

Football and the Rituals of War: A Game Within a Game?

GRACIELA SUSANA BORUSZKO

*“Ever since words existed for fighting and playing,
men have been wont to call war a game.”¹*

*He (Stepsiades) is bathed in the brightness of the violet-haired Muses,
And he has given a share of his crown to his namesake uncle,
Whom Ares of the bronze shield conveyed to his doom,
But for the brave men honour is stored up as reward.²*

When you say the word “game” the immediate connotation is a group of people who gather to enjoy collectively a relaxing activity. The purpose is to have fun by a regulated process wherein one team strives to prove superiority to an opposing team. The principle of collective enjoyment is linked to opposing teams competing for superiority that is manifested in victory for the “winner” and defeat for the “losing party.” A common goal is at stake, which is to win, and only one party can obtain it. War and football³ function in the same way, using similar strategies as well as distinctive rites. In a 1981 article on bonding and violence in sports, Eric Dunning explains this phenomenon: “The intense feeling of in-group attachment and hostility towards out-groups...mean that rivalry is virtually inevitable when their members meet.”⁴ This rivalry is expressed in behaviors that parallel war and football rituals like painting the faces for a match, chanting hymns, wearing emblems that demonstrate shared identities and rival identities simultaneously. Individual supporters or groups of supporters also participate in the rivalry by observing superstitious and personal rituals.

Etymologically, the word “game” carries the notion of a physical activity that produces joy. Both objectives are linked to the idea of success and superiority. The Old Saxon word “gaman”, the Old High German “gaman” (sport, merriment), the Danish *gamen*, the Swedish *gamman* (merriment), are identical with the Gothic *gaman* (participation, communion.) The word comes from the Proto-Germanic prefix *ga- (collective) + *mann (person) which gives a sense of “people together.” The -en was lost perhaps because it was mistaken

for a suffix. The current meaning of the word game “contest for success or superiority played according to rules” was first used circa 1200 to refer to athletic contests, chess, or backgammon.⁵

The term “rite,” derives from the Latin *ritus* indicating a religious observance or ceremony, custom, usage, thus a ritual constitutes a ceremonial practice. Ceremony derives from Latin *caerimonia* that connotes the ideas of holiness and sacredness, making reference to a reverent rite or a sacred ceremony. In this way, when approaching the concepts of football and war, there is a common denominator for both activities: rituals. Both human pursuits are based on “rituals” that, by definition, incorporate a third human activity: religious practices. This study will explore the interrelation of football and war rituals as expressions of identities, within shared values in cultural contexts, delivering meaning and significance.

Bernstein, Elvin & Peters describe ritual as:

...a relatively rigid pattern of acts specific to a situation, which constructs a framework of meaning over and beyond the specific situational meanings. ... the symbolic function of ritual is to relate the individual through ritualistic acts to a social order to heighten respect for that order, to revivify that order within the individual and, in particular, to deepen acceptance of the procedures which are used to maintain continuity, order and boundary and which control ambivalence towards the social order.⁶

At first sight, the sports rituals in the form of handshakes, wearing of uniforms, chanting, the use of flags, opening and closing ceremonies, medal awards ceremonies, pre-match talks, the display of trophies, all of these common practices reflect to some extent war rituals. According to John Goodger:

The conceptualization of ritual as a particular form of expression and communication... provides a basis for examining a variety of meanings and inner states associated with it. Further, it directs our attention not only to the question of what is being expressed but also to the nature of the social structural contexts in which forms of ritual may occur.⁷

Consensual rituals that regulate the communal life of a team as well as differentiating rituals like changing rooms assigned to different members of the group, or wearing a distinctive badge for different subgroups of the team, indicate an invisible barrier between the insiders and the outsiders achieving social bonding among members of the football team. The current shared life of the team is even inserted into a historical trajectory creating a liaison between teams in time like in the display of photographs and trophies of each football team. The timely aspect of the trajectory of a national team, for example, uses consensual and differentiating rituals to distinguish each team while accentuating the trajectory of a club in relation to a collective history of a particular people, thus creating a corporate identity. In this sense, national football teams imprint identity traits on a people, as it constitutes a form of collective expression and communication in which members are reminded of their collective identity as teams in order to convey shared collective values. In John Goodger's words social bonding and ritual in sports are crafted around some core structures:

...the distinction between social structural contexts, which contain mainly, shared symbolic systems, knowledge, beliefs and sentiments, and those in which there is greater division of labour, specialization, interdependence and diversity.⁸

National sentiments are expressed using symbolic systems such as singing national anthems, reciting pledges of allegiance, the collective assertion of belonging and inhabiting a shared territory, the use of flags as a representation of the collective identity, or the use of national colors. These shared values are practiced by different groups that operate self-sufficiently in specialized tasks while keeping a strong nexus of interdependence with many other subgroups that create a diverse expression of a national sentiment. In a football match, under the banner of these national common sentiments, knowledge, and beliefs, there is a particular structure of specialization, interdependence, and diversity. The practice of football has been an intrinsic part of the social life in England since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. John Marshall Carter from the University of Illinois in Urbana, Illinois conducted research on this topic drawing on William fitz Stephen's history of medieval sport.¹⁰ He states that:

The growth of the cities in the twelfth century represented a new chapter in medieval social history. Cities, as fitz Stephen reminded us, were more than groups of people who gathered together for mutual protection and commerce. Diversions were a significant part of London life also.

In addition, Johan Huizinga, the renowned Dutch medievalist, wrote:

“Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game.”¹¹

Nowhere in medieval sport history are Huizinga’s words more confirmed than in William fitz Stephen’s description of London sports in the twelfth century. Indeed, fitz Stephen seems to have been in tune with the idea of sport as ritualized aggression when he says, “Youth is an age desirous of glory and victory, and therefore young men engage in feigned battles.”¹² Though fitz Stephen’s detailed account of sport is organized roughly by seasons, it is the idea that play is ritualized aggression and that play is training for war, which provides a consistent thread through his ludic tapestry.¹³

The play as ritualized aggression motif covers the following sports in Fizs Stephen’s narrative: 1) cock-fighting, 2) sham fights of the young, 3) leaping contests, 4) archery, 5) wrestling, 6) stone-throwing, 7) javelin throwing, 8) bear baiting, 9) bull baiting, 10) hunting, 11) ice skating, and 12) football.

... After dinner the boys engaged in football. The sons of London citizens of all social classes were eager to emulate the trend-setters in their society, the warriors. These boys, equipped with home-made shields and swords, pretended that they were winning glory for their lord.

... Again, in these sports as in cockfighting, the theme of ritualistic warfare is ever-present. In addition, “sport as preparation for war” is certainly a recurring impetus behind London sports, whether conscious or unconscious. If man engaged in rough activities requiring sharpened skills, he would be a better soldier for it whether or not it was manda-

tory. In fact, it was not until the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries that English kings organized sport as a preparation for war.¹⁴

Football has been associated with war since it was adopted by societies that saw in it a way to prepare young boys for war. It was only late in the twentieth and twenty-first century that football was openly promoted among girls in some parts of Europe and the United States with less popularity in Latin America. Thus, national identity played an important role in these early “games” that were fostered as preparation for war. The first colleges to make sports a major part of student life were Ivy League schools and military academies, the latter of which “endorsed the old General Wellington idea that battles were won and lost on the playing fields of youth” since they trained young men to be tough-minded competitors, excellent strategists, and physically fit: “The better the sports program, they reasoned, the better the soldier.”¹⁵

On the reverse side, football¹⁶ terms have been used in relation to war scenarios. In his book *Sports World*, Robert Lipsyte relates the nexus in terminology used by the Nixon administration in relation to the Vietnam War.

... “sports-speak” was often used during the Nixon administration to explain and justify its decisions about Vietnam. When Secretary of Defense Mel Laird announced the stepped-up bombing of Vietnam and the mining of Haiphong, he likened the South Vietnamese to an “expansion ball-club” that “will not win every battle or encounter but they will do a very credible job. ... then referred to its new bombing campaign as “Operation Linebacker” and gave Richard Nixon the codename of “Quarterback.” While trying to win the 1968 Presidential election, Lyndon Johnson’s vice president, Hubert Humphrey, likewise used sports-speak in an attempt to disassociate himself gracefully from Johnson’s policies on Vietnam, explaining to the public that he was not “calling the signals” in the war, but acted more as “a lineman doing some down-field blocking”¹⁷

Lipsyte, later in his piece on the Gulf War for *USA Today*, indicated that after days of watching “soft-faced” news anchors such as CNN’s Aaron Brown “defer to ax-jawed analysts” like retired army veteran General Wesley Clark, news networks’ “play-by-play” coverage of the war began to seem more like

an ESPN sports show. In the same fashion journalistic reports refer to “momentum”, the “run to daylight” from Kuwait to Baghdad, or the Marines “ramping up to win ugly?”¹⁸ The use of football¹⁹ terminology created a more accessible way that helped the military communicate with the American public about its strategies. Nonetheless, the conversation becomes more about who is winning the war, rather than the legitimacy or purposefulness of the war and its serious economic and human costs. It also trivializes the horrors and further conflates war and sports in the minds of the public thus devaluing the war experience.

Brown also noted, “Sports reacts after a tragedy by first cancelling games, then restarting them to signal a return to normalcy, and then through an incorporation of military and patriotic symbols to signify national unity in a time of crisis.”²⁰ An example from history is after the assassination of President Kennedy, NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle began to fill his football²¹ games with “moments of silence, flag ceremonies, the singing of hymns, and other tributes to honor the fallen leader.”²² In the same way, after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, game fields were transformed into patriotic theaters arising at a time of national crises and disappearing once the tragedy “sting” dissipates. One more example of the association of sports and military life is the fact that in 2000, the San Diego Padres players began wearing camouflage jerseys for Military Opening Day, a special day at the park that welcomes service members and their families and includes military-themed pre-game ceremonies and in-game segments. In addition, it is worth noting that the Dallas professional sporting events, among others, are recruitment venues for the military in exchange for providing bands, musicians, or other entertainment elements during the games.

Mosher also mentions the case of Marco Lokar. “A substitute guard for the Seaton Hall basketball team, Lokar came from a Slovenian-Italian family caught up in the Yugoslavian war. When the *Pirates* were expected to wear flags on their uniforms in 1991 in support of Desert Storm, Lokar refused to don the symbol because ‘from a Christian standpoint’ he could ‘not support any war, with no exception for the Persian Gulf War.’”²³ His refusal to be co-opted by the sports-war intertext resulted in heavy media attention, and crowds began booing him every time he entered the game or touched the ball. Both he and his pregnant wife also received death threats, ultimately causing Lokar to withdraw from Seaton Hall and return to Italy. This player felt strongly about

his pacifist ideals choosing to disrupt the neat package of sports conjoined with military support.

Astore pointed out the use of commercials for military recruitment as it associates with sports:

... recent Army commercials (which often air during televised sporting events) depict soldiers playing volleyball, lifting weights, climbing mountains, and engaging in similar sporting activities, while a voice-over stresses that military service “promotes teamwork and toughness.” Absent are images of soldiers under fire, wounded soldiers, or disabled veterans. Army service in these ads is celebrated as (and reduced to) an action-filled sequence of sporting events. [The author objected to] this conflation of war and sport precisely because war is not a leisure-time activity, nor is it entertainment. Military service should not be sold to American youth with sporty imagery, or with stadium pageantry.²⁴

Aside from the military approach to sponsor military activity, the commemoration of war is an almost ubiquitous feature of all human societies. Max Weber defined a nation state as community united by:

... “memories of a common political destiny” central to which, were violence and, above all, war. The commemoration of wars has been associated with religious rites as they developed from funeral rites. The Olympic games were organized to memorialize Greek victories in Southern Italy in 764 BC. Indeed, the nine-metre statue of Nike, the goddess of (martial and sporting) victory, which was erected by the Messenians in front of the Temple of Zeus at Olympus, was forged from the spoils of war.²⁵

Although in ancient times only the generals and commanders were honored and commemorated, more recently the focus shifted to honor the sacrifice of the soldiers. This homage is represented in the compilation and public exhibit of listings of individual names. Anthony King mentions, “In the twenty-first century, a dramatic shift in commemorative practice has occurred. The personalities of individual soldiers and their actual domestic relations have become the emotive focus of attention.”²⁶ As he retired, former president George W.

Bush compiled a book of his paintings titled *Portraits of Courage: A Commander in Chief's Tribute to America's Warriors*, a collection of stories, 66 portraits, and a four-panel mural that he painted to honor military veterans.²⁷ Honoring the dead and commemorating war has been expressed in a myriad of venues all throughout history.

Peter Alegi, in his book *African Footballscapes*, indicates that in late colonial Africa football and identity formation were closely linked in the French and Belgian Congo.²⁸ Phyllis Martin also mentioned one example: “In Brazzaville and Léopoldville, the game allowed fans to forget their difference and to forge a broader sense of identity when regional or international matches were staged. When a Brazzaville select team played against a Léopoldville team, Bacongo and Poto-Poto fans buried their differences and became Brazzavillois.”²⁹ National identities intermingle with team loyalties affirming broader memberships beyond the team loyalties without diminishing the game loyalty. Football rituals of each team are left aside on this occasion while maintained with a broader membership at sight. Once the change of loyalty is decided the same rituals are observed including the new pledge of allegiance thus affirming the notion that national identity is reinforced in the practice of football in a similar way as it was done in England in the medieval times. The notion of war now is translated into the defense or reaffirmation of national identity while war is represented in each team’s strategies to win the game. This is done in conjunction with the fans who participate by chanting, wearing the colors or emblems of each team, painting faces, or performing other rituals to infuse energy into the team. Alegi, speaking of African football, conveys that:

Everywhere on the continent, football teams and spectators contributed to the emerging consciousness of national identity and popular resistance to colonial rule. … One of the most dramatic examples of the linkage of African football to anticolonial resistance was the formation of the Algerian National Liberation Front’s “national” team during the war of independence against France. … The departure of the Algerian footballers from France made news all around the world. … “Football got into French-Algerian politics,” reported the *New York Times* in an article about a group of “Algerian Moslems” based in French professional teams who left “to join the nationalist cause against France.”³⁰ *Time* explained: “It was as if, overnight, the best Latin American baseball players in the major leagues--men like Chico Carrasquel, Bobby Avila, Minnie Minoso,

Ruben Gomez--had fled the U.S. and challenged the Yankees and Braves for the world championship.³¹

We see here an incipient identity in conflict that is fighting to legitimize the new political identity of a group that uses the football team to solidify an emerging identity. The political implications between the countries that were at war transcended into football politics where allegiances had to be changed and a myriad of identity and political issues even invaded the religious arena when athletes were identified by religious affiliations. This African scenario called for the need to represent it in an American scenario in order to clarify the nature of such an extraordinary event that adopts political innuendos that overrule the sports tenants. The example of Latin American baseball players coming to play against the American teams insinuates a hypothetical international confrontation that would be sportive and political at the same time just as apartheid was also a polemic issue in South Africa.

The struggle over the right to represent South Africa in world football was far from over. The first international delegation to visit South Africa for the purpose of addressing apartheid-related dispute was a FIFA commission of inquiry. In January 1956 the Lotsy Commission confirmed earlier findings that SAFA represented a minority group and did not properly constitute a national association. However, FIFA agreed with SAFA that segregated football was a South African “tradition and custom.”³²

In this case a political internal conflict was directly linked with the players of a national team requiring some mediation and negotiation between a national sports association and its international counterpart. Not only international conflicts but also national conflicts involve the inner fiber of the sport that is dragged into the first row of the conflict becoming a “key player in the resolution or escalation of the conflict.”

In South Africa, as in Nigeria and Algeria, football after 1940 reverberated with political implications, locally and internationally. In all three cases urban growth, access to Western education, mass media coverage, and passion for the game among cosmopolitan African nationalists strengthened the connections between football and mass politics.

Football helped to propel and legitimize the activities of anticolonial movements. ... Immediately after gaining their freedom, African states, as a way of asserting their status as independent nation states and their membership in the global community, joined the United Nations and a series of transnational institutions, including FIFA, the International Olympic Committee, and other global sports organizations.³³

Migration of football players from Africa to Europe after 1980 stimulated a wider phenomenon that extended to the tragic migrations in the twenty-first century.

The flow of African footballers to Europe increased in the 1980s and 1990s, a trend some labeled a “New Scramble for Africa.” Regulatory changes quickened the pulse of migration. Many European leagues began to allow a small number of foreigners per team, usually no more than two or three (though citizenship rules differed from country to country). ... Migration brought about a partial Africanization of the European game that blurred the boundaries of race, citizenship, and national identity. It is no longer extraordinary for players of African origin to represent a European nation in the World Cup or European championship. ... Migration has transformed the composition of Africa’s national teams. ... today the vast majority of national team members are based in Europe.³⁴

Nowadays, the allegiance and national identity of teams are framed in a new kind of war, the economic war and the corruption war. Sticking with the example of Africa (an example that is repeated in Latin America and other regions) and looking at the 2010 World Cup hosted in South Africa there are many indicators of further changes.

From a cultural standpoint, many ordinary South Africans (and their African neighbors generally) cannot afford World Cup tickets and thus may be reduced to adding “African” flavor to this corporate event by dancing in the streets, singing, making music, and showcasing “traditional” clothing and jewelry for foreign visitors and television audiences. ... For the 2010 World Cup in South Africa is very much about

the changing relationship between sport, race, nationhood, and big business. Within an international framework dominated by FIFA and trans-national corporations accountable mainly to themselves, South Africa's hosting of the World Cup represents the latest and most ambitious attempt by an African country the use football to showcase its political achievements, accelerate economic growth, and assert the continent's global citizenship.³⁵

As we have demonstrated, football as a "game" also plays a role in the "political game" of the countries that find in it a way to express their national identity and pride in globalized world. Football offers a common "language" among the nations conveying a variety of political discourses that disseminate the national and political confrontations of the times. It seems impossible to exclude conflicts from football. The effects of the conflict impact the structure of the game or the representation of the sport in a given scenario, or it is manipulated in order to include it in complex conflicts such as the world cup in Mexico in 1986. In this game, Armando Maradona, an Argentinian player, scored a controversial goal against England, called "la mano de Dios" or God's hand. It was celebrated in Argentina as a kind of vindication for the adverse result of the Guerra de Las Malvinas or Falkland War. It is also noteworthy that the scoring of this goal involved the illegal use of the player's hand and was named "the hand of God," which invokes divine intervention or a religious connotation so that a religious rite of using the hands to worship God somehow validated the illegal way the goal was scored. Rites were transposed from the religious arena to the sports arena within a political context of a lost war. In the minds of the Argentinian spectators the game not only extended the war but somehow changed the historical outcome of it.

When the British soldiers arrived in Africa, they found that the Africans had their own sports, but they were not interested in those. They certainly enjoyed playing football for their own entertainment. Along the time and as the "civilizing mission" of Africa took place, they used football as a colonization tool. Football arrived first to the ports and then followed the railroads into mainland Africa.

A similar scenario took place in America in the transformation of the Apache tribal warfare and culture into the All-Indian rodeo.

Two centuries ago survival for the Apaches was achieved through raiding and tribal warfare. These survival methods included acquiring food, seeking vengeance for the death of a loved one killed in a previous raid, and establishing territorial boundaries. Today, the Western Apaches have re-established this traditional way of life through the All-Indian Rodeos.³⁶

The Apache warriors maintained the ancestral war practices in present times through the rituals associated with All-Indian Rodeos. War rituals were transposed into the practice of a sport. In addition, Ben Chavis describes how Apache warriors practiced some sports as a preparation for war.

Apache warriors were encouraged to be strong and brave by their families and war chiefs, complimenting their physical strength and coordination by enduring strenuous warfare journeys. ... The goal of Western Apache warriors was to focus on the battle and destroy the enemy. ... Specific religious rituals were observed prior to warriors commencing a raid. The Apaches enlisted the supernatural powers to ensure their safety, good fortune, a worthy opponent and a safe return home to their land and people. ... Sports and games among Indian tribes were an established way to prepare warriors as active participants to ensure their survival, maintain traditions and rituals, and preserve ceremonialism. Tribal warfare preparation became an important institution for the Western Apaches.³⁷

This brings to mind the practice of “Capoeira,” a Brazilian art form that combines fight, dance, rhythm and movement, in order to create a dialog between players, a conversation through movement. African slaves developed this art form and some historians claim that slaves used capoeira’s dance-like appearance as a way to hide their training of combat and self-defense; skills that were used in the event the slave escaped from their lords. Oxendine and Louis, two American Indian scholars and authors, in their extensive research noted in relation to Indians and sports:

In the traditional life of most American Indian communities, sports and games occupied a very prominent role. In fact, accounts provided by

oral history, artifacts ball courts, folklore, and the writings of early travelers, suggest that the importance placed on these activities would be considered excessive even by today's standards... these activities were steeped in tradition and intimately related to all phases of life, especially to ceremony, ritual, magic and religion.³⁸

Ben Chavis made a parallel listing of rituals of war and their transposition into the All-Indian Rodeo rituals:

Prayer was a very important ritual among the Western Apaches. Medicine men had to be consulted before warrior went into battle and in All-Indian Rodeos the Apache cowboys consult with medicine men, preachers and priests before entering the All-Indian Rodeos. They also pray a great deal... The warriors, horses and weapons were blessed by medicine men to ensure their success and safety during the raids and battles while in the All-Indian Rodeos the cowboys' horses and rodeo equipment are blessed by medicine men and priests...The Apache war chiefs gave speeches that encouraged the warriors to be brave and cautious before they went into battle against the enemy while at the All-Indian Rodeos the older cowboys encourage the younger ones to practice hard, pray and stay focused on the All-Indian Rodeo.³⁹

The ritualistic transposition from rituals of war to rituals of sports in the Apache tradition and the practice of the capoeira in Brazil mirror the use of football in Medieval England in order to prepare the soldiers for war, as was discussed at the beginning of this article. We can attest thus, that this characteristic is not exclusive to the practice of football. Nonetheless the Apache tradition responds to a deeper concern to maintain the traditional ways of their people, including language, religion, politics, customs and beliefs. Nowadays, it is common to see players make the sign of the cross as they enter the football field before a match or to see a group of players praying before or after the game. After scoring a goal, some players point to the sky, signaling their gratitude to God for letting them score the goal. Other players wear t-shirts with religious inscriptions under the team's uniform and display them at a moment of joy during or after the game. Religious displays are common in many

games. The uncertainty of a game's outcome seems to be established in a cloud of mystery and each team tries to win by requesting the favor of the Divinity.

In relation to the practice of football and commemoration and war, these three commissioned paintings will be discussed: John Singer Sargent's painting *Gassed* (1919) and Arabella Dorman's *Wazha Pa Wazha (Shoulder to Shoulder)* and *The Dance*. Anthony King, describes the trajectory of both painters:

During the First World War, as an American, he was not initially selected by the Ministry of Information as an official war artist and was only belatedly called upon in 1918, partly as a result of his own personal bereavement; his niece Rose-Marie Ormand, who had posed for some of his paintings, was killed by a freak German shell in Paris on 29 March 1918. He was subsequently commissioned to produce work for the Ministry of Information, which would record and celebrate Anglo-American cooperation in France. ... Sargent spent three months in France. After two months of fruitless research, he eventually witnessed the treatment of gas casualties. This event would become the subject of *Gassed*.

... Arabella Dorman was a successful and well-connected portrait artist who, like Sargent, had specialized in the depiction of "society" individuals and families. She was embedded for long periods in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2013 spending time on the frontline with troops, including in Sangin, Helmand, one of the most dangerous places in the entire theatre. As a war artist, most of her work records combat soldiers, military operations or Afghan civil society. However, there is an important exception to this. One of her largest and most striking works, *Wazha Pa Wazha*, depicts a football match between British soldiers and their Afghan mentors in a Forward Operating Base in Nad-e-Ali in Helmand in 2013. Dorman conceived of this painting as a deliberate twin to Sargent's *Gassed*.⁴⁰



*Arabella Dorman, Wazha Pa Wazha
(Shoulder to Shoulder), 2013. © Arabella Dorman.*



John Singer Sargent, Gassed, 1919. © IWM (Art.IWMART 1460).

Wazha Pa Wazha and *Gassed* exhibit a similar palette of colors (pale Khaki, brown and grey tones) as both paintings depict a football match in a war context. Both artists portray the losses of war using a football match as an alternate scenario to war. At the same time, the sports tenets of ‘winners and losers’ are used to represent the complexities and uncertainties of war. In both paintings, the football match is depicted in a moment of engagement of the soldiers that somehow are oblivious to the war context. There is no winner or loser insinuated in the painting but just a group of soldiers engaged in the match. Both paintings are essentially British depicting British soldiers and painted by an American and a British painter. According to Adams and other authors, the message of the paintings is more redemptive than critical where the painter instead of rejecting war, decide to paint a tribute to the human spirit.⁴¹

Adams and Hughson have argued that *Gassed* does not implicate football with the war but rather uses football as a symbol of human indomitability in the face of horror. Sargent was commemorating neither the war nor the fallen but celebrating and memorializing rather the transcendent human spirit which could rise above suffering and waste.⁴² *Gassed* was conceived as a deeply symbolic painting. Bailey relates the influence of the practice of football in the British Empire.

The Association of Football, as it is now recognized, was invented in a small group of elite English Clarendon schools between the 1940s and 1860s to be formally codified in 1863. Sports became a means of preparing a new elite for the conquest and administration of an Empire, displacing individual codes of aristocratic honour with bourgeois thrift, self-denial and teamwork. Football was seen as a means of generating the nationalist commitments and masculinity capable of defending and extending Great Britain and her empire.⁴³

Painting, like other artistic disciplines such as poetry or music, participates in the artistic commemoration of war and sports. In the poem of Henry Bolt Vitai Lampada (1892), in the face of certain death in battle, the officer is able to recall his school-boy sporting experiences, exhorting his men, and finally challenging his enemy to “play up and play the game” to the very end. Football was a central ritual in British imperialist nationalism. Alex Danchev writes, “Armed with art, in other words, we are more alert and less deceived.”⁴⁵ The

willingness to draw “truth” from war events is the bases for the artistic commissions that were supposed to communicate aspects of war and thus, convey meaning.

It is at the center of such compositions that we find the two topics of this article represented in artistic form in order to communicate significance within a descriptive context of war. The association of both subjects indicates that they “match.” In *Gassed* the artist depicts a football match of the soldiers in the background of the aftermath of battle. In *Shoulder to Shoulder* the artist shows the soldier-player as taking part in a football match where Afghan and British soldiers participate in the game and the battle is not part of the picture. It seems that Sargent was presenting the football match as a historical and cultural event that prepared the soldiers for combat and while in combat helped them escape the horrible consequence of war. Football would represent the preparation and healing process while war in its horrific consequences is harbored in the middle. The British soldiers in *Gassed* are, for the most, part lying on the ground, having been gassed by the opposing forces. However, there are two groups of soldiers that are in formation ready to be guided out of the battleground. The group of soldiers that is closer to the viewer consists of eleven soldiers, the same number of players that is on a football team. They are lined up as players do when they enter the football field and they share a common uniform. There are also other figures who are organizing the soldiers as they prepare to exit just as football players are prepared by a team of trainers and coaches. The men are holding each others’ shoulders or backs because they are temporarily blinded by the effects of the gas indicating that while they are part of an army, this group of soldiers shares a short term goal: to recuperate and recover their



John Singer Sargent, Gassed, 1919. © IWM (Art.IWMART 1460).

sight. Even though that task is an individual one, the goal will be achieved as a team. The second group of soldiers located on the right of the viewer is already marching “out of the field” where the war “match” is finished and the results have been achieved. The war “game” is depicted in full view, the aftermath of the battle is shown, while their bodies tell the most compelling story. All of these bodies have suffered the consequences of war in a personal and collective way, which is indicative of the way that the healing of the physical and emotional wounds will be achieved. All of them will have to leave the battleground literally and emotionally. The game is finished, the result achieved, and as all spectators and players leave the field at the end of the game, so too, the soldiers are leaving the field while, in contrast, the football match in the background of the painting is still being played. The disparity in the actions of both groups of “players” indicates that, while war is a more devastating and dangerous game that carries the destiny of nations, football conveys the cultural destiny of the same people. The football players, as well as the team of marching soldiers, relay the same human spirit that announces and attempts to dream of the collective and individual life ahead.

There is a clear message of hope out of the devastation of war. Hope is manifested in the soldiers that courageously stand up and march moving ahead. There is an artistic parallel in the shape and color of the round ball and the moon behind the second group of marching soldiers. While the ball is the “star” of the game being playfully passed among the players, the moon is far away in the horizon behind the marching soldiers as it participates in the announcement and expectation of a new day ahead. Both “games” convey the human spirit of human resilience.

The title of the painting, *Wazha Pa Wazha (Shoulder to Shoulder)* introduces the participating teams in their own languages. It is one game with undifferentiated players for each team but two different languages. The linguistic approach of the artist, Arabella Dorman, is more neutral than John Singer Sargent, presenting both teams with a linguistic diversity in the title. But a strong connection is indicated in the unitary meaning conveyed by the title that, for the sake of the audience, is being interpreted, thus illustrating the role of the painter in this commission. It seems that the painter is posing as a transparent witness rather than an interpreter of war. This scenario is further reinforced by the repetition of the word shoulder or *Wazha* reinforcing again the idea and image

of a common ground or field. In the painting the “battlefield” or “field” is not located on the ground. It seems to be in the air, in a different sphere that escapes the immediate objective of the “fight.”

The possession of one same territory wasn’t the ultimate element in dispute. The painting denounces a rather philosophical conflict of two people confronted in human terms not for a particular dominion of a territory but rather a “match” to determine one way of life over another. In *Wazha Pa Wazha*, all players are playing one game as if there is only one team. There is no distinction of uniforms. The physical characteristics of each ethnic group is not depicted in the painting as the painter took the care to paint them without showing their faces.

The painter seems to indicate that the result of that “match” or “war” was void as one “team” could not win but that the objective of the game is to become closer. Most of them are not facing the viewer because it is “their game.” The shoulder is the image chosen to convey the kind of weapon that they are using. The shoulder represents the part of the body where we carry our “burdens” literally and figuratively while shoulder to shoulder reinforces the image of a common task of union. This contrasts the nature of war and football where one is against the other and one imposes “burdens” over the other.

The message of Dorman is a universal one that the conflict is borne by both groups, that both sides have a shared humanity, and that the burden is carried on the shoulders of all. In the painting, the football match is isolated from the war context. This might indicate that the conflict is not nested in the military context but in the daily life of each citizen who handles life as a football match and tries to resolve the many circumstances of life individually and collectively. Perhaps the painter is pointing out that the origin of the conflict coincides with the right place to find resolution: in the daily activity of living and not in the act of calling on death to decide on it.

This painting presents many spaces that are covered by dust as a reminder that there is space for resolutions to all conflicts in the middle of the “game” of life. These spaces of dust cover the many possibilities of resolution of conflicts as new opportunities of life. War is absent from the picture, which gives way to a message of peace and life rising above the conflict. In Dorman’s words, “The painting is about unity. It is about the human spirit rising above conflict. It is about overcoming distrust and enmity.”⁴⁶ Interestingly, Dorman paired this painting with another painting: *The Dance*, where the painter represents



Arabella Dorman, The Dance, 2010. © Arabella Dorman.

a group of young Afghan girls playing and dancing in a circle. A priori, the painter is linking the male group of football players with a female group of dancers. Here is a universal message that includes the female presence, placing it outside of the field of conflict but within a human activity linked to the joy of life and freedom. Freedom is represented in this pair of paintings not as a result of a conflict but rather in the normal act of living, which is where any conflict should be resolved: in the shadow of life and not on a deadly field. Freedom is linked to life and not to death. King rightly proposes that the paintings, by Sargent and by Dorman, are a pair:

Gassed and *Shoulder to Shoulder* can be seen as a pair of paintings separated by almost a century. They depict a quite different relationship between football, war and remembrance. While *Gassed* located war in a coherent international political context, which explained the sacrifice of soldiers, even if that meaning was rejected, *Shoulder to Shoulder* depicted military death in a strategic vortex.

Dorman explains, “Like *Shoulder to Shoulder*, *The Dance* celebrates universal human values -- and above all, the (female) right to liberty. They’re a pair: *Shoulder to Shoulder* and *The Dance*. Girls dance. Boys play football; it is more adversarial and aggressive. But like the dance, football unifies. It is a symbol of unity. Everyone plays football. It is a primeval activity. Humans have always danced, painted and played. They represent the triumph of the human spirit.”⁴⁸

King accurately summarizes the relationship between war and football as this: "Once a symbol of international rivalry and localizing patriotism, football has continued to play a role in these rites of commemoration but football has become a motif of universalism; it represents the human condition in general and denotes what all humans share rather than what divided them in an increasingly fragmented and confused global order."⁴⁹

Fischer broadens the analysis indicating that:

Critically examining these one-dimensional sport/war tropes in the NFL's 9/11 commemoration ceremonies that engaged citizenship in a functioning democracy needs to be aware and demands a critique of a militarization that threatens and works to eliminate those public spaces necessary for democratic debate and discourse⁵⁰

Football and war, as they are part of the political life of the peoples of the world, point toward an era with new venues for the resolution of conflicts. The solutions are not only pacifism but rather a resolution of the conflicts on the battlefield of the meeting-of-the-minds, in the context of dialogues in the course of real life activities that bring people side by side, as citizens of the world. Life calls for freedom and all kinds of enjoyment; there is no need to call on death to resolve the issues of the living.

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NOTES

¹Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1949), 89.

²Pindar, *The Complete Odes*, Ismthian 7, trans. Anthony Verity. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 135-136. A Greek poet whose odes praised the victors of the Games, Pindar used sport to commemorate recent wars. Pindar draws a parallel between the sacrifices of Stepsiates at the Games and his uncle in war and calls upon Thebes and those present at the Isthmian games to

honor them together. For Pindar, their sacrifices are equivalent. Sport has frequently been used as a collective rite for the commemoration of war.

³Note: Football refers to a family of team sports that involve, to varying degrees, kicking a ball with the foot to score a goal. Unqualified, the word football is understood to refer to whichever form of football is the most popular in the regional context in which the word appears. In this article the word football will refer to the English football game, which is called soccer in the United States. When the word football refers to the American football game it will be noted as such.

⁴Eric Dunning, “Social Bonding and Violence in Sport,” *Journal of Biosocial Science* 13, no. S7 (1981): 5-22.

⁵*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1966, s.v. “game”.

⁶B. Bernstein, H. L. Elvin, and R. S. Peters, “Ritual in Education,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 251, no. 772 (1966) : 429-436.

⁷John Goodger, “Ritual Solidarity and Sport,” *Acta Sociologica* 29, no. 3 (1986): 220.

⁸Goodger, “Ritual in Solidarity and Sport,” 221.

⁹John Marshall Carter, “Perspectives on Medieval Sport in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century England,” *Sport History Review* 12, no. 1 (May 1981): 10-16.

¹⁰*Amplius et ad ludos urbis veniamus, quoniam non expedit utilem tantum et seriam urbem ese, nisi dulcis etiam sit et jocunda* in “*Descriptio nobilissimae civitatis Londoniae*”, in Materials, 2-13. Two functional translations are H.E. Butler’s in F. M Stenton, *Norman London* (Historical Association Leaflets, nos. 93, 94, 1934) and Stow’s *Survey of London*, (London, 1965), 501-509.

¹¹Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.89.

¹²*Sed aetas auida gloriae, juventus cupida victoriae, ut in veris praelis fortuisa se habeat, ita in simulatis exercetur*, in Materials, 12.

¹³Carter, “Perspectives on Medieval Sport...,” 12. Various writers have dealt with the idea of the ritualization of aggression. The ethnologist Konrad Lorenz *On Aggression* (New York, 1966) is a popular example. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, (New York, 1962) demonstrated the importance of the ritualization of aggression by children when they reach the ages of six or seven. An interesting study of the ritualization of aggression in medieval society is Barbara H Rosenwein’s *Feudal War and Monastic Peace: Cluniac Liturgy as Ritual Aggression*, *Viator II* (1971), 129-138. Rosenwein shows how the long, taxing schedule of the Cluniac monks’ backgrounds, re-channeled aggression.

¹⁴Carter, 12-13.

¹⁵Steven Stark, “Drill and Kill: How Americans Link War and Sports,” *The Atlantic*, (September 30, 2010).

¹⁶Here the term “football” refers to American football.

¹⁷Robert Lipsyte, *Sportsworld: An American Dreamland*, (New York, NY: Quadrangle Books, 1975), 13.

¹⁸Robert Lipsyte, “Sports Metaphors Trivialize War,” *USA Today* (April 6, 2003).

¹⁹ Here the term “football” refers to American football.

²⁰Robert S. Brown, “Sport and Healing America,” *Society* 42, (2004): 37.

²¹Here the term “football” refers to American football.

²²Ibid.

²³Stephen Mosher, “Songs Sung Red, White, and Blue: Music, Sports, and the Rhetoric of Patriotism,” In S. Spickard Prettyman, and B. Lampman (Eds), *Learning Culture Through Sports: Ex-*

- ploring the Role of Sports in Society*, 156; Opening day rosters feature 229 players born outside the U.S. *Major League Baseball*, (April 6, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.mlb.com>.
- ²⁴William Astore, “The Militarization of Sports--And the Sportiness of Military Service,” *The Huffington Post* (July 28, 2011). <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>.
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- ²⁶Anthony King, “Sport, War and Commemoration: Football and Remembrance in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries, *European Journal for Sport and Society* 13, no. 3 (2016), 210.
- ²⁷George W. Bush, *Portraits of Courage: A Commander in Chief's Tribute to America's Warriors*, (New York: NY: The Crown Publishing Group, 2017).
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- ²⁹Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville*, p.125.
- ³⁰*New York Times*, April 16, 1958. Interestingly, the Times identified the men as “French athletes” in the headline and as “Algerian Moslems” in the body of the article.
- ³¹Alegi, *African Footballscapes*, 44. For a useful overview, see Youssef Fates, “Football in Algeria: Between Violence and Politics,” in Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football in Africa*, 41-58. For English-language Works on Algeria’s political and diplomatic history, for example, John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
- ³²Alegi, *African Footballscapes*, 50.
- ³³Alegi, *African Footballscapes*, 52, 66.
- ³⁴Alegi, *African Footballscapes*, 94, 104.
- ³⁵Alegi, *African Footballscapes*, 131-132.
- ³⁶Ben Chavis, “All-Indian Rodeo: A Transformation of Western Apache Tribal Warfare and Culture,” 4.
- ³⁷*Ibid*, 5-6.
- ³⁸G. Krutz, G. Conversation on Western Apaches at the University of Arizona, Tucson, January 18, 1993, 1.
- ³⁹Chavis, “*All-Indian Rodeo*,” 7.
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- ⁴³Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 215.
- ⁴⁴George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 23.
- ⁴⁵Alex Danchev, *On Art and War and Terror*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 4.

⁴⁶Arabella Dorman, *Before the Dawn: Catalogue*, November 11, 2014, 5. Retrieved from <http://www.flipsnack.com/arabella-dorman/before-the-down-2014-exhibition-catalogue.html>. Dorman's testimony was collected through a personal interview with the artist.

⁴⁷King, "Sport, War and Commemoration," 226.

⁴⁸Dorman, *Before the Dawn: Catalogue*, 7.

⁴⁹King, "Sport, War and Commemoration," 227.

⁵⁰Mia Fischer, "Commemorating 9/11 NFL-Style." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 38, no. 3 (1986): 218.