

other sources. Any words that are not accompanied by footnotes can be read, if not as make-believe, then as not necessarily of this world, or at least the world as understood by Leopold von Ranke and his legions.

In an era when publishers face ever greater pressure to move to endnotes or eliminate notes altogether, the footnotes in *The Singer's Needle* offer a welcome reminder of the enriching potential of placing a parallel narrative at the bottom of a page. I enjoyed not having to flip back and forth constantly from the page in hand to the back of the book, and the notes themselves contain some of the most bracing bursts of historiographical prose I have read in years. This gift enabled me to forgive the omission of an index, the lack of which may send some readers in search of the electronic edition.

Teachers of creative writing sometimes refer to the “principle of Chekhov’s Gun”: hang a gun in a prominent place, and something must ultimately come out of the barrel, or readers will feel cheated. The challenge of this book is not that the guns do not go off. It is rather that there are so many guns hanging from the wall, of different calibers and makes, and they go off in such irregular and unpredictable ways, that the overall effect can be like that of an armory that has been set on fire.

But *The Singer's Needle* is also a brave book. And if the acknowledgments are to be believed (and I do not doubt they are), those risks have come at a considerable cost to at least one person. Unlike the character of the editor, I value bravery more than neatness or organization, and so my gratitude outweighs my frustration. *The Singer's Needle* is indeed a book of many voices. Even with all the din, it is worth listening to each and every one of them.

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GERMÁN PATIÑO OSSA, *Black Cookstove: Meditations on Literature, Culture, and Cuisine in Colombia*. Trans. Jonathan Tittler. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2020.

This book is presented as an inquiry into eating and cooking practices in the Cauca Valley, Colombia. Its author was born and raised in this region of the Pacific coast. Germán Patiño Ossa, deceased in 2015, was a writer and novelist who championed the region’s culture. *Black Cookstove*, first published in Spanish in 2007 under the title *Fogón de negros*, perfectly represents these qualities. The word “meditation” in its subtitle (“Meditations on Literature, Culture, and Cuisine in Colombia”) accurately announces the author’s approach. A meditation is a discourse expressing considered thoughts on a subject. This description

identifies the book's statement. As *Black Cookstove* is not an academic work, it cannot be evaluated according to academic standards. It rather fits into efforts to capture the culinary practices of a region. As it refers to the past to provide explanations, it falls into the category of culinary history, a genre as diverse in its manifestations as the ideas and practices of culture itself, and thus difficult to pin down. I would go a step further and analyze it in the spirit of Latin American *pensadores* who freely interpreted and reflected on cultural idiosyncrasies—typically those of a people or their respective nation. *Pensadores* do not allow themselves to be constrained, certainly not by academic disciplines. Patiño Ossa explicitly stated his intentions: First, he adduces the lack of sources on Afro-descendants' foodways in the Cauca Valley, to justify his decision to use a literary source; second, he seeks to remedy the insufficient presence of the region in the national narrative; third, he explores the premise that *colombianidad* as a cultural concept has to include Blacks as well as the hybrid culinary history of the country, in which they play a crucial role.

First, he explains that “cooking, as an element of culture, at least where research is concerned, cannot rely on an elaborate specialized bibliography.” By using a novel “of the same climes” as the central historical source, the author tries to “unravel the hidden networks of culture” (p. 19). Although he undoubtedly succeeds, this comes at a cost that is high, too high.

Due to the dearth of historical primary sources, Patiño Ossa borrowed from the novel *María* written by Jorge Isaacs in 1867. Before it was outdone by Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*, *María* was the best-selling novel in Latin America, and also conquered Spain, France, and the entire English-speaking world. Apart from its extremely sensitive, empathetic description of a failed romance, the novel is a masterpiece of the literary depiction of landscape and people. The nature of the Cauca Valley, the forests and valleys, the fauna and flora are traced with photographic accuracy and very pictorially, without lapsing into campy pathos. Life on the hacienda is described just as clearly and realistically as are the individual characters, the interpersonal relationships that sustain the patriarchal structure that still strongly felt the impact of the colonial era and slavery.

The author loses himself in the style of Isaacs's ode to the Cauca Valley and, although Patiño Ossa completes his inquiry on the topic with other accounts, essays, historical records of travelers to the region, etc., I do not agree with his view that there are not enough sources available to sketch a picture, appropriate to the twenty-first century, of a society and its eating habits that continue to be shaped by the fundamental contradictions of slavery. He could have done better by consulting, for example, scholarly studies describing slavery in the Colombian Pacific coast. Nina S. de Friedemann's *La saga del negro: presen-*

cia africana en Colombia (1993) would have been a good choice. From this anthropologist, the reader of *Black Cookstove* would have learned that, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Pacific coast mining economy stimulated haciendas and prepared the path for an economic expansion where large-scale production of sugar cane, plantain, tobacco, and cattle became the norm. Over the centuries, the demands placed on mine owners to feed the slaves increased, and the *platanares*, which were small portions of land located around the mine and set aside for slaves' food production, became insufficient. Mine owners then realized the need for haciendas to increase their food production to sustain the mining economy. The novel *María* is set in such a classic hacienda of the Cauca Valley. Regrettably, Patiño Ossa's valuable descriptions of some African-American food do not leave the confines of the hacienda where social inequality was the norm.

His second aim is to counterbalance the Eurocentric perspective on nation-building in Colombia. In most Latin American standard historical narratives white immigrants are the protagonists. The Indigenous contribution to nation-building is at best indirectly included; as for the cultural evidence of the contribution of enslaved immigrants, it remains absent. The historical invisibility of Afro-Latin Americans in the national arena can also be directly traced to the lack of cultural, political, financial forums, and institutions that could encourage or forge imaginary coherence. Despite their importance for the colonial economy, African slaves at the time of *María* had fewer rights than Indigenous people. The colonial "black codes" issued by the Spanish Crown, apparently written to "protect" slaves, were a legal framework to institutionalize slavery as a socio-economic system. African slaves were segregated and relegated to agricultural labor and other rural activities. The codes also "prohibited the access of blacks and *pardos*, until the fifth generation, to the sciences" (Friedemann 1993, 60). African slaves were legally banned from education, which further condemned them, for generations, to occupy low places within society. This dynamic has left its mark on Colombian social stratification to this day.

Third, in focusing on the Cauca Valley, the author claims that this vast region better explains the country's diversity and cultural richness and therefore represents the actual character of *colombianidad*, but that due to the dominance of studies on the politically central Andes region, its crucial cultural role is under-represented. In sum, the author claims to restore the visibility of the enslaved population, their networks and ability to fuse different cultures—in this case, cuisines—while also encouraging Colombians "to better understand our inclinations, customs, and character" through cooking (19). Some of the Afro-Colombian dishes could open the mind to the country's multiversity.

From the colonial period to the times of *María*, the Cauca Valley's economic base had shifted to large-scale sugar plantations. That explains the dominance of sweet dishes, from which Patiño Ossa chose *dulce de leche*. He briefly mentions all the handwork that had first to be done by slaves before the typically lone female slave started "to beat the dulce de leche" (p. 24). And he mentions that the slaveowners' wives could not stand the heat nor were strong enough to stir this mixture of sugar and milk for hours, during which it thickened gradually. Although the author mentions the division of labor on the hacienda, in which slaves were exploited, Patiño Ossa reproduces in the nineteenth-century manner of Isaacs's *María* the idealized image of slaves and masters occasionally partying in harmony around Black cookstoves where delicious sweets were prepared (24-25).

This also comes across when he celebrates the rural stew *sancocho* that also is known in neighboring states. Again, Patiño Ossa relies on Isaacs's idyllic description of the countryside and life on the hacienda. However, unlike the novel *María*, in which Afro-descendant characters are portrayed as individuals, Patiño Ossa does not mention a single name of an enslaved person. On the contrary, the personality of the *hacendero*'s servant, deprived of his freedom, remains in the dark. The enslaved one submits to nature and disappears in it. Just as nature is not rewarded for its abundance, the elites in the Cauca Valley also appropriated the services of the slaves. When it comes to cooking, most of these cooks were certainly women. A twenty-first-century perspective would have noticed the intersectionality at work in the many entangled issues faced by Black women in Colombia.

In his description of the Afro-American finger-food *fufú*, Patiño Ossa likewise hides the person and her social conditions. In *María* the protagonist names Rufina, a woman freed of bondage, and observes her kitchen from outside: "[the] oven was formed by a great box of palm planks filled with earth, over which rested the stones and the apparatus for making fufú" (p. 43). Patiño Ossa's words condense the presence of *fufú* in the Cauca Valley into a general observation without a trace of agency: "It [*fufú*] belongs to the African culinary heritage, and it is one of the very few recipes that maintain the details of the cuisine of that vast and diverse continent. It is not matter of Creole cuisine with strong Afro-descendant component, as are almost all recipes in *María*, but rather a concatenation of its own character and origin from different native communities of tropical Africa" (p. 44).

Ultimately, it is up to the reader to assess the extent to which this text underscores the powerful and transformative role Afro-descendant women play, which translator Jonathan Tittler has noted (p. xxvi). In any case, the author of *Black Cookstove* did not succeed in connecting with contemporary discourses

of cultural hybridization or intersectionality. The book nevertheless remains a literary gem for aficionados of the Cauca Valley and its abundant cultural manifestations.

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PABLO ALABARCES, *Historia mínima del fútbol en América Latina*. Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2018.

Despite its title, Pablo Alabarces' *Historia mínima del fútbol en América Latina* is not a short history of the world's most popular sport in the cultural region which has become famed as the most authentic home of the game's passion, style, and social significance. It is a detailed and important publication. In a detailed work of synthesis drawing on the booming scholarship across history, sociology, and cultural studies, Alabarces sets out to provide "a history of something that doesn't exist," meaning "Latin American" football as opposed to the regional and national institutions which have co-opted the sport for their own aims (CONCACAF in North and Central America and the Caribbean, and CONMEBOL in South America). It is, Alabarces asserts, "a possible history," a complicated conjuncture of narratives, beliefs about origins, legends around players and their achievements, and the persistent sense that there is a "something" which sets Latin American football apart from the many other societies and cultures around the world that set social and political store in the round-ball game. It is the same "something" that authors such as Tony Mason, Andreas Campomar and Josh Nadel have sought to capture in their own books which have some overlaps with this one.

I like this book. (As well I might: the author has some nice things to say about my work in the introduction, just as he is typically generous to many of the researchers whose work he has drawn together in the book). I enjoyed reading it, I took lots of notes and I gained lots of insight. Many of the details are spot-on, and the run through the origin myths of football in the various countries is encyclopaedic as well as precise.

As a recognized expert over several decades on the sociology of football and identities in Argentina in particular, the author has given himself the space to explore the relationship between football and the British empire in the early decades of the sport's growth—over half the book is dedicated to this period, and the first players, clubs, games and institutions that provide the foundation for subsequent championships, competitions, and rivalries. He explains and accounts for each country's inventions, myths, and legends, and draws these