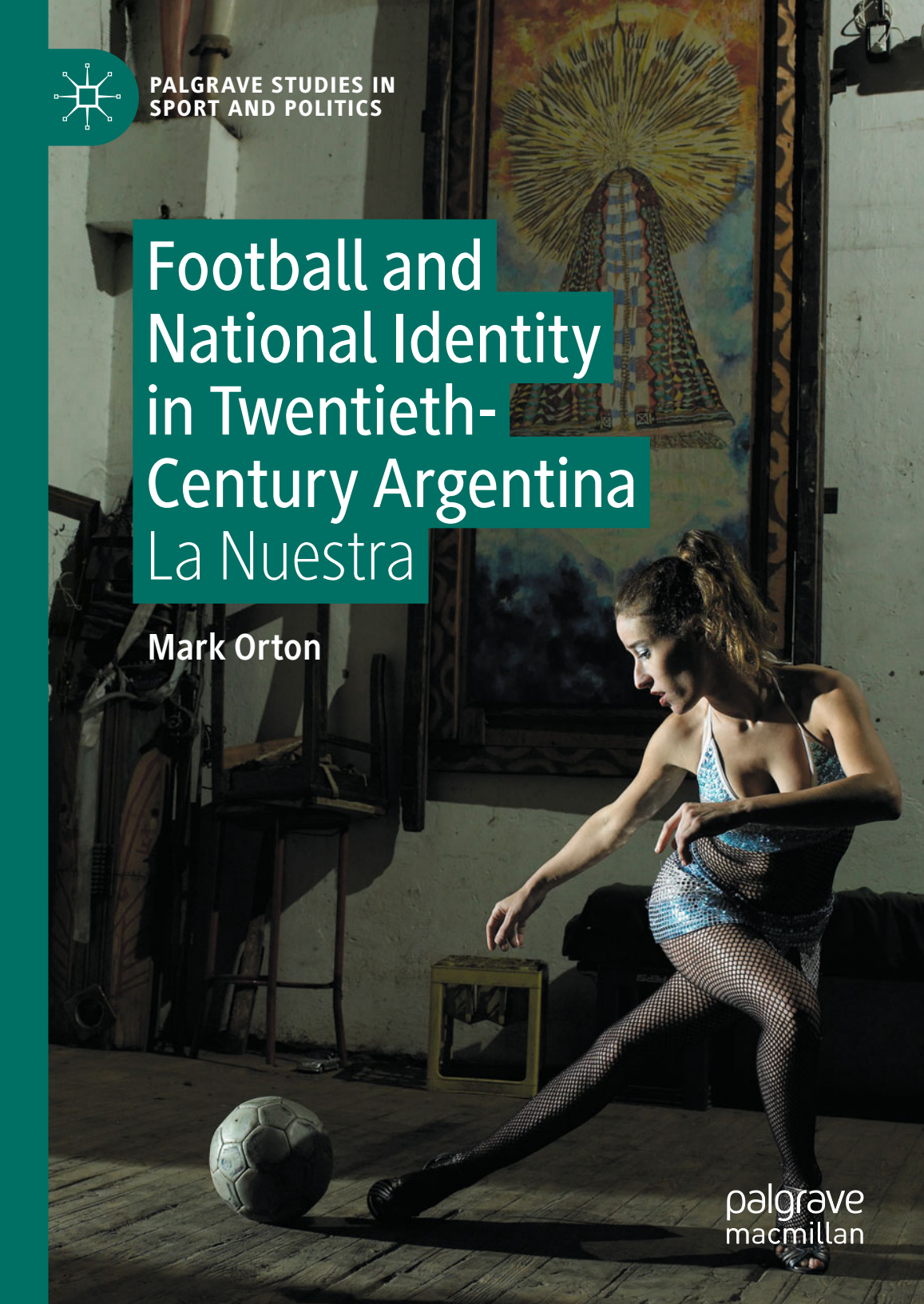

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Football and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Argentina

La Nuestra

Mark Orton

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Contents

Abbreviations

AAA	Alianza Anticomunista Argentina
AAAF	Asociación Amateur Argentina de Football
AAF	Asociación Argentina de Football
AAFAP	Asociación Argentina de Football (Amateur y Profesionales)
AAFL	Argentine Association Football League
AAmF	Asociación Amateurs de Football
AFA	Asociación del Fútbol Argentino
BAEHS	Buenos Aires English High School
CBD	Confederação Brasileira de Desportos
EAM	Ente Autárquico Mundial '78
ERP	Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo
FAA	Futbolistas Argentinos Agremiados
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GOU	Grupo de Oficiales Unidos
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC	International Olympic Committee
PFA	Professional Footballers' Association
TyC	Torneos y Competencias
UCR	Unión Cívica Radical
UTA	Unión Tranviarios Automotor

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The outpouring of grief following Diego Maradona's death in November 2020 confirmed the symbiosis between football and Argentine society. As journalist Marcela Mora y Araujo highlighted at the time, 'Maradona became an emblem of *Argentinianess*, more so than other sports stars or celebrities.'[1] With the passage of time, a myth has emerged conflating Argentina's destiny as a nation with the performance of its men's national football team, with victories confirming Argentina as 'first among equals,' whilst losses become a collective tragedy.[2] Taking Argentina as its case study, this book focuses on the long twentieth century, from the establishment of British economic hegemony during the late nineteenth century to the catastrophic 2001–2002 financial crisis that so affected Argentine society and led to a reappraisal of the country's identity as the hegemonic neo-liberal economic model of the previous quarter century became decisively discredited. It analyses how football became so entrenched within society that alongside the tango, it became an important cultural signifier of that Argentine identity. It demonstrates how football functioned as an agent for assimilation in a nation transformed by massive European migration at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as echoing

[1] *The Guardian*, 26 November 2020, 45.

[2] *Vein ti tres*, 30 June 2016, 3.

M. Orton, *Football and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Argentina*, Palgrave Studies in Sport and Politics,
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Argentina's economic, political and social development throughout the remainder of the twentieth century as competing discourses surrounding national identity vied for supremacy.

Whilst this phenomenon is not new or exclusive to Argentina, using sport as a lens for viewing society has fascinated scholars since the mid-1970s, demonstrated by works such as Robert Malcolmson's *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* and James Walvin's *The People Game*.[3] More recently, academics have broadened their range, utilising sport to analyse immigration, politics, socio-economic organisation and other issues relating to national identity construction. These are most evidently linked to global sporting events such as the Olympic Games, where national teams characterise what Benedict Anderson describes as an 'imagined political community' representing tenuous notions of shared values.[4]

Whilst scholars such as Michael Goebel, María Sáenz Quesada, Luis Alberto Romero and Colin MacLachlan have offered a wider understanding of identity creation in Argentina, Goebel acknowledged in 2011 that there was a need for academic attention to the role of football in this process given, 'the weight attached to footballers and their style of play as the embodiment of Argentiness.'[5] Though Goebel chose not to follow this up himself, others have done so with mixed success. In his popular history of Argentine football, *Angels with Dirty Faces*, Jonathan Wilson provides a synthesis of the existing historiography without adding much new analysis in the first half of the book, although this is partially remedied through his first-person interviews with actors from later in the twentieth century.[6] Sociologist Pablo Alabarces contends that narratives of national identity around football in Argentina complement official narratives, rejecting any role for British pioneers of the game in 'contributing to that identity.'[7] Alejandro Molinari and Roberto Martínez have made the case that historians should take into account all the cultural universe of a people when analysing the concept of identity, whilst

[3] Malcolmson (1973) and Walvin (1975).

[4] Anderson (1983, 6).

[5] Goebel (2011, 198), Sáenz Quesada (2012), Romero (2004), and MacLachlan (2006).

[6] Wilson (2016).

[7] Alabarces (2006, 3).

absenting women, indigenous and *mestizo* people, and Afro-Argentines—the 'voiceless others'—from their investigation of how football became *the* national passion in Argentina.[8]

Taking an explicitly historical approach, drawing upon primary newspaper and magazine sources as well as archival material from football clubs, governing bodies and governmental records, *La Nuestra* looks at the evolution of football's relationship with Argentine society and how it helped a diverse population think about concepts of the national without losing sight of their ethnic origins. It also examines the role of these 'voiceless others' in using football as a way of imposing themselves on the national consciousness, as well as highlighting the complexities of dual identity in the opening decades of the twentieth century as football was becoming a symbol of hybrid *argentinidad* or Argentineness.

As well as assessing Argentine identity through football in a domestic setting, this book examines how the game provided a way for Argentina to be perceived abroad, especially in Europe, through the mythology of an idiosyncratic style of play known as *la nuestra* 'our way' and how deviations from this in the 1960s and late 1980s changed opinions abroad of Argentina more widely. It illustrates how despite being able to produce some of the best footballers the world has ever seen such as Alfredo Di Stéfano and Diego Maradona, football also reflected Argentina's economic weakness in the wider global economy at key points in the twentieth century such as the 1930s and in the final quarter of the twentieth century.

Representations of the role of football in constructions of Argentine identity have hitherto inclined towards a nationalist, revisionist interpretation of the country's history in which immigrants were assimilated into a unified Argentine 'race' that was European and white in contrast to neighbouring Brazil in which as Roger Kittleson describes, 'Conceptions of *brasildade* in soccer depended on theories that Brazil had a mixed-race culture.'[9] This assimilationist approach has led to the acceptance amongst historians of Argentine football of what Eric Hobsbawm identified as 'invented tradition.'[10] By creating and venerating symbols

[8] Molinari and Martínez (2013, 11–14).

[9] Kittleson (2014, 6–8).

[10] Hobsbawm (2014, 1–2).

such as the *pibe* and the *potrero* and in creating an idiosyncratic Argentine playing style known as *la nuestra* ('our way'), during the 1920s, writers such as Borocotó fulfilled what Hobsbawm described as 'continuity with a suitable historic past' in which such symbols 'reflect the entire background, thought and culture of a nation,' something that has influenced the subsequent historiography.[11] Developing his synthesisation of the construction of an Argentine playing style during the 1920s with its accompanying lexicon of *criollo* footballing terms from a survey of contemporary articles in *El Gráfico*, the anthropologist Eduardo Archetti posited in *Masculinities*, 'football is a powerful expression of national capabilities and potentialities,' without fully challenging their underlying precepts.[12]

This nationalist viewpoint makes no consideration of the positive contribution to this process by the British footballing pioneers of football or their Argentine-born descendants, nor the possibility of dual identity amongst other immigrant communities. Alabarces suggests in *Fútbol y patria* that Argentine identity is based upon plurality and the coexistence of varied stories that allow for multiple constructions, without clarifying what they are, especially in the case of dual identities.[13] Whilst Ranaan Rein has contributed to filling this historiographical gap in *Fútbol, Jews and the Making of Argentina*, by focusing solely on the Jewish community he gives no sense of the contribution of larger and more influential immigratory communities.[14]

The symbiotic relationship between football, civic identity and Argentine politics has also been a fertile area for scholarship. For example, Julio Frydenberg has identified that this relationship began as 'team-clubs' morphed into more complex 'member-clubs' that became embedded in the local community.[15] Meanwhile, Vic Duke and Liz Crolley have noted that democratic participation within football clubs predated that of Argentina more widely by several years.[16] In his exploration of Argentine football's governing body, *AFA*, Sergio Levinsky highlights the centrality

[11] Ibid., 11.

[12] Archetti (1999, 15).

[13] Alabarces (2007, 28).

[14] Rein (2015, 15).

[15] Frydenberg (2011, 45–70).

[16] Duke and Crolley (2014, 100).

of this relationship. Quoting the boast of 1960's Asociación del Fútbol Argentino (AFA) leader, Valentín Suárez that 'the state will never lower the curtain on football,' he argues that this meant that no matter what financial problems Argentine football got into, the government would always rescue it due to its importance to Argentine society.[17]

Areas remain in need of greater interpretation. The conjunction of football's professionalisation with a period of democratic deficit in Argentina's political landscape at the start of the 1930s has been unsatisfactorily dealt with by scholars. Levinsky makes a loose connection between the arrival in football club boardrooms of erstwhile elected politicians following the 1930 military coup that ejected President Hipólito Yrigoyen, but does so without further elaboration.[18] Meanwhile, Alabarces claims that the inauguration of professional football in Argentina in 1931 was an important political act in that, 'it functioned as the only way of democratising sporting practice.'[19] By placing professionalism and the subsequent commodification of the game in Argentina in its wider political context, *La Nuestra* argues that in the case of Argentine football, the classic interpretation that professionalism was the origin of all ills, as the start of corruption and mercantilism in the game still has merit, despite Alabarces' rejection of it.[20]

Much of the existing scholarship concerning the link between football and politics rightly focuses on the transformational 1946–1955 presidency of Juan Domingo Perón. With the assimilation of immigrants accomplished by the 1940s, the way was open for Perón to develop new concepts of national identity, free of ethnic differences after his 1946 election. For almost a decade, Peronism, based on a nebulous ideal of social justice, revolutionised Argentine society, bringing previously marginalised sectors such as the working class firmly into the political process. Rein sustains that, 'Peronism used sports for the dual purpose of reshaping Argentine national consciousness … and mobilizing support for and loyalty to the regime.'[21] For his part, Alabarces highlights the role of cinema in supporting Peronist narratives of social mobility through the

[17] Levinsky (2016, 20).

[18] Ibid., 45.

[19] Alabarces (2007, 55–57).

[20] Ibid., 55.

[21] Rein (2015, 95).

release of films like *Pelota de Trapo* (1948) and *Escuela de Campeones* (1950).[22] This book complements this research by investigating the overlooked pedagogical role played by the Peronist press in support of these political goals, particularly the incorporation of working-class internal migrants into the political process, who had hitherto been dismissed by *porteño* elites as *cabecitas negras* or 'little blackheads.'

Another area of the relationship between Peronism and football where there is room for further analysis surrounds the 1948–1949 players' strike which had long-term consequences for Argentine game. Investigations by Julio Frydenberg and Daniel Sazbon have focused on the political aspects of the dispute, whilst Enrico Montenari has concentrated on the strike's effect on football fans.[23] *La Nuestra* adds to these findings by focusing on the role of footballers as members of the labour movement and how the dispute contributed to shifting ideas of national identity through resulting migrations.

A further contentious theme from the Peronist era was the absence of Argentine participation in international competition between 1947 and 1955. Levinsky attributes this policy—especially withdrawal from the 1950 World Cup in Brazil—to footballing diplomatic disagreements between the two nations, highlighted by Argentina's attempt to usurp Brazil's hosting of the tournament.[24] Building on this interpretation, this book places these decisions in the context of wider Peronist foreign policy and linking the period to previous examples of diplomatic failure on the part of Argentina's footballing authorities in explaining a pattern of dysfunction.

Following Perón's overthrow in 1955, the 1960s and 1970s were a turbulent period in Argentina as repressive military regimes sought to suppress alleged subversion. In his exploration of Estudiantes de la Plata as the archetype of *antifútbol* and the modernisation of Argentine football, Alabarces has conflated the violence committed by the team with that of the regime of General Juan Carlos Onganía. *La Nuestra*

[22] Alabarces (2007, 65–80).

[23] Frydenberg and Sazbon (2015, 65–80) and Montenari (2018, 191–204).

[24] Levinsky (2016, 84).

alternatively views the rise of Estudiantes as a case study for better understanding generational change in Argentina that functioned as a metaphor for youthful resistance to hegemonic forces.[25]

Scholars have long explored the use of major sporting events by national leaders for political ends, with Matthew Brown noting of the Tlatelolco massacre of unarmed students by Mexican security forces days before the opening ceremony of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, 'The government's subsequent cover-up of the extent to which its agents had caused the violence themselves served to show how important international opinion, and the role of sporting events in directing that attention, had become.'[26] Argentina's hosting of the 1978 World Cup was just such a seminal moment, both in a sporting sense and in a societal one, with the country in the grip of a military dictatorship at war with a significant proportion of its own population considered 'subversives.' Existing interpretations have failed to fully evaluate the moral ambiguity of the period. Levinsky suggests that a unified identity emerged during the tournament driven by a pliant press in support of the regime that negated any criticism of the government by human rights groups as being 'anti-Argentine.'[27]

By contrast, the analysis of Alabarces is rooted instead in revisionist post-democratic norms of morality. He argues that during the competition the conflation of football success and patriotic representation reached hyperbolic levels due to the association with the 'aggressive and fascistic' nationalism of the dictatorship, although accepting that later interpretations following the 1983 restoration of democracy in Argentina have changed the way scholars now view the tournament.[28] By contrast, viewing the 1978 World Cup through a purely contemporary historical context rather than the approaches employed by other scholars, this book arrives at new interpretations based on the actions of participants at the time, adding to the body of knowledge relating to this important juncture in Argentine history.

La Nuestra also amplifies the voices of previously under-represented sectors of society—women, Black people, *mestizos*, the interior and the young, showing how football provided a route to being heard in the

[25] Alabarces (2007, 95–104).

[26] Brown (2014, 145–146).

[27] Levinsky (2016, 186–187).

[28] Alabarces (2007, 111–126).

national discourse that was not available through other ways. Indeed, their stories are weaved through the chronology of the twentieth century, reaching public consciousness at various points as they intersect with wider processes of Argentine political, cultural and socio-economic transformation.

The role of women in Argentine football, especially as players, is a facet of the game that has grown in academic attention in recent years, especially Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel's 2019 collaboration, *Futbolera* and Ayelén Puyol's book *Que jugadora*, although David Wood's investigation of literary representations of female football in South America highlights how little has been written in contrast to that of the development of the women's game in Argentina compared with neighbouring Brazil.[29] Much of this research focuses on Argentina's participation in the 1971 Women's World Cup in Mexico, and this book adds to a better understanding of the thread running through the history of women in Argentine football.

Attempts to examine themes of race and provincial identity through football have been less convincing. In the existing literature, these themes barely get a passing mention. Jeffrey Richey's doctoral study of press coverage of race, ethnicity and provincial identity in Argentine football between 1912 and 1931 identifies a pejorative discourse amongst populist sectors of the Buenos Aires press, true of *Crítica*, a newspaper which applied stereotypes of backwardness to those of Indigenous and *mestizo* background from the northern provinces of Argentina. Other findings regarding the 'benevolent' role played by central authorities are contestable though.[30]

In terms of race, the sociologist Grant Farred argues that much of what has passed for racial discourse in relation to football in Argentina has come in counterpoint with neighbouring nations, describing the depiction of Brazilian players as *macacos* or 'monkeys' in the Argentine press during the 1920s as being a 'Darwinian trope that signifies Brazilian racial inferiority.'[31]

[29] Elsey and Nadel (2019), Pujol (2019), and Wood (2018, 569).

[30] Richey (2013, 117–119).

[31] Farred (2005, 104–105).

Structure

The thematic chapters are structured chronologically reflecting on different elements of national identity construction with supporting case studies as the century progressed, with some themes such as the role of women, race and the interior interweaving through the whole book.

Chapter 2 investigates football's arrival and diffusion in Argentina, arguing that a supportive environment on the part of Argentine elites and nation builders encouraged the arrival of British investment, which combined with a rapidly growing working class proved fertile ground for the spread of football in Argentine. It argues that there were three key disseminators of the game in Argentina in which British immigrants were at the forefront, or at least heavily involved: the private school system, the railway industry and neighbourhood clubs.

Chapter 3 examines how football contributed to constructions of *Argentinidad* within Argentina from the First World War until 1930. It deconstructs some of the myths surrounding the creation of *la nuestra* as a metaphor for an assimilated Argentine society arguing that Anglo-Criollos played a significant role that has hitherto been rejected. It also makes the case that following the decline in influence of the British community in Argentine football, the baton was picked up by the Italo-Argentine collective on the pitch, in the boardroom and on the terraces in a way that did not entirely forego expressions of Italian identity. Case studies of the Santiago del Estero provincial team in the Campeonato Argentino, the Afro-Argentine footballer Alejandro de los Santos and the first women's game in 1923 reflect on the difficulties encountered by 'voiceless others' in forcing themselves into the national discourse.

By contrast, whilst covering the same timeframe as the previous chapter, Chapter 4 focuses on how displays by Argentine teams on the international stage informed opinions of how the country was perceived abroad. Additionally, it shows how transnational relationships developed with Danubian football during the 1920s that helped shape Argentine football over the following two decades. As *rioplatense* football came to dominate international football in the 1920s and early 1930s, *La Nuestra* demonstrates how perceived footballing styles and national characteristics expressed through football were used as a means of separating Argentine and Uruguayan identity which had hitherto been viewed as a united entity.

Central to Chapter 5 is the relationship between politics and football in Argentina. Beginning with the introduction of professionalism in 1931, it shows how an oligopoly of economically powerful clubs, the so-called *cinco grandes*: Boca Juniors, Independiente, Racing Club de Avellaneda, River Plate and San Lorenzo, came to dominate Argentine football in a manner that reflected the wider democratic deficit in the country at the time. Whilst the link between Peronism and sport has been well documented, this chapter re-evaluates some of the lesser covered aspects of this relationship, firstly the promotion of the working class with the changing demography and demonisation of internal migrants as *cabecitas negras*, the role of footballers as workers highlighted by the 1948–49 Players' Strike, the weakness and inconsistencies in foreign policy that saw the national team withdrawn from international competition. Arguing that rather than being the 'Golden Age' of Argentine football as most writers contend, this chapter suggests the 1940s presaged the 'Age of Decline' that reached its nadir with humiliating World Cup defeat at the 1958 World Cup that became known as the 'Disaster of Sweden.'

Chapter 6, 'The Age of Revolution,' analyses the turbulent period between Juan Peron's overthrow in 1955 and his return to power in 1973. Beginning with the response to the 'Disaster of Sweden,' it investigates how Argentine football, like the wider nation struggled with processes of modernisation, raising with it existential questions about national identity. The chapter shows how this tempestuous period was reflected by changes in playing style as football became an arena for the political struggles and violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It also examines how societal changes in terms of the radicalisation of youth and increasing rights for women were illuminated through football through case studies of Estudiantes de La Plata's rise to prominence and Argentine involvement at the second Women's World Cup in 1971.

Chapter 7 explores Argentina under the *Proceso* and how the country lived through the paradox of its most important footballing moment, hosting the 1978 World Cup, coinciding with the government being in a state of war against sections of its own people, and how the tournament provided an arena for different concepts of national identity to be competed for. It also examines the role of football in maintaining the morale (or not) of the Argentine people during the *junta*'s doomed 1982 military adventure in the Falklands/Malvinas.

The final thematic chapter concludes by looking at the final two decades of the twentieth century in Argentina, highlighting how the

international performances of the country's leading clubs, as well as the national team's 1986 World Cup victory, helped re-assert the nation's reintegration into the global community following the restoration of democracy in 1983. It assesses the transformation of Argentina under President Carlos Menem's neo-liberal economic policies, in which economic autonomy was surrendered to foreign capital for the sake of short-term riches, but which ended in *el crisis* of 2001–2002 which plunged huge swathes of the Argentine population into poverty. As such, it highlights how Argentine football faithfully reflected this process of globalisation, as the export of footballers and uniquely Argentine methods of player commodification reflected a neo-liberal economy based on 'competitive advantage' in what could be termed the 'Argentine Football Factory.'

Methodology and Sources

As an historical investigation that gets to the heart of understanding national identity construction over long twentieth century, *La Nuestra* has relied upon a range of primary written sources to better understand and interpret this phenomenon. The primary sources used have been contemporary newspapers, magazines, government publications, football clubs' and governing bodies' annual reports as well as personal papers. Given the century-long scope of this project, these sources best support the arguments presented by this book in displaying first-hand the opinions and actions of actors involved in the themes under investigation.

Archival research at the Biblioteca Nacional de Argentina and Tea y Deportea journalism school in Buenos Aires helped narrow down the choice of two key titles: *El Gráfico* and *La Nación* as the main underpinning of the research for *La Nuestra*. The main reason for their suitability is that both publications cover the entire chronological span of this book, something that cannot be said for other titles such as *Crítica*, *La Cancha* and *Goles*, allowing for a greater consistency of analysis. The editorial reputations of these titles mean they are both renowned for the depth and journalistic quality of their reporting, with *La Nación* being similar in editorial style to *The Times* in Britain and achieving what Daniel Lewis describes as 'international attention and prestige.'[32] Whilst it is true that

[32] Lewis (2001, 70).

other scholars, most notably Archetti and Alabarces, have heavily utilised *El Gráfico* in the course of their own research, the magazine's use in this book remains valid since it reinterprets material from the magazine used by other scholars, especially in the case study of Estudiantes in Chapter 5, as well as utilising previously unused articles.

Supplementing these key sources, other titles have supported individual case studies according to chronological relevance. For example, *Crítica* under the editorship of Natalio Botana during the 1920s had highly opinionated journalists pontificating on a range of footballing issues as he challenged for office in the footballing corridors of power. Argentine regional newspapers have also been referenced when examining the relationship between the capital and the interior. Titles such as *El Litoral* in Rosario and *El Liberal* in Santiago del Estero present a provincial perspective alongside those originating from Buenos Aires, especially in terms of agitating for greater provincial involvement in the national governance of Argentine football. More populist magazines such as *La Cancha* and *Goles* and the sports newspaper, *Olé*, are used given their self-appointed roles as the 'voice of the terraces,' enabling the consideration of opinions not always apparent in the two main sources. In a similar vein, as the sporting mouthpiece of the Peronist regime, *El Mundo Deportivo* is also referenced to better understand the link between Peronism and football. Uruguayan dailies such as *Mundo Uruguayo* and *El País* are used in the case study contrasting footballing identities between Argentina and its *rioplatense* neighbour. *La Nuestra* also analyses British and European national and local newspapers in examining footballing interactions between Argentine and European sides, to gain an outsider's perspective on constructions of Argentine identity through football and also to interpret the 1978 World Cup when the Argentine press was heavily censored by the prevailing military dictatorship.

To better understand the strategies of key institutions in Argentine football, the archives of the AFA, the game's governing body, available online in digitised format, as well as those of club sides River Plate and Vélez Sarsfield were accessed. Most documents accessed from these archives were *memorias y balances*, a combination of correspondence, annual accounts and reports in a single volume which facilitate the analysis of trends from year to year and changes and continuities in policy, as well as being a way of examining how these institutions have been affected by economic and political factors impacting Argentine society more widely.

The choice of River Plate and Vélez Sarsfield was predicated on the issue of availability, given that few clubs have written records available from the early decades of the twentieth century. These records illuminate the organisational identity of the respective bodies in terms of their corporate values, as well as mediating their opinions on issues of the day such as the introduction of professionalism. By analysing the commercial contracts entered for things such as land purchase and rental from railway companies, these sources highlight the role played by these companies in the development of Argentine football. Similarly, by recording who competed for office, they provide a point of departure for investigating wider political links between the governing body, clubs and political parties and state institutions. From the data contained in annual reports, such as membership lists, it has been possible to extrapolate further information related to the ethnic make-up of support bases. This proved extremely helpful when for example gauging the magnitude of the Italo-Argentine community in Argentine football. Furthermore, government records such as census data have been particularly useful for understanding immigratory patterns and government policies on issues such as naturalisation of foreigners.

In terms of personal sources, the diary of William Heald who participated in the first game played in Argentina, and player autobiographies such as those by Alfredo Di Stéfano and Osvaldo Ardiles give an insight into key periods such as the 1948–1949 players' strike and the 1976–1983 dictatorship through the thoughts and feelings of actors who participated during these events.[33]

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CHAPTER 2

'The Virile English Game': The Origins of Argentine Football 1867–1912

Football's arrival in Argentina was heavily shaped by the outcome of the civil wars which bedevilled the country from independence from Spain in 1816 that went the way of liberal national builders, who solicited foreign investment and immigrant labour to modernise the Argentine economy. The British responded with alacrity, and its economic influence was accompanied by the arrival into Argentina of other cultural and sporting practices such as football, disseminated through British community social clubs, schools and industries, especially the railway industry. Historians have considered this to be representative of British 'informal empire,' a term imbued with pejorative connotations, but this chapter argues that of the positive aspects to this relationship, the diffusion of football was one of its most benign and efficacious features.[1]

As with other sporting foundations, such as William Webb Ellis picking up and running with the ball at Rugby School in 1823, football's entrance to Argentina is surrounded by myth. Repeated ad nauseam by writers, especially outside Argentina, Tony Mason's 1995 assertion that football was popularised by the local population watching groups of British sailors kicking a ball about whilst waiting for their ships to be loaded or unloaded

[1] Brown (2014, 61), Knight (2008, 30), and Alabarces (2007, 39–46).

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remains remarkably resilient.[2] Despite Argentine-based scholars such as Julio Frydenberg confirming that there is 'no verifiable evidence' of this being the case, the sailor myth has become rooted because it supports later historical outlooks in which the arrival of football was part of a British neo-colonial project to dominate Argentina.[3] This populist revisionism provided for notions of worker to worker transmission of football, but is not rooted in any historical chronology, and has been designed to divert attention from what Alabarces considers to be a top-down diffusion from the dominant to the popular classes.[4]

By contrast, this chapter contends that football was diffused through a combination of both top-down and horizontal transfer at the end of the nineteenth century. These transfers were initially established through British private schools, railway works' teams and *barrio* (neighbourhood) teams in which the British mixed with other nationalities, enabling miscegenation and the production of new shared identities founded on a common cultural practice. Football became therefore such an integrative force once disseminated to the Argentine popular classes that it became a useful conduit for the organic creation of local identities amongst people from diverse backgrounds, independent of state-led attempts at assimilation into Argentine society.

The Third British 'Invasion' of Argentina

In 1806 and 1807, British military commanders, General William Carr Beresford, Commodore Sir Home Popham and Lieutenant-General John Whitelocke, exploited Spanish involvement in the Napoleonic Wars by attempting to usurp Spain's colonial rule in Argentina. Unprotected by Spanish forces, these unlicenced military actions were repelled by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, in the process developing nascent ideas of Argentine national identity that ultimately achieved independence from Spain in 1816.[5] A succession of civil wars threatened to strangle the embryonic nation almost at birth, but victory by Justo José Urquiza over his erstwhile Federalist ally Juan Manuel de Rosas at the Battle of

[2] Mason (1995, 1–7) and Goldblatt (2007, 125–128).

[3] Frydenberg (2011, 25) and Brown (2014, 65–68).

[4] Alabarces (2018, 51–54).

[5] Harvey (2002, 12–13) and Knight (2008, 37).

Caseros in 1852 paved the way for the adoption of a new liberal constitution a year later, providing the basis for Argentina's economic and demographic transformation into a modern, multi-ethnic nation with full political control over its entire territory.

The overthrow of Rosas saw Argentina become more global in outlook as it sought to maximise the economic potential available exporting from its agriculturally rich pampas to markets in Europe. With Argentina's oligarchic land-owning elite loathe to invest the necessary capital expenditure on modernising the country's transport system and other infrastructure, economically liberal Argentine nation builders such as Juan Bautista Alberdi, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre instead sought overseas investment. British investors filled the void, using capital accumulation from Britain's own successful industrial revolution to help construct Argentina's nascent infrastructure. British capital was particularly essential to railway construction, which Argentina desperately needed to get its agricultural produce to port and onwards to international markets, given the lack of natural communications like navigable rivers in the vast pampas. Between 1865 and 1913, trade between the UK and Latin America trebled as Argentina became Britain's leading trading partner, accounting for almost half of its overseas investment. This upgrading of Argentina's transport network alongside technological advances in shipping facilitated quicker and cheaper transatlantic trade with key European markets, as Liverpool supplanted Cadiz as the main destination for Argentine goods.[6]

Another reason for constructing the railway system, especially in the late 1880s when the network grew from 5,836 km to 9,432 km, was to assert government authority over all Argentine territory. With speculators reticent to invest in economically unviable routes, Argentine authorities offered concessions to construct lines to remote parts of the country. Under President Juárez Celman, Argentina indebted itself with loans from Barings Bank in London, offering profit guarantees to those foreign capitalists prepared to build them. Unfortunately for the government, the level of agricultural production required to service the loans failed to keep pace with repayments, accelerating the 1890 Barings Crisis in which only the intervention of the Bank of England as 'lender of last resort' saved Barings from bankruptcy.

[6] Rock (2019, xi), Sáenz Quesada (2012, 359–360), and Brown (2014, 61).

1890 was a point of inflection for Anglo-Argentine relations, as British banks called in their Argentine loans crippling the local economy, forcing the resignation of Juarez Celman. To re-open now harder to obtain lines of credit, the Argentine state sold its controlling interest in the railways to the British companies running them. Whilst Britain did not exercise formal political power in Argentina, the Barings Crisis demonstrated that through its commercial relationship, Britain could use economic leverage to ensure that its interests were not endangered by political decisions taken by the Argentine government. With the headquarters of the Ferrocarril Oeste and Ferrocarril Sur based at River Plate House, it is easy to see why this centre of British investment invited comparison with other colonial enterprises like East India Company and the Hudson Bay Company.

Despite this hegemony being described by some scholars as 'informal empire' in which Argentina simply exchanged one colonial ruler for another, with Argentina tied to Britain for the purchase of manufactured goods in return for its primary exports, the benefits of the arrangement did not all flow Britain's way. Since Latin American republics possessed neither the economic, technological, nor social capital to achieve the aspired level of modernisation, had the British not filled the void, then other competitors such as the United States, France and Germany would have replaced Britain as the hegemonic power instead.[7] As the nineteenth-century British Liberal politician Richard Cobden claimed, 'our miraculous railroads, that are the talk of all nations, are the advertisements and vouchers for the value of our enlightened institutions.'[8] As Colin Lewis notes, narratives of British economic dominance 'have disguised, diminished and deflected attention from the *anglo-criollo* character of initial funding in these activities.'[9] It was this sense of co-operation between Briton and Argentine that helped in the later popular diffusion of football.

Britain's exertion of soft hegemonic power also expressed itself culturally, accounting for the game's establishment. In 1895, the British community in Argentina stood at 21,788. Barely accounting for 1% of the population, the economic power they exercised meant that key individuals

[7] Williamson (1992, 280–285), Bakewell (2004, 441 and 491), Hobsbawm (1994, 39–40), and Lewis (2007, 228–229 and 261).

[8] Cited in Ferguson (2004, xviii–xix).

[9] Lewis (2007, 232).