*. For too long, scholars have ignored Latino athletes who are underrepresented in race studies (but not in sport, itself) within sociology of sport literature. The lack of attention on this particular group has not kept up and completely ignores the athletic participation, political struggles and social experiences of the Latino diaspora. Ironically, scholars of race and sport are perpetuating the same bias seen in the larger society by ignoring an entire continent and its peoples. An extreme case of prejudice against Latinos, and perhaps a widely accepted view among sport-race scholars that has contributed to the lack of scholarly attention, comes from Phillips (1993) who wrote “we refer to Latin Americans as a “race” even though we know they are not” (p. 184). This statement, from a chapter on sports and race, infers that Latinos are not a racial category worth examining and thus are ignored from this conversations on racial issues despite their participation in sports.

Despite their underrepresentation in numbers within professional sports, Latinos have been immersed in sport dating back to the late 19th century (Burgos 2005), in particular within the confines of the baseball diamond, arguably the most “American” sport in the United States. Over the last century there has been an increase of Latinos participating across major professional sports (Burgos 2005; Iber 2009a, 2009b; Jamieson 1998; Klein 1995; Regalado 2002). Yet, the academic body of knowledge on Latinos in sport is still quite small (Iber 2009a). This lack of literature presents a unique opportunity for prospective scholars interested in the

Latino sporting experience, but also presents a challenge when attempting to find literature within the field.

In his seminal textbook in sport studies, Coakley (2017) outlines three types of Latinos in the United States today: (1) those who are US mainland- Puerto Rican-born, (2) those who are from Latin America and working in the United States; and (3) those who have immigrated here with their families or to be with their families. Increasingly, refugees from Central America also comprise US Latinos (Menjivar 2005). The scant literature on Latinos and sport in this review touches on the experiences of both US-born Latinos (Iber 2009a, 2009b; Jamieson 1998) and Latin Americans employed in the United States as professional athletes (Burgos 2005; Regalado, 2002). Yet none of the articles focus on immigrants or their families, this study will begin to fill this gap in the literature.

Scholarship on Latinos and sports ranges in topics from gender, to specific types of sport, to various countries and even distinct national identities. For example, Jamieson (1998) examines issues related to feminism in her examination of media representations of Nancy Lopez, the first US-born, professional Latina golfer. Conversely, Klein (1995) explores masculinity while studying both Mexican and North American baseball players in a prominent US-Mexican border baseball team. Burgos (2005) also touches on elements of gender, in particular stereotypical gender roles, in his history of Cuba. Outside of the world of gender and sport, Iber (2009a; 2009b) and Regalado (2002), prominent historians of Latinos in sport, studied narratives of Latino quarterbacks in the National Football League and challenges faced by Latino baseball players in Major League Baseball clubhouses, respectively. This brief summary exposes the scarcity of academic literature on Latinos in sport and challenges in drawing specific, conceptual connections on a particular issue within the group of articles. Despite these challenges, I

identified three broader frameworks that create coherence when these articles are read collectively. These frameworks are intersectional identities, media constructions and stereotypes.

Nation, Culture, Ethnicity and the Intersectionality of Latino Identities

The Latino diaspora is extremely diverse and at times quite complicated to delineate in socio-cultural terms. Point in case are the various labels: *Latino, Hispanic, Chicano*, etc., which have been used to define the broad group of people of various racial, national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. While the historical evolution of these labels is outside the scope of this literature review, the multiple labels establish that national, cultural, ethnic, racial and other various forms of identities are at the core of the Latino diaspora (Overmeyer-Velázquez 2019). The intersectionality of these identities is a significant common thread among the articles reviewed.

One of the earliest scholarly pieces regarding Latinos in sport is the work of Klein (1995) who examined cross-cultural aspects of masculinity between Mexican baseball players and their North American teammates that conveyed differences in how each group expressed their emotions. The aim of Klein's ethnographic study was to explore the manner in which nationalism was constructed (1995). An interesting collision of national identity was evident when Klein described a conflict between a player and the team's manager:

Issues at the heart of their resistance had to do with nationalism. Firova is a *Pocho* (a Mexican-American) who acts more like the classic tight-lipped Texan than he is than like a Mexican. The anti-Firova sentiment was also felt by the fans and press of Nuevo Laredo and was directed at his style of managing, which was not Mexican, and his being American. (Klein 1995:377)

While Klein's work primarily focused on issues related to masculinity via cross-cultural comparisons of Mexican ballplayers and their North American counterparts, the conflict of national identity would arise in the other four scholars' work in similar forms.

Jamieson (1998) writes about the story of Nancy Lopez, the first US Latina on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour, while examining the various manners in which print media construct Lopez's identity in "specific racialized, classed, sexualized and gendered ways" (ibid:345). The struggle between national identity found in Jamieson's study is not between two parties like that in Klein's work, but rather in how two cultural groups label people in dissimilar ways. Jamieson's work consisted of analyzing an article from a prominent American sport magazine and two popular Latino news magazines. In describing Lopez's cultural identity, the aim of the American sport magazine was to describe Lopez as an "assimilated Mexican woman, and promote her as credentialed middle-class American women" (ibid:346). Whereas the Latino magazines were careful to preserve Lopez's culture that "maintained her Mexican pride, and yet [showed that she] made it in U.S. society" (ibid:349). This conflict in identity mirrors Klein's example as it pits two national identities against one another.

Other examples of conflicts between national identities occur in less pervasive forms. Regalado (2002) delves deep into examining issues affecting Latino ballplayers in Major League Baseball (MLB) by examining such issues as various Latino ethnic groups within the MLB, use of North American labels, and player interactions with the press. A particularly noted observation in Regalado's work relates to national identity, displaying the dichotomy between Cuban and Mexican ballplayer's willingness to assimilate to American culture. According to Regalado, "national identity was the one constant in their lives, it was not negotiable" (ibid:17). However, he found the Cuban ball players took a "pluralistic" and "progressive" approach to

change, while Mexican ball players were more resistant and “clung” to their identity as a means of survival.

Burgos (2005) also echoed the early forms of Cuban assimilation to the American pastime. In his detailed historical account of the formation, development and expansion of Cuban baseball, the struggles of national identity were primarily confined to Cuban circles and focused on assimilation versus cultural autonomy. Focusing on the Mexican-American experience, Iber (2009a) detailed Mark Sanchez’s rise to prominence at the University of Southern California (USC) while playing quarterback for the Trojans’ football team. While Sanchez was not the first Latino to play for USC, he was the first Latino to play quarterback. A controversy of national identity would surface when Sanchez wore a mouthpiece decorated with the Mexican flag, despite being a fourth generation Mexican-American (Iber 2009a). As Iber writes, Sanchez would receive criticism and backlash for “Quarterbacking while Mexican” (2009a:884).

Clashes between national identity and sport are not relegated to situations and events like a World Cup match between two distinct national teams. As the aforementioned articles suggest, the intersectionality of national identity takes place in various forms and between similar yet distinct national, ethnic, and cultural groups tied together within the Latino diaspora.

Furthermore, the conflicts can be constructed by outside cultural groups who construct norms about identity and appropriate forms of assimilation.

Media Constructions of Latino Athletes

A second reoccurring theme present in the literature are the various media portrayals of Latino athletes in sport. Embedded in the articles, the authors highlight the moments when Latinos have been lauded for their sporting accomplishments, but also the occasions when the athletes have been denigrated. The most significant study that delineates the media constructions

of Latino athletes is Jamieson's (2009) examination of media texts on Nancy Lopez. Jamieson examined three prominent magazines that featured an article on Lopez in their issues. The news articles came from *Sports Illustrated*, a prominent sport magazine in the United States, and *Nuestro* and *Hispanic*, two notable Latino publications. The focus of this study was grounded in feminist concepts to decode race, class, and gender representations of Lopez's presence on the LPGA tour (Jamieson 2009). A significant finding in Jamieson's investigation demonstrates the dichotomy in media representations, *Sports Illustrated* constructs Lopez negatively "as the racial-ethnic other, and trivializes the significance of her Mexican heritage" (Jamieson 2009:350). Whereas *Nuestro* and *Hispanic* portray Lopez and her cultural background "in a positive and significant light" (ibid:351). These racial constructions have a significant impact on the framing of Latino athletes. As Jamieson concludes, that when analyzing the media texts on Lopez the contents "offer insight to the pervasiveness of the project of White male superiority" (2009:355).

Similar racial constructs appear in other sports, particularly in professional baseball, where Latino participation has grown tremendously in the latter part of the 20th century. Regalado's (2002) article on Latino identity in Major League Baseball is one such example. In his study, Regalado (2002) observed how the media distorted the cultural identity of various Latino *peloteros* or ballplayers by attempting to change the player's given name.

"Members of the English-speaking press and club media officials took it upon themselves to label players with Americanized nicknames. Roberto became "Bobby"; Mateo, "Matty"; Luis, "Looie"; Dagoberto, "Bert." Moreover, Latin players often viewed with disdain the name "Chico," which was one of the overused nicknames attached to players of Spanish-speaking decent. (p. 21)

The attempts by the media to Anglicize the names of Latino players parallels the *Sports Illustrated* texts on Nancy Lopez, in which the English-speaking media attempts to frame Latinos as assimilated subjects that strips away their ethnic identity. Regalado (2002) finds that the trials and tribulations faced by the Latino players propelled these men to form a “single cultural community” (ibid:23) in which they “defended, supported, and encouraged one another” (ibid:23).

Inequalities and Challenges for Latino Athletes

A third and final theme found in the literature written on Latino athletes relates to the challenges and inequalities they have faced. If not apparent by now, issues of discrimination, stereotyping, power, and privilege are embedded in the experiences of these athletes. A prime example is that of Burgos (2005) whose historical study recounts the struggles the Cuban nation endured both for independence and in the development of baseball on the island. In his historical account, he explains how the development of baseball in Cuba was a national project against the imperialism that would “transcend national boundaries and that would infuse baseball with nationalistic significance against colonial Spain” (Burgos 2005:11). While the fight for national independence and development of baseball occurred simultaneously, the movement itself was spearheaded by Cuban elites of light skin (Burgos 2005). Therefore, the nationalistic sporting project would develop issues of segregation and racism, similar to their North American counterparts in the United States, as “Afro Cubans struggled to define their place in Cuban society” (Burgos 2005:11). Subsequently, Afro-Cuban baseball teams would begin to form their own baseball teams and flourish on the diamond.

As the development of Cuban baseball progressed, US-based squads would make tours to the island to compete against the Cuban teams. Burgos further outlines issues of prejudice and

discrimination when the US teams began to lose games to their Cuban foes. American sportswriters, who documented the baseball tours and games, would write negatively of the “colored” teams and call for an end of baseball tours extending their racial lines in Cuba (Burgos 2005). As tensions increased among Cubans between racial and class lines, Burgos argues that the once fervent ideals of nationalism and fight against colonialism were overshadowed:

The ultimate privileging of race over nation came in the late 1900s and early 1910s, when Cuban baseball officials and players considered a new racial policy within the professional game. It was then that a notable contingent of the lighter skinned participants in Cuban baseball opted to campaign for restructuring of the professional game in hopes of creating greater opportunity over the national discourse of a nonracial national identity (p. 34).

A short review of these articles confirms that Latinos have a long history of participating in sport, both abroad and in the United States. Embedded within these scholarly articles are numerous socio-cultural issues in the form of cultural comparisons of masculine emotional expressions along the US-Texas border (Klein 1995); to racial, classist and gender representations of a Latina golfer by various media outlets (Jamieson 1998); to cultural identity and media relations in Major League Baseball (Regalado 2002); to a historical recount of the clashes between nations, classes and races in the formation of Cuban baseball (Burgos 2005); to an introduction of Latino participation and challenges in the collegiate and professional American football (Iber 2009a).

Applying *Entre Dos Mundos* Framework in Latino Sports Studies

An aspect of *Entre Dos Mundos* framework is the bicultural identity that is formed when immigrant Latino families form communities in the host nation yet maintain their cultural

orientation to their homelands (Menjívar 2002). This bicultural theme is apparent in the examples of Mexican-American athletes like Nancy Lopez and Mark Sanchez found in the literature reviewed above. The case of Jonathan González contributes to the literature on Mexican-American sporting figures, and also adds an example of a sporting figure whose bicultural identity is scrutinized by media outlets. Despite their ability to “span both places” (Menjívar 2002:538), athletes like González find themselves *Entre Dos Mundos* in the sporting world in particular when their national identity is questioned. As is the case of dual national players in soccer who play for another country that is not their birth nation.

While many professional athletes profess that representing their country of origin is an honor and privilege, some suggest that an athlete who plays for a country that is not their birth nation could be considered a disloyal act. In January 2017, after the USMNT failed to qualify for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, USMNT goalkeeper Tim Howard questioned the commitment of dual national players on the roster suggesting that foreign-born players were not passionate enough about representing the US (Rogers 2017). Comments like Howard’s carry a nativist connotation and suggest that only “real” United Statesians are capable of representing the country at the international level.

Howard’s nativist argument unfairly place individuals like González directly in the crossfire despite his dual nationality and his eligibility to represent either the US or Mexico as granted by FIFA’s eligibility rules. This is a predicament that many Mexican Americans face as they are caught between two worlds. González’s case then, is a prime example of this conflict and one that situates the experience in a sporting context. Sports media augments this issue in particular as it relates to the negotiation of identity.

Billings and Hundley (2009:2) argue that sports media outlets “routinely resist more progressive thinking about identity issues” and suggest that examinations of identity in sports media and the players involved are “ripe for examination” (Billing & Hundley 2009:3). The coverage of sports has progressed and pushed sports media beyond the last section of the newspaper. Bellamy (2009) argues that sports have garnered a significant amount of power and influence in the entertainment industry that it has become an institution in its own right which he coins “MediaSport” (p. 67). As an institution, sports media coverage is often biased (Kim and Billings 2017) and in their study highlight that in-groups and out-groups are formed even in journalistic writing on game results. Kim and Billings go on to contend that at the international level, sports media pits one country over another with clear winners and losers and that sports journalist often write with nationalistic bias to generate national pride and boost national identity. This genre of sports writing, in particular between two nations, inherently creates an “us” vs “them” dichotomy. Returning to González’s case, the narrative around his decision is positioned as a battle between the US and Mexico with journalists on both sides arguing to position him on the winning side. In this case, the issue is problematic as it strips González of his own self-identification and places directly in the middle of the crossfire, in which he is rendered as neither from here nor there, a notion of *Entre Dos Mundos*.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In this project, I rely on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological framework in order to uncover the underlying ideologies of journalists in their coverage of González's decision to exercise his one-time switch from the USMNT to the Mexican National team. While CDA's origins are tied to the field of linguistics (Machin and Mayr 2012) its use has transcended disciplines and has been employed in the sociology of sport subfield (Chan and Brooke 2019; Burdsey 2016; Dowling 2020; Jette 2006; McGannon and Butryn 2020; Rich and Giles 2014). Its implementation in this project aligns to Machin and Mayr's (2012) claim that the aim of CDA is to "reveal buried ideology" (ibid:1). Thus, a core principle of CDA is to take a critical perspective in examining discursive practices that often reconstruct power and dominance (Fairclough 2013; van Dijk 1993). Therefore, by employing CDA methods in this study, I aim to uncover the pervasiveness of nationalistic ideologies that continue to reproduce social inequalities against Mexican-Americans which render them as neither from here (i.e. the US) nor there (i.e. Mexico) and place them in a continual space of liminality. In this chapter, I describe the research design, the data sources, analysis methods and the justification of text selections.

Research Design

Within the literature on Latinos and sport, Iber (2009a, 2009b) and Jamieson (1998) have previously conducted media analyses of prominent *atletas* such as Mark Sanchez and Nancy Lopez. While their projects did not employ a CDA framework, their research involved case studies. As case studies have become a common approach of conducting qualitative inquiry (Stake 2000), using González's case will focus on a "contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context (Kohlbacher 2006:4). It is important to note that a case study is not a research

method, but an approach within the methodological process of qualitative research. According to Hartley (2004) case study research “consists of detailed investigation of phenomena with the aim being to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied” (ibid:323). By using CDA to analyze González’s case, this thesis will shed light on the issues related to Latino athletes that will help theorize and develop postulates that will further the study of Latinos in the sport studies field.

Sample

In describing case studies, Yin (2003) offers six potential sources from which to develop a data sample: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts. While *Univision Deportes* (Lopez 2018), a Spanish-language titan in sports media, was the first to break the news on González, his story was subsequently covered by both English and Spanish sport media outlets. Thus, for this project, I gathered documents, in the form of electronic news stories, in both English and Spanish-languages, that covered González’s story prior to and after his decision to switch national teams. By including articles in both languages, the sample set provided unique perspectives from US and Mexican standpoints that allowed me to analyze how González was positioned between two worlds.

To create the sample set, I collected news articles written on González six months prior to his decision (dating back to July 2017) and six months after his decision (prior to June 2018). Using the Boolean search operators “Jonathan González” AND “Mexico OR United States” AND “soccer OR “fútbol” in both the Nexis Uni database and google news search engine I collected a total of 351 articles (166-Spanish, 185-English). Collecting data from these multiple news outlets over a one-year period created a robust database for this case study and maintained a chain of evidence that Yin (2003) contends maximizes the benefits of case study work. Once

articles were collected, I read through each article to determine if the article was useful to use for this study. Given the nature of sports journalism many articles mentioned González but were not related to his decision but rather were recaps of game matches or highlighted his individual performance in games he played. Other articles did not mention González at all, or required a paid subscription to access the article, or mentioned González's dual-nationality as a backdrop to another soccer player's story. After this scan of articles, the final sample set was narrowed down to 33 articles in English and 21 articles in Spanish.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Neuman (1997), data analysis is “a search for patterns in data” (ibid:426). It is not until a researcher examines the data that they are able to discover these patterns. Thus, as Hartley (2004) posits the collection of data and its analysis are “developed together in an iterative process” (ibid:329). Furthermore, as Yin (2003) suggests, data analysis consists of “examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (ibid:109). As such, the initial proposition of this study is to employ a CDA framework to examine how journalists covered Jonathan González's decision and how his particular case exemplifies the challenges of Mexican-Americans who are “caught in the crossfire” (Anzaldúa 1987:216). Finally, the data collection and analysis process align with Patton and Appelbaum's (2003:67) orientation in that “the ultimate goal of the case study is to uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory.”

A common first step in the analysis stage in qualitative research is coding. According to Gibbs (2007:40) coding is “how you define [what] the data you are analyzing are about.” Saldaña (2013:3) defines a code as a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a

summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” Therefore, for the analysis portion of this study, I began reading each article and applying preliminary codes to the texts. This form of coding is what Holton (2007) describes as open coding. In analyzing the 54 articles of my data set, I coded the articles with a descriptive word or direct phrase from the text as part of the First Cycle (Saldaña 2013) of the coding process. For this process, I took direct statements from the articles and copied them to an excel spreadsheet. These entries were either a word or a phrase that had a relevant connection for example “his change to represent Mexico, which is where his family is from” (Gonzalez 2018). This statement was given the code “Mexican roots” to highlight his family lineage.

In the Second Cycle (Saldaña 2013), I categorized the preliminary codes into related groupings and came out with 23 different codes. For example, preliminary codes related to Mexican roots or Mexican heritage or family lineage were grouped together and given the secondary code Mexican identity. In total I ended up with 23 categories, that were further grouped together in smaller groups. For example the Nationality theme, had the following preliminary codes American, CA native, Dual national and Mexican-American as they were all related to González’s national identity. In total, I developed four themes for which to conduct my analysis. These four themes and the results of my findings are presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Results

In this chapter I discuss the findings of this study to demonstrate how national identity is constructed by the media in the case of Jonathan González. By focusing on González's case, I present four themes that reveal the precarious nature of a Mexican American soccer player's decision when they choose between one national team over the another. Furthermore, these themes around Gonzalez's decision help uncover how Mexican Americans are positioned between two worlds even in sporting environments in an "Us" versus "Them" dichotomy. Furthermore, the juxtaposing narratives of González's decision between the English and Spanish-language media outlets positioned the story as a battle between rivals, best described by Universal (2018) as a *novela* (soap opera). Through my analysis, I identified following themes to categorize the clash in four parts which are detailed in the subsequent sections: (1) *Constructing National Identity*; (2) *The Spoils of Battle*; (3) *Contesting National Allegiances*; (4) *Between Two Pitches*.

Constructing National Identity

The first theme uncovered in this project is related to how the media constructed González's national identity. The discourse around González's place of birth, ethnic roots, and nationality was a central theme in the data that was partly based on factual information; González was born in Santa Rosa, California to Mexican parents. This proved to be the most eminent theme as it appeared in the media coverage before González's made his announcement, but even more so after the announcement. However, the descriptive adjectives or identification nouns used to describe González's identity demonstrated glaring differences between the English- and Spanish-language articles. This reveals that framing González as either American,

Mexican or a dual-national was intentional, further subjugating him to the liminal space of *Entre Dos Mundos*. While González has the privilege of claiming both national statuses as Mexican or American due to his dual-nationality, the media accounts clearly coined him as one or the other and rarely as both. This positioning would serve as the backdrop to González's decision and further exacerbate his loyalty or lack thereof to one nation over the other.

González framed as an American.

One of the key differences between the English and Spanish-language media accounts on González was his framing as being an American. Seven of the 31 English-language articles specifically labeled González as an American (Creditor 2018; Fleming 2018; Gonzalez 2018; Hall 2018; Hernandez 2018; Sciaretta 2017a, 2018b). Of the 21 Spanish-language articles, only three labeled him as American (La Silla Rota 2018; Lopez 2018; Publisport 2017). The difference in labeling could be seen in the type of American, for example the Spanish-language articles simply labeled him as “*el estadounidense*” (the American) or “*ciudadano norteamericano*” (American citizen). Whereas the English-language articles relied heavily on the importance of his birthplace and where González grew up in describing with labels such as “American-born,” or “American-raised,” or “he’s as American as they come,” and “bleeding red, white and blue.” These labels around González’s birthplace and upbringing suggest that González is as American as apple pie. In particular, by using the “American as they come” phrase, which suggest there is a continuum of how American one can be, the author is suggesting that González is on the furthest side of being American. While González was indeed born in the US, and an American citizen, one can see that the Spanish-language media outlets simply stated a fact, whereas the English-language media outlets embellished the fact with degrees of Americanness. The use of such metaphors by the English-language authors is a tool to reassure

the reader, that though González is a Latino, his status is truly that of an American that bleeds red, white and blue.

Another manner in which the discourse on González's national identity is composed is by using his physical birthplace Santa Rosa, CA. This is another factual detail of González's biography; however, how the media outlets presented the piece of information and how often it was emphasized varied by language source. In the Spanish-language outlets, only six of the 21 articles (Canton 2018; Bell 2017b; El Universal 2018; Mancera 2018; Sanchez-Lafuente 2018; Rivas 2017) specified González's place of birth and each one used basic descriptions such "*nacido en Santa Rosa*" (born in) or "*nació en California*" (was born in). In contrast, 22 of the 32 English-language outlets mentioned his birthplace with descriptors such as "born and raised," "California-born," "California-raised," or used the term native in "California native" or "native of California." Once again, these descriptors exaggerate the fact that González was born in Santa Rosa, CA. In particular the use of the term native is political in that it ties González, but all other people born in this nation to the US. Since the US has birthright citizenship, by emphasizing his place of birth, the reader is assured that he is a real American and not one of those quasi-American immigrants.

At first glance the elaboration of González's biographical facts may not seem problematic, but when comparing one language group to another, the discursive practices become apparent. In total 23 of the 31 English-based articles either labeled González as American or included his birthplace of Santa Rosa, CA with embellished metaphors, adjectives or idioms. In contrast, only 9 of the 21 Spanish-based articles used basic facts to label González as either "*estadouniense*" (American) or "*nacido*" (born). From this, one can glean that the English-language media was intentional in describing González as an American, but not just a

regular American, but one that bleeds red, white and blue, and one that is as American as they come. This framing makes González decision to switch national teams as traitorous, which will be described later. However, before that notion is unraveled, I now turn to how González was framed as a Mexican.

González framed as a Mexican.

Although the Spanish-language media outlets did not label González as American as often or by descriptive degrees of Americanness, the same cannot be said for how González was framed as Mexican. The media did this in two ways: (1) by labeling González specifically as Mexican, or (2) by reinforcing his Mexican roots. In the first case, González was described as a Mexican in five of the 21 Spanish-language articles (Canton 2018; Medio Tiempo 2018; Lopez 2018; Ponce de Leon 2017; Presse 2018). These accounts would also be aggrandized like the English-language outlets did with descriptions such as “*su sangre mexicana*” (“his Mexican blood”) or “*más mexicano que nunca*” (“more Mexican than ever”) or “*un mexicano se nace donde se le da su gana*” (“a Mexican is born wherever they want to”).

In these overstatements, we can see the same use of metaphors as it relates to having Mexican blood or degrees of Mexicanness. The last description is a unique one in that it suggests you can be Mexican regardless of your place of birth. In colloquial Spanish, this phrase is often coupled with a curse word to suggest the notion of one doing what they damn well please. While the quote does not contain such curse word, the extent of exclamation can be inferred and the phrase counters statements that González is not Mexican because he was not born in Mexico. This nativist argument is one that is often made about Mexican Americans from native-born Mexicans and part of the reason why Mexican Americans feel like they are neither here, nor from there.

The second manner in which the Spanish-language media construct González as Mexican is through his familial roots. This occurrence was more frequent than the use of the Mexican label as it occurred 9 times in the Spanish-language articles (Afición 2018; Bell 2017a, La Silla Rota 2018; Lopez 2017; Panero 2018; Presse 2018; Rivas 2017, Sanchez 2018; Sanchez-Lafuente 2018). The descriptor “*padres mexicanos*” (“Mexican parents”) was used in conjunction with facts about González place of birth to also emphasize that he was, indeed, Mexican despite being born in the US. While this use was not an embellishment, it certainly was intentional to downplay the fact that González is also American.

Surprisingly, the English-language media did not label González as Mexican once. Instead, the English-language media labeled González as “Mexican-American” on four occasions (Boehm 2018; McCaulley 2018; Sciaretta 2017a; Usry 2017a). On a separate occasion Sunderland (2018) noted the fact that González was born to Mexican parents. It is striking that González was not labeled as Mexican or that his parents were not mentioned beyond the sole occurrence while the Spanish-language media mentioned it frequently. I argue that the English-language media was set on portraying González as American, and in fact, the use of the term Mexican-American, while apt, was political in order to describe González’s ethnic background but to not delegitimize him as anything but American. The term Mexican American is sometimes used to label González as a dual national, but this term is often one that relates to a specific ethnic group. The last manner in which González’s identity was constructed by the media, and perhaps the most appropriate of labels, is as a dual national.

González framed as a Dual National.

As a citizen of both the US and Mexico, González has dual citizenship. However, this particular categorization marker was the least one least used by either language media outlets,

despite it being the most accurate in describing González's identity. Two of the 21 Spanish-language articles (El Universal 2018; La Silla Rota 2018) identified González as having "*dobles nacionalidad*" ("dual citizenship"). In the same manner, five of the 31 English-language articles (Henry 2018; Marshall 2018; Usry 2017a; Wahl 2018; Wine II 2018a) also described González as a "dual national" or a "dual citizen." In each of these cases, none of the articles exaggerated the fact of González's dual nationality and simply stated the fact as is. This demonstrates a neutral stance taken by the author in which the author does not privilege one nationality over the other. One can argue that this stance should have been the most appropriate marker used to communicate González's national identity. Its non-use by the media outlets fails to label González correctly and instead constructs him as either American or Mexican, and at times on the furthest end of a continuum. This is most problematic to González as it doesn't allow him to identify himself as he feels most fit, and unfairly situated him between both countries who would eventually fight for his allegiance as if González was a prize to be won.

The narratives around González's national identity demonstrate that he can be both American and Mexican at the same time. Or at least that is how the media portrayed him as American in one setting and Mexican in the other. This is an aspect of being between two worlds, in which the person is able to span both places (Menjívar 2002). However, in *Entre Dos Mundos* literature, this bicultural experience of sharing two identities is not seen as a detriment. In González case, as a dual national, he is both a citizen of Mexico and simultaneously the US. Yet, the media narratives victimize González by suggesting that if he is good American, then he is bad Mexican or if he is a good Mexican, he is a bad American. For González, and other Mexican-Americans, rooting for both the USMNT and *El Tri* is part of the experience of being between two worlds. However, in the world of sport, or in this case the sporting media, this

transnational ability is regulated due to the binary nature of sports in that one has to choose which side to be on and further controlled through media narratives.

The Spoils of Battle

For those unfamiliar with the rivalry on the football pitch, it is no secret that the United States and Mexico do not care for one another on the soccer field. Kassing and Meân (2017) provide an edited volume with an array of essays on various topics related to the rivalry both on and off the field of play. In González's case, the rivalry would move away from the sporting grounds and place him at the center of the battle between the respective national soccer federations. The tense rivalry felt on the playing field was also read in-between the lines of the news coverage leading up to and after González's decision.

The fight for González's allegiance.

Prior to González making his announcement on January 8, 2018, several of the English and Spanish-language media outlets (Bohem 2017; Fleming 2017; Presse 2017; Rivas 2017; Wine II 2017, 2018) began to describe his looming decision as a battle between the US Soccer Federation (USSF) and the *Federación Mexicana de Fútbol* (FMF). Wine described the fight for González as a "tug of war battle" (Wine II 2018a) and as a "power struggle between Mexico and the USMNT" (Wine II 2017). On the Spanish-language side, Rivas (2017) insinuated that it would be a well fought fight ("*va a ser un duelo muy peleado*").

The framing as a battle narrative continued well after González made his decision as both English and Spanish-language media outlets continued the discourse (El Universal 2018; Fleming 2018; Hall 2018; Henry 2018; Gonzalez 2018; La Silla Rota 2018; Lopez 2018; Straus 2018). In one reference Henry (2018) metaphorically compared this recruiting battle as "somewhat of a cold war" between both federations. Clearly, this clash between the USSF and

the FMF was not a war, much less one at the equivalent of the Cold War, however the metaphorical descriptions used by Henry and others support Macin and Mayr's (2012) claim that metaphors are part of daily language use and serve as a mechanism to understand reality.

In this case, the use of metaphors by the English and Spanish-language media outlets highlights one particular experience while concealing another (Machin and Mayr 2012). The experience that is being concealed is González's own personal struggles in choosing one national team over another. Instead, the use of the battle metaphor by the media organizes the readers experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) around the notion that González's decision is not his to make, but rather a prize to be won. Hernandez (2018) best describes this notion as he unveils the power relations between federations over González's allegiance when he wrote "There really wasn't a choice for him to make. The choice was made for him." This power struggle between the federations objectifies González as prize to be won.

González as the spoils of victory.

The Spanish-language media took the lead in objectifying González as a prize to be won. On two occasions (Presse 2018; Rivas 2018) González was described as "*el objeto de deseo*" ("the object of desire") by the Spanish-language articles. In these two cases, the authors wrote that González was the desired prize of the FMF. In a separate article (Bell 2018) the author makes a plea to the FMF with a similar statement "*Mexico, no puedes dejar ir a esta joya*" ("Mexico, you can't let go of this gem"). All three of these occurrences came before González's announcement, and it should be noted that the English-language media did not classify González as an object of desire or a gem. One can only speculate why only the Spanish-language media described González as a prize; a plausible explanation is that González had already represented

the US at the youth level and part of the USMNT system and was, therefore, already considered a US “property”.

A fourth and final occasion of describing González as a spoils of victory came after González had made his decision. In this case, McCaulley (2018) once again describes González as “*la joya juvenil*” (“the youthful gem”). While labeling González as a youthful gem is not a far stretch based on his actual performance and accomplishments on the field, it certainly positions him as object that is worth obtaining. Usry (2017b) would touch on this aspect by writing, “he’s still proving worthy of either team’s attention.” González certainly received attention from both federations and media outlets in the months leading up to his decision and after.

The winners and losers of battle.

The Spanish-language media proclaimed Mexico the victors of the campaign to win the “prize” that is González. Lopez (2018) wrote “*Mexico le ha ganado esta batalla a Estados Unidos*” (“Mexico has won this battle to the United States”). Panero (2018) added a notion of fortune that suggests Mexico shouldn’t have ended up with González in the first place, when he wrote, “*La selección Mexicana de futbol esta de enhorabuena*” (“The Mexican National team is in luck”). McCaulley (2018) continued the luck trend in her writing with the statement “*en esta ocasión, el futbol ha beneficiado a la Selección Mexicana*” (“in this occasion, soccer has benefited the Mexican nation team”). *Afición* (2018) continued the triumphal victory with his account, “*los mexicanos han ganado la más reciente disputa*” (“the Mexicans have won the most recent dispute”). Finally, Bell (2018) suggested that Mexico’s victory was due its own resolve when he wrote “*la selección nacional, principal beneficiado con la determinación*” (“the national team, main beneficiary with the determination”). In these articles, the Spanish-language press shape the narrative behind González’s decision as a jubilant victory for the Mexican

national team, yet at the same time concealing González's internal struggle of being between two worlds.

On the contrary, the US media wrote with a sense of defeat. Creditor (2018) began his news coverage with the opening line, "González has made his choice, and it does not appear to be a good one for US Soccer." Sciaretta (2018b) added a similar sentiment stating it as a "loss" for the USMNT. In total 12 of the 31 articles (Bell 2018; Creditor 2018; ESPN 2018; Galarcep 2017; Gonzalez 2018; Hernandez 2018; Jimenez 2018; Sciaretta 2018a, 2018b; Straus 2018; Wine II 2018b). Unlike the Spanish-language articles, these authors tone was more somber and even described the defeat as an "emotional cost" (ESPN 2018).

What once seemed as a foregone conclusion with González involvement with the USMNT youth system, turned into a "perplexing defeat" (Hernandez 2018). As a result, many questions, speculations, and opinions as to how and why the USMNT loss González to their rivals were posed. Such as Bell's (2018) assumption that "the U.S. did not value" him or Gonzalez's (2018) opinion that "the U.S. did everything to try and keep him." The most outrageous motive that explained why González choose *El Tri* came from an interview with Thomas Rongen, Chief Scout of the USMNT in Fleming's (2018) article:

"It's a big loss, obviously. He (González) would have liked to play for the U.S., but you know what, *his dad is so Mexican* [emphasis added], that he wanted him to represent Mexico and I knew it was a losing battle, probably."

Rongen's quote clearly summarizes the sentiments of this recruitment battle; other similar responses arose in other English-language articles about those "*Bad Hombres*" from south of the border who snatched González's allegiance from the USMNT's grip.

What is lost in the narratives in portraying González's as an object to be won, is that he ultimately belongs to the side that is the victor of the battle. These narratives around belonging relate back to the concept of *Entre Dos Mundos* as the individual between both worlds fits in both sides. González is not a prize to be won but rather a unique person that has two dual citizenship in two separate countries. The narratives around his belonging suggest that he cannot have his place in both worlds and only belongs to the captor of his identity.

Contesting National Allegiance

The accounts on González's case have presented several thematic trends that I have covered thus far. Yet, the crux of his predicament, and the argument of this study, is that Mexican-Americans like González are caught between two worlds when it comes to supporting the USMNT or *El Tri*. In this section, I unravel how González's predicament was a losing battle for him from the start and how the media misrepresented his loyalties to either nation. I begin by showcasing González's initial leanings, how the FMF influenced his shift and end with how his decision was marked as disloyal.

González's desire pre-decision.

In the months prior to González's announcement it appeared as if he had already committed to a national team, and both the English and Spanish-language articles took note. Eight of the eleven English-language articles (Fleming 2017; Galarcep 2017; Sciaretta 2017b, Usry 2017a, 2017b; Valentine 2017; Wine II 2017) and four of the Spanish-language articles (Bell 2017b; Diez 2017; Publisport 2017; Rivas 2017) that were written before the announcement all stated that González's desire was to represent the USMNT. Furthermore, Rivas (2017) cemented González's aspirations when he referenced that González himself had stated "mi sueño es ganar un Mundial con mi selección (Estados Unidos)" ("my dream is to win

a World Cup with my national team (United States).” If González’s desires weren’t clear, his actions prior to his decision also fell in line with his words.

According to two of these authors, González himself made key decisions that exemplified this desire. First, González declined to sign with *las Chivas de Guadalajara* and instead signed with *los Rayados de Monterrey* (Sciaretta 2017b) because signing with the *Chivas* would have prevented González from playing with the USMNT team as the *Chivas* have a long-standing policy that only Mexican players who are eligible and willing to play for Mexico will be signed by the team. Secondly, Wine (2017) indicated that González had “turned down every call up” that Mexico gave him. Based on these actions by González and expressed statements by the authors, it seemed clear that González had every intention to play for the USMNT.

Even after González’s decision was made, both the English and Spanish-language media outlets continued to emphasize that González’s desire had been to represent the USMNT (Bell 2018; El Universal 2018; ESPN 2018; Galarcep 2018; Jimenez 2018; La Silla Rota 2018; Lopez 2018; Marshall 2018; Panero 2018; Straus 2018). Jimenez (2018) summed up the confusion many USMNT personnel and supporters felt with this statement “Gonzalez had never openly expressed any interest or desire to play for Mexico,” and Straus (2018) confirmed González’s intentions by noting, “all indications were that he had shown all the signs that his allegiance was still with the U.S. national team.” If González had his heart’s desire on the USMNT, then something occurred to change his mind. According to the English-language media accounts the Mexican federation were the poachers, or the seducers from the Spanish-language version.

Mexican aggression or seduction?

A portion of the discourse around González’s decision focused on various conjectures as to why González ultimately decided to represent *El Tri* instead of the USMNT. One of those

reasons, that the English-language media highlighted in 11 of the 31 articles (Bohem 2018; ESPN 2018; Galarcep 2017; Hall 2018; McCaulley 2018a; Sciaretta 2018a, 2018b; Showell 2017; Usry 2017b; Valentine 2017; Wine II 2018a), was that Mexico was responsible for González changing his mind. In some cases, the rhetoric around Mexico’s recruitment of González was quite scathing as writers used verbs such as *poach* (Valentine 2017), *pry* (Sciaretta 2018a; Usry 2018b), *target* (Showell 2017), and *lure* (Usry 2018b) to suggest that the FMF stole González away from the USMNT. This can also be inferred by the use of antagonistic adverbs such as *aggressively* (Sciaretta 2018a, 2018b) or *assiduously* (Boehm 2018) to describe the FMF’s pursuit of González as hostile.

On the contrary, in 3 of the 21 Spanish-language articles (El Universal 2018; Mancera 2018; Sanchez-Lafuente 2018) the authors romanticized the recruitment attempts by the FMF. Mancera (2018) wrote “*González, un futbolista estadounidense seducido por México*” (“González, an American soccer player was seduced by Mexico”). Sanchez-Lafuente (2018) continued with the romanticization in speaking about González’s future with the Mexican national team in stating his potential future is what seduced him (“*fue lo que sedujo a Jonathan González*”). Jimenez (2018) indicated that González was courted by the FMF when he wrote “*Jonathan es pretendido por la Selección Mexicana*” (“Jonathan is wooed by the Mexican national team”). It is interesting to note, that this view of seducing González occurred in the English-language media accounts as well. McCaulley (2018a) wrote that “Mexico actively courted Gonzalez” and Hall (2018) suggested that “Mexico’s bid to woo González” was successful because of conversations with key personnel in the FMF’s system.

Whether the FMF were aggressively pursuing or seductively courting González is left to the reader’s interpretation of the author’s writing. I argue that the English-language media, in

particular those that disapproved of Mexico's recruitment is yet another nativist example of portraying Mexico as sinister actors. In his seminal textbook, Acuña (1972) illuminates this exact issue as he deconstructs historical narratives written by white historians who often blamed Mexico for causing the Texas revolt or the attacks at the Alamo. Acuña's (1972) work, much like the stories of the Spanish-language media, portray an opposing version of such accounts that continue to be erased, dismissed or whitewashed by accounts that suggest González turned his back on the US.

Divided loyalties: Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

While the choice to play for the USMNT or *El Tri* was ultimately González's decision to make in the end, the narratives around his loyalty to either nation would not be his to compose. The accounts of his decision, which have been investigated in this study, present a glimpse of his struggle. However, only González and those close to him truly understand the difficulties he went through as he pondered his decision. Despite the fact that González stated his intentions were to play for the USMNT, it should not have come as no surprise to see González have a change in heart. Galarcep (2017) suggested this was a possibility when he offered a perspective on the precarious nature of such a decision. He notes, "young players with multiple international options can often be fickle, *changing allegiances* [emphasis added] with ease as they go back and forth trying to decide [who] to play for." While Galarcep offers insight into the indecisiveness of a teenager, his claim of changing allegiances is grossly problematic as the international governing body of soccer bestowed this privilege upon González. Despite having the advantage to choose one national team or another, González endured fierce criticism around his national loyalty.

It is important to note that the FIFA statute that grants dual-national players like González the ability to represent another country is titled, “Change in Association.” This is a key distinction because Galarcep’s “changing allegiances” gives a different connotation than the title of the FIFA statute. The use of “allegiance” infers one’s commitment, fidelity or loyalty, thus changing allegiances implies a switch in loyalty or disloyalty. Given that playing professional soccer is a *job*, “change in association” clearly describes what is occurring: the player is choosing another employer. However, the use of “switching allegiances” was how seven of the English-language articles (Creditor 2018; Galarcep 2018; Goff 2018; Hernandez 2018; Straus 2018; Sunderland 2018; Verschueren 2018) portrayed González’s decision. It should be noted, however, that, five authors (Henry 2018; Jimenez 2018; Marshall 2018; Wahl 2018; Wine II 2018b) were much more subtle in illustrating González’s decision as they described the change in association as a decision or choice which carried a more neutral tone.

While not as extreme as switching allegiances, five of the articles (Associated Press 2018; ESPN 2018; Gonzalez 2018; Hall 2018; McCaulley 2018b) used descriptions such as “switched to Mexico” or “switched from the US to Mexico” and “switched sides.” However, these depictions still suggest a move that is more extreme than simply changing employers despite athletes having the freedom to do so. In sports, and in the world of international soccer, a player can freely relocate from one club to another club after their initial contract expires, this is known as a free transfer in soccer or free agency in other sports. These types of moves are common in sports at the club level and do not garner much attention outside the realm of sports. However, when such decisions are made at the national level, the decisions are closely examined due to the ties of nationalism. While professional soccer players do not sign contracts to represent their nation, their birth status is an assumed contract that such player will represent the

country if they are called up to represent the nation in international competition. Thus, when a professional athlete chooses to exercise a change in association as González did, the magnitude of such choice is amplified as the player and their choice are no longer a personal matter but a decision that embodies the country as well.

Finally, more blatant descriptions confer that the English-language articles as a whole categorized González's decision as a disloyal act. Sunderland (2018) stated that González was "turning his back on the United States;" Galarcep (2018) followed suit by expressing that González was set to "trade the Stars and Stripes for the green of El Tri;" and lastly Creditor (2018) uttered that González was "jumping ship." These comments demonstrate that González had committed a treacherous act in choosing to exercise his right under FIFA statutes to represent the Mexican national team.

The narratives around changing allegiances used by the media is a paradox in the world of sports or the professional world for that matter. Sporting athletes build their careers by positioning themselves in the best place for them to succeed. Part of that positioning is changing associations, or in this case teams that might provide a better opportunity. In constructing González as a disloyal patriot, the media is removing any agency González has in choosing what is best for him and his professional career. In this case, being caught between two worlds means that personal decisions around career building necessarily become politicized. For González and other Mexican-Americans, *Entre Dos Mundos* represents the choices we have in selecting what suits us best.

Entre Dos Campos (Between Two Pitches)

González is not the first Mexican-American soccer player to have faced the decision to represent either the USMNT or *El Tri*, although he is the first to choose the latter. One of those

players who also faced this struggle is Hérculez Gómez Hurtado. In an interview, Gómez (2018) was quoted saying the following in McCaulley's (2018) article:

I have a Mexican wife, my daughter was born in the States, I was born in the States, my parents were Mexican immigrants. I have love for both countries. Mexico gave me everything I have, but America made me. I share immense love for both. You're not going to make me feel different about my love for both countries.

Gómez's statement embodies precisely what it is to be *Entre Dos Campos* (Between Two Pitches) for many Mexican-American soccer players, and fans alike. This affinity for both countries makes selecting one national team challenging. Boehm (2018) describes this difficulty and confirms that players like González are caught between two worlds: "it's very difficult for those of us who are not dual nationals to see things through their eyes, to feel what they feel. In many ways they live in two worlds, pulled in multiple directions by a complex cocktail of cultural influences and circumstances."

In González's case the USSF and the FMF associations were the institutions that dragged González into this "cocktail." Nevertheless, it was the both the English and Spanish-language media who confounded the issue with mediated misrepresentations and a false expectation of national loyalty despite González' dual citizenship. McCaulley (2018b) speaks to the problematic nature of the English-language media's discourse by writing "feeling American and feeling like a member of another nation are not mutually exclusive. It's unreasonable to ask a player to only feel American." As both the English and Spanish-language media constructed González's national identity, objectified him as a prize to be won in battle and questioned his national allegiance, they concealed the emotive nature of González's predicament. McCaulley (2018a; 2018b) seemed to be the only author on the English-language side to pick up on the

emotional struggle González and other Mexican-American players endure by suggesting that many players would gladly represent either the USMNT or *El Tri* because “they love both nations and both national teams” and that many players, including González “feel equally attached to two countries.”

At the end of the day, González’s decision to represent either the USMNT or *El Tri* was ultimately his choice to make and best expressed by Bell (2017b) as “*un tema personal y familiar*” (“a personal and family issue”). While González was not quoted directly in a vast majority of the articles, the few occasions in which his words were used demonstrate the emotional nature of this issue for him. In July of 2017, six months prior to his decision, González (2017b), as quoted by Sciarretta (2017b), explains the importance of his family in his decision making and inclination to represent the USMNT:

Until this moment, the United States has always guided and been there for me so I feel like I have the need to be with them. I'd say for now I'd have to stick with the U.S. for all they've done for me. My family is supportive in whatever decisions I make so it makes it much easier for me. International play for me is once in a lifetime opportunities (sic), not everybody gets the chance to play international soccer so I'm very fortunate for everything I've been through and hopefully will be going through.

When González later made his decision to play for Mexico, he made a public statement that he shared through Twitter. In this statement González continues to acknowledge the role his family played in making the decision:

Four years ago I arrived in Mexico with the dream of playing soccer professionally, something that I have accomplished with a lot of hard work, dedication, and above everything else, with the support of my family. It is not easy to leave behind the country

in which one is born; however, Mexico is also my home as it is the country where my parents were born and, consequently, where my roots originate. Today I am experiencing a very important moment, perhaps the most important up to now in my professional career and I am convinced that representing a country is, perhaps, one of the greatest honors a soccer player can have in their life. Through this medium I want to express that my present is in Mexico, the country that has opened doors for me. (González 2018).

In reading González's words, both prior to and at the time of his announcement, one can sense the importance his family played in making his decision. This deeply personal account is buried in the English and Spanish-language media discourse. These two block quotes demonstrate González's ability to span both cultures (Menjívar 2002). Yet, at the same time, they also reveal his need to negotiate his position in both societies. For Mexican-American players like Jonathan González, Hérculez Gómez, Efrain Alvarez, Jesse Gonzalez, Omar Gonzalez, Carlos Reyna and the many more to come, Jonathan's case sheds light on what it means to be "caught in the crossfire" (Anzaldúa 1987:216) and *Entre Dos Campos* in the world of soccer.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The international world of soccer is full of numerous cases of dual national players who choose to represent a different country on the field of play rather than their birth nation. Jonathan González is one of those such players when he announced his decision to change his association and represent Mexico over the United States on January 8, 2017. While FIFA, the international governing body of soccer, grants players like González the ability to choose which country they want to play for, through specific eligibility statutes, the player's decision is often faced with much scrutiny. Even though González is not the first player to play for a different national team, he is the first US-born soccer player to choose Mexico over the US. Thus, his announcement garnered much attention as media outlets covered the story in both in the US and Mexico. González's decision is one that many Mexican-American soccer fans when faced with the dilemma in choose to root for either the Mexican or United States national teams. or the Us

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to use González's case as an example of the precarious nature that Mexican-Americans face in negotiating their national identity or national allegiance as they are stuck *Entre Dos Mundos*—Between Two Worlds. Furthermore, the research question that guided this project was to understand how sports media outlets construct national identity, interrogate national allegiances and further exacerbate this tension that Mexican-Americans face. To interrogate this query, I used critical discourse analysis to examine 54 media accounts that demonstrated that González was “caught in the crossfire” (Anzaldúa 1987:216) as both the English and Spanish-language media outlets constructed differing narratives of González's decision.

This study exposed the pervasive nature in which media narratives constructed González's national identity as either American or Mexican, and rarely as a dual national which is the most accurate description of his national identity. This project also revealed how González was objectified as a prize to be won as the US and Mexican soccer federations fought each over for González's allegiance. Additionally, this investigation unveiled how González's national allegiance was contested after his decision to portray him as disloyal for exercising his right to change soccer associations. Finally, this research project demonstrates how other Mexican-American soccer players like González have struggled with their affinities for both countries yet downplayed by the media. These insights demonstrate the tension many Mexican-American face as they are rendered *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (neither from here, nor from there) and thus struggling to find acceptance in both countries.

By using González's story as a case study, I demonstrate how Mexican-Americans are wedged in this liminal space known as *Entre Dos Mundos* or *Between Two Worlds* (Bacallao and Smokowski 2005; Campbell 2005; Gutierrez 1996; Menjivar 2002) within the professional soccer realm. This is particularly relevant as González will not be last Mexican-American soccer to face the difficulty in selecting a national team. Furthermore, the pressure felt from soccer federations in recruiting the player takes a toll on the individual; as in the case of Efrain Alvarez, another dual national soccer player whose father told the media that his son has been traumatized by the recruitment efforts of the USMNT and *El Tri* (Bernstein 2021). According to Medio Tiempo (2018), Mexican-American players face an internal conflict due to their dual nationality (“para los jugadores mexicanoamericanos, existe un conflicto interno; tienen la doble nacionalidad”). While dual national Mexican-Americans have the ability to represent either

country, their precarious position *Entre Dos Mundos* places them in a state of “limbo” (Sanchez-Lafuente 2018).

This condition of ambiguity for Mexican-American soccer players is not isolated to the Mexican-American experience. As previously noted, international soccer’s largest stages such as the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA European Cup are other examples in which dual national players are playing for teams other than their birth nation. In victorious cases, as in France’s win in 2016 FIFA World Cup, foreign-born players are celebrated for their successes and rendered as loyal Frenchmen. Yet, in cases of defeat, such as England’s loss in the 2020 UEFA Euro Cup, dual national players are condemned for their failures and racialized as foreign traitors. Therefore, by examining González’s predicament and extending it to other dual national soccer players, sport sociologists can begin to uncover discriminatory ideologies that plague the soccer world and further extend the boundaries of literature on race and sports.

It is important to note that the concept of *Entre Dos Mundos* is primarily used to understand how immigrants and their kin experience the bicultural environments in which they dwell and how those cultural spaces inform their experiences of residing among the borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987). Thus, a major limitation of this study is that we cannot understand how González felt before, during and after his decision and only left with mediated accounts to postulate his feelings on the decision. To gain such insight further research is required in the form of qualitative interviews with González and other dual national players to fully understand the intricacies of being a dual national and what one undergoes when having to choose one nation over another. Furthermore, the notion of dual nationality is not exclusive to the soccer world or Mexican-Americans. In other sports, such as baseball, basketball and hockey, which are also contested at the international level, one can also find examples of athletes representing a

different country than their birth nation. Consequently, examining additional sports, athletes and other ethnic groups can provide a host of insights on transnationalism in sports that would advance theoretical concepts like *Entre Dos Mundos*—Between Two Worlds and provide the impetus to conceptualize new theoretical frameworks exclusive to sports studies.

In the meantime, for first-generation Mexican-Americans, like Jonathan, Efrain or the character Luis in the McDonald's commercial, the uniform colors one chooses to wear is a complex decision. Like them, I identify in being caught in the crossfire and stuck *Entre Dos Mundos*. We are both Mexican AND American. It is a blessing and a curse. We reap the benefits of being bicultural but carry the burden of identity politics. The color red resembles our blood lines that connect us to *una historia*, our historical component. The color white resembles the piece of paper upon which our birthplace is marked, our cultural component. The last two colors, green and blue, represent the privilege of claiming a dual national identity. Ultimately, our third choice of color is ours to make. Whether we don the colors of *El Tri*, or the colors of the USMNT, or both, we ultimately make sense of this decision through our own self-identification. This is the sensory component of our choice and that is based on what feels right!

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Spanish-language News Articles

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VITA

Born to a *Mexicano* immigrant father and a *Tejana* migrant worker mother, Jaime Morales is a first-generation Mexican-American with dual citizenship. Jaime is an avid soccer fan and grew up rooting for the Mexican national team. Throughout his life, Jaime has had to negotiate his ethnic identity and wrestled with the notions of not being Mexican enough or not fully American. This struggle has led Jaime to pursue a Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His research interests in the Latino sport studies are influenced by the identity politics of being *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (neither from here, nor from there). Upon graduating, Jaime will attend the University of Connecticut to further examine the intersection of sports and *latinidades*.