

RAANAN REIN: *Fútbol, Jews, and the Making of Argentina*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.

A new work by one of the most renowned, multifaceted, and prolific historians of Argentina can generate unreachably high expectations. This book meets them at many levels. The most elemental is an impressive research base constructed from a myriad of sources ranging from memoirs, periodicals, popular theater, film, soap operas and photographs to archives of football teams and interviews and questionnaires of fans. This, plus a deep familiarity with the secondary literature, supports a series of perfectly concatenated and illuminating chapters.

The first, appropriately, provides an overview of Jewish migration. In his 1896 Zionist manifesto, Theodor Herzl defined the choice for Eastern European Jews as one between “Palestine and the Argentine.” Although over the next three decades or so most stayed and the majority of those who left headed for the United States, within Herzl’s choice Argentina clearly won out becoming the second most important global destination of Ashkenazi Jews. By the outbreak of World War I they had become the third-largest immigrant group in the country. At its peak in the 1950s, Argentina’s Jewish population numbered over 300,000, the fifth largest in the world, with the majority concentrated in Buenos Aires.

Next Rein provides a history of the local setting: Villa Crespo, a neighborhood associated with Jews, football, and the tango, which effectively—and affectively—captures the themes in the title of the book. The district had been a sparsely populated area dotted with a few elite estates for much of the nineteenth century. In the first two decades of the next century, industrialization, trams, the railroad, and a subway line turned it into a cosmopolitan working- and middle-class neighborhood. By the end of World War I, however, it had already become identified with Jews in particular, as when Alberto Vaccarezza, the most popular playwright of the time, titled his 1919 comedy about Villa Crespo *El barrio de los judíos*. The Jewish presence continued to increase over the next three decades, and is still felt today even after half-a-century of exodus towards more affluent districts to the north. Another distinctive characteristic of Villa Crespo is that it attracted immigrants directly from Europe and also those who had been residing for years in other wards of the city. The presence of immigrants at different stages of assimilation increased the neighborhood’s pluralism. This is beautifully captured by Rein’s tales about greenhorns, “*casteidish*” (a mixture of Castilian and Yiddish akin to Spanglish in the U.S. today), Jewish tango singers, soccer players, and *fútbol* fans.

Indeed, by the early twentieth century football had morphed from a pastime of British residents and Anglophile patricians into a mass phenomenon and a marker of Argentine popular identity and immigrant integration. Buenos Aires

boasted then, along with Montevideo and London, the largest number of football clubs and stadiums in the world. Rein focuses on one of these clubs: Atlanta. Named apparently after a U.S. warship visiting for the inauguration of President Quintana in 1904, the team spent almost two decades wandering through several neighborhoods until it found a permanent home in Villa Crespo in 1922.

Although Atlanta was never a Jewish club formally, it eventually became strongly associated with Jews, much like what happened with Tottenham F.C. in London. The reason for this is not as obvious as it would seem. Rein points out that River Plate, a team consistently ranked among the top ten in the history of the sport, had actually more Jewish players and fans. Perhaps Atlanta's humbler status is part of the explanation. In the interviews conducted by the author, the expressions of loyalty for a team that often ranked at the bottom of the division recall the fervor elicited by other long-losing teams elsewhere and in other sports. Rein's analysis indicates that the fervor may also reflect a mixture of political culture and ethnic, class, and localist identities. Most Atlanta fans came from a specific area of Villa Crespo inhabited by middle and lower-middle class people of Jewish or other European ancestry, and socialist leanings. The rivalry with Chacarita Juniors, a team from the poorer, less European, and more Peronist western edge of Villa Crespo, accentuated the division and zeal. The fans' chants of these local archrivals often targeted Jews on one side and *mestizo* migrants or Bolivians on the other. In a chapter on fan culture, which follows two chapters on club and national politics during the Peronist period, Rein offers an insightful analysis of these insults. More than mere expressions of anti-Semitism and white racism, they represent a ritualized passage into a social space where nominally transgressive behavior is temporally allowed, much as it is in carnivals. He mentions the case of Jewish fans of Chacarita who admit chanting Judeophobic insults during games against Atlanta. It would seem as if during the games, the team acquires quasi-tribal characteristics and becomes the fans' primary object of loyalty and a source of social identity.

It is difficult to exaggerate the contributions of this book. It does much to de-provincialize Jewish history by moving beyond notions of exceptionalism and fixation on anti-Semitism to connect it to the general history of human mobility and encounters. Its rich and multi-layered analysis makes it as intellectually satisfying as it is engaging. And its fusion of the histories of migration, ethnicity, sports, urban culture, and politics at various levels makes it a model for new forms of integrated histories.

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