

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

into an account of how an elite, foreign sport became popularized, embraced by the poor and marginalized and turned into “the people’s game.” The book is dedicated to three of the great scholars of Latin American football whose influence is clearly and proudly visible: Eduardo Archetti, Roberto da Matta, and Simone Lahud Guedes.

The question at which Alabarces prods throughout the book is this: how exceptional *is* football in Latin America compared to elsewhere. Behind this is a second question, just as interesting: what explains the differences between the various countries where citizens have taken the sport to their hearts. There is nothing innate or natural about any of this, Alabarces insists at the beginning, instead focusing on the individuals who pioneered the game, the communities that embraced it, and the institutions that governed it. The first chapters are broadly national in orientation, and they feature a flood of dates, names, and foundational moments. Everywhere has its own unique origin story of course, though Uruguay is presented (p. 59) as a particular anomaly because of the coincidence of its state-led development model and welfare state at precisely the same time as the first football games provided exercise and identity for working men in the growing cities. Elsewhere it was the weakness of states and institutions in the early 1900s that set up the long-running dichotomy between popular enthusiasm and corrupt governance that shapes much of the second half of the book on the people’s game. There are standalone chapters on professionalization (which is particularly excellent), international football, race and nation, and conflict. As Alabarces has it, “football is discovered, copied, invented, founded, and appropriated across South America according to the rhythms of each place’s integration into world capitalism at the end of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s, and their relationship with the hegemonic empire of the time” (p. 135). These later chapters provide pacy run-throughs of the relationship between football and the dictatorships of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, and they will surely provide the reader with a helpful overview from which to approach the more specialized works presented in the useful annotated bibliographical summaries for each chapter that end the book.

There is a short epilogue which reflects on the book, what is in it and what is not. As the author recognizes, the most glaring absence is women, and any future edition will surely be able to remedy this omission drawing on the excellent research that has been carried out in the last few years, most notably Brenda Elsey and Josh Nadel’s *Futbolera*, published just after this book.

The strengths of this *Historia mínima* are also its weaknesses. The hiving off of national stories into chunks telling the similar stories of pioneers, clubs, officials, cups, and league victories gets repetitive by the time we get to Mexico, and presumably many readers will instinctively veer towards the countries that

interest them most. As Alabarces knows better than anyone, football histories were always transnational histories, with Argentinian players representing Italy already in the 1930s, and the globalization of football from the 1990s putting Brazil's Roberto Firmino, Colombia's James Rodríguez, and Argentina's Sergio Agüero on my English television screen whenever I choose to look at it. Representative international football and its kits, flags, anthems, and memories shape so many people's experiences of football that it can often be difficult to imagine its history in other ways. *Historia mínima* sets out in compelling detail just how much we have come to know about the national histories of football in Latin America. The piling up of these national histories does not quite allow Alabarces to answer his question about that "something that doesn't exist," the "Latinamericanness" of a special football culture, and I would have been intrigued to read more of the author's conclusions on the language of football for example, the peculiarities of the architecture of Latin America stadia, or the role of religious beliefs and institutions in shaping the much remarked "passion." There also remain some unanswered questions about the relationship of football to other sports (notwithstanding some excellent comparisons with baseball in the circum-Caribbean). The next generation of football historians, taking a transnational approach and with ever-greater access to digitized newspapers and more accessible archival material, will be now able to build on these secure foundations to assess the intersections between gender, race, class, place, and empire that gave football its power and meant that its many histories in Latin America have been anything but *mínimas*.

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LEONARDO SENKMAN & LUIS RONIGER, *América Latina tras bambalinas. Teorías conspirativas, usos y abusos*. Pittsburgh: Latin American Research Commons, 2019.

Hace algunos meses personas armadas asaltaron al Capitolio en Washington, DC, muchas de ellas convencidas de la existencia de una conspiración urdida por políticos, empresarios y grandes periódicos para ocultar el funcionamiento de una red de pedofilia y para quitarle el triunfo electoral al ex presidente Trump. En el 2020 arreciaron en Francia las manifestaciones contra la imposición del "pasaporte sanitario": entre los participantes se cuentan quienes denuncian que la vacunación contra el COVID-19 era en realidad un medio para controlar mentes y cuerpos a través de la introyección de un chip invisible. Sólo por la actualidad y peligrosidad política de esas creencias conspirativas, vale la pena