

FOOTBALL CULTURE AND SPORTS IMAGINARY IN LATIN AMERICA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: The article deals with the intellectual discussion about the idea of Latin America, with the objective of showing how this debate is manifested in the context of the region's professional football. The argument we propose is that the design of a Latin American unit encountered difficulties regarding the construction of identity throughout its history, more precisely between the late 19th century and the end of the last century. If the geographical territories often cross historical periods of continuous exchange between unity and fragmentation, approximation and distancing, the Latin American case draws attention to the particular characteristics of its colonial heritage. Without being only a dimension of the past, such influences became more complex throughout the 20th century, when the emergence of the United States as a hegemonic power began to have decisive effects on Latin American economy, politics, and culture. Our purpose here is to suggest that, although USA's hegemony is uncontested in all contexts of collective life in Latin America, its presence was not directly felt regarding modern sports, especially in the practice of professional football, through intercontinental tournaments of clubs and National teams. In this context, the otherness remained focused on the other side of the Atlantic: either to the United Kingdom, responsible for inventing and making the rules of sports practices; or to Latin European countries – France, Italy, Spain and Portugal – that influenced in institutional and cultural terms the styles and playing techniques in South America.

Keywords: Latin America; Iberism/Americanism; sports imagery; football tournaments; collective identities

Introduction

This article examines the intellectual discussion around the idea of Latin America. The main goal is to show the direct or indirect repercussions of this debate on the framework of professional football in the region. The argument is that, if all the continents undergo identity processes that marked differences and similarities among neighboring Nations, the concept of a Latin America unity

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found special difficulty of identity construction throughout its history, more precisely between the late 19th century and the end of the last century.

If the geographical territories often go through continuous historical periods of frontier exchange between unity and fragmentation, approximation and distancing, the Latin American case draws attention to the particular characteristics of its colonial heritage. Such characteristics are expressed through multiple influences coming from colonial metropolises, particularly Spain, Portugal, England and France.

Without being only a dimension of the past, these influences became more complex throughout the 20th century, when the emergence of the United States as a hegemonic power began to have decisive effects on Latin American economy, politics and culture.

Our purpose here is to suggest that, although USA's hegemony is uncontested in all spheres of collective life in Latin America, its presence was not so directly felt regarding modern sports, especially in the practice of professional football, through intercontinental tournaments of clubs and national teams.

In this respect, the otherness remained focused on the other side of the Atlantic: either to the United Kingdom, responsible for inventing and making the rules of sports practices; or to Latin European countries – France, Italy, Spain and Portugal – that influenced the styles and playing techniques in South America in cultural and institutional terms.

Firstly, we will highlight the nature of intellectual debates around the idea of Latin America. Following, we will point out a history of creation of sports tournaments between clubs and countries selected in Latin America in order to show the slow institutional process of identity construction through sports and a dialogue with the temporality and with the European football calendar. Finally, we conclude with a summary about the limits and the potential of establishment of a Latin American sports unity in the beginning of the 21st century.

The Latin American identity construction: continuities and intermittences

As of the end of the 19th century, the intellectual self-awareness of being Latin American was sought by writers such as José Martí (1999), in Cuba, and José Enrique Rodó (1985), in Uruguay. In Brazil, the physician Manoel Bonfim

(1993) is representative; in 1903 he formulated a critique of the parasitic condition experienced in the region, because of the legacy of colonial mindset and practices by the European metropolises. Following this group of authors, José Vasconcelos, Mexican, (VERÍSSIMO, 2013) wrote in 1925 the book "The cosmic race: Mission of the Ibero-American race", which already preconized a type of "hybrid utopia", mobilizer of the continental imaginary.

In the Latin American intellectual ambience, it can be said that, on the one hand, the "arielism" has preponderated, expression inspired by a supernatural character in the play "The tempest" (1611), one of William Shakespeare's last works. Such current of thought opposed to modernizing and scientific currents, proclaiming a return to the Iberian past. On the other hand, in Argentina the strand represented by Domingos Sarmiento (2010) excelled, which aimed their bases against the provincial reality of caudillismo and was in favour of the old Hispanic American colonies' alignment with the North American model.

Expression coined in 19th century France - period in which the country was under the command of Napoleon III - "Latin America" was standardized in the United States in the second half of the 19th century, in order to identify a geographic area south of the North American Rio Grande, on the Mexican border. The category arises after a French scientific-military expedition to Mexico and its coinage in a book dates back to 1862. The American "other" stopped being only the opposite to Europe and started to aim the contiguous territory, situated South of Ecuador.

In 1856, the Colombian poet and diplomat José María Torres Caicedo had already contrasted "Latin America" to "Anglo-Saxon" America in his poem *Las Dos Américas*. Caicedo founded intellectual societies with a view to bringing the Latin American countries together, which was clearly a political project. In its turn, this was settled in an old idea about the "Latin race," coined by Michel Chevalier, a Frenchman, in 1839, in order to bring the French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian speakers together. The approach pleased Spanish American *criollo* elites, as they appreciated the francophone culture (Burke, 2009, p. 159).

In view of this, the term was soon placed in contrast to the emerging Pan-Americanist policy in the United States. Pan-Americanism intensified at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century with the emergence of the North American

hegemony, which aimed to amplify its expansionist policy and international influence zone. The period was marked by wars perpetrated by the United States, as the one against Spain in 1898 for the dispute over the Caribbean Antillean islands, such as Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Also at this time, expansionist mottos have become well known since the disclosure of the Monroe Doctrine, drawn in 1823 and resumed in the early 20th century by Theodore Roosevelt - "America for Americans" – in the wake of the big stick diplomacy, sponsored by the North American Secretary of State James Blaine.

There were not few difficulties of achieving the Pan-Americanist project. Part of the obstacles was due to the Iberian culture specificities transplanted to the U.S. territory. Iberism and Americanism constituted antithetical poles, triggered by authors of social thought, in contrasting comparison to the models of development in each region.

The counterpoint was also used by politicians interested in using the North America's colonization case to legitimize the North American supremacy; the colonization was considered successful due to the "settlement colonies", as termed by the French economist Pierre Paul Leroy-Beaulieu. As for the endemic Latin America backwardness, it was explained by the Iberian heritage, materialized on the basis of its "exploitation colonies" experience, to refer to Leroy-Beaulieu's antithetical pair.

North American researcher Richard Morse (1988) was one of those who dared to think of that equation in a less predictable way, without immediately contrasting each other and without using a one-way principle. The Brazilianist would enhance the ideological and institutional heritage contained in concepts of Ibero-America and Anglo-America. Since then, he dealt with the Latin America specific values, its allegedly racial, linguistic and cultural unity, with the proposition of a different valuation principle for each one of them.

That is because the explanatory tradition stressed the Iberian backwardness, with the predominance of holism, annihilator of individual differences. As for the Anglo-Americans, the supremacy of Protestant individualism was acclaimed, cultivator of democratic, Republican and constitutional ideals. This has shaped the American history with the ideals of civic virtues, free initiative, political decentralization and economic liberalism.

It was a country decanted by cosmopolitan intelligentsia since *Democracy in America* (1835), a book by French author Alexis de Tocqueville (1985). This decantation derived from the rationalist, materialist and liberal aegis of the United States, which encouraged the belief in the autonomy of the individual over the whole. As for the Hispanic and Lusitanic heritage countries, based on the historical legacy of Catholicism, they were formed under the principle of a more centralized and incorporating state, based on the experience of a hierarchical community.

According to Morse, this trait, far from being an obstacle, conferred an advantage to the Ibero-American experience. Its more open and more fraternal sociability allowed it to reverse the traditional devaluation in the face of the North American alterity. To his mind, the idea of the superiority of U.S.A. before the inferiority of Latin America should not be conceived.

Yet in terms of ideology, it is known that the period between wars (1919-1939), intermediated by the "Great depression" - under the damaging effects of the New York stock market crack - used physical force, employing war-military power. However, the bellicose prominence in foreign policy coexisted with other forms of domain. North America started to engage with the southern hemisphere of the continent from a blend of diplomacy and violence. Development of the mass media on a global scale has enabled a more sophisticated domination exercise, in the form well-established by the Frankfurt School, from the concept of cultural industry.

Alongside the debate on the cultural industry, the continent lived with frequent tensions in the political sphere. In constant ambiguity with the governments of the USA, the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s watch the emergence of Presidents and dictators of Latin America, who would be called populists by certain strands of sociological interpretation. In Brazil, in the midst of historical vicissitudes, the concept of populism was drafted by university graduates from *Escola de Sociologia Paulista* (Miceli, 2012).

These sociologists underlined the frailties of the kind of capitalist transformation in Latin America in the mid-20th century, far from the ideal type erected by Marxism based on Industrial Revolution. They did not deny the advent of masses but argued the undue consideration of social contradictions that underlay political clashes. They sought to draw the attention to the fact that the

aliancist rhetoric of nationalism had the effect of covering up the fundamental question of capitalism. This focused on the conflicts of class, in the fierce disputes between capital and labour, in the historical role of the working class and in the ruptures more drastic than reforms held by populist leaders.

Despite these criticisms inspired in the context of academic Marxist debates of the time, whose assumptions were also object of revision and more accurate analysis in recent decades (FERNANDEZ, 2001), the projects of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina would become important nationalist and labour references in their respective countries. Their centrality can be measured in the historical developments and ballasted lineages in their successions.

In place of the primary agricultural exporting system, industrialization would be the touchstone of government speeches. It was believed that the industrial process would be the driving force of the region's emancipation and, in view of this, it was channelled by personalist leaders and by a national feeling of anticolonial aspect, as an elementary contrast to external influences and interferences.

Within the institutional level, after the second world war, it is worth mentioning the local search on Latin America would be propelled by the creation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in 1948. As noted by the economist Celso Furtado, the organ, linked to the United Nations (UN), suffered strong opposition from Washington in its early years.

ECLAC, headquartered in Santiago of Chile, was composed by a generation of Latin American intellectuals with a technical training in economics and, at the same time, with the developmental concern that intended to overcome the structural backwardness and conquer the region's autonomy. In the ECLAC environment, names like Raúl Prebisch from Argentina (Dosman, 2011), Celso Furtado from Brazil (2007) pontificated. They were responsible for outlining public policies based on economic studies and social interpretations aligned to the continent's historical evolution.

Latin America comprises a very wide territorial region, with more than 20 million square kilometers. The regional framework encompasses South America, Central America and the Caribbean Islands. There are at least three subsets – Northern Mexico, the American isthmus and the South American continent – and

three languages of colonial origin – Spanish, Portuguese and French. These, throughout the colonization history, undermined the pre-Columbian cultures and African ethnic-cultural traditions.

According to the observation of Celso Furtado:

"Latin America has ceased to be a geographical expression in order to become a historical reality as a result of the disruption of the traditional framework of international division of labour, of the problems generated by a late industrialization and of the evolution of its relations with the United States; when the U.S.A. became a hegemonic global power they conceived for the region a status of its own, involving a more direct and ostentatious control, and at the same time, requiring increased cooperation among the countries of that area" (FURTADO, 2007, p. 32)

In continuity to the dialogue of developmentalism in the 1940s and 50s, but also with criticism of the dualistic reading then in force, which substantiated the industrialization by import substitution; in the late 1960 the generation responsible for laying the foundations of the theory of Dependency emerges, under the political impact of a series of events. Among the most important ones, it is worth citing the Cuban Revolution, the Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps by President Kennedy and the military coups supported by the U.S.A.

The intellectual debate of that scenario would be enriched in 1970, when the Chilean historian Enzo Faletto, and the Brazilian sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso publish the essay *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (2004). The authors seek to undo the illusion of the possibility of actually breaking the dichotomic centre-periphery model. Against the grain, the authors propose integrated regional development between the various Latin American countries, so as to constitute a concrete alternative to the greed of international division of labour and to the compelling domain of big business on national markets.

Radicalization was a constant at the time, with extremisms of both parties amid the deployment of dictatorial and discretionary regimes that would prolong their hold in power. Discourses and practices were revolving around revolutionary processes in the Caribbean - island of Cuba – with insurrectional movements in Central America - Nicaragua and Guatemala –, with reformist and coup projects in South America – Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. There was a period of nearly indistinction between politico-ideological militancy and production of scientific knowledge, especially in the Social Sciences.

Perhaps the most emblematic book of this generation has been signed by Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. *Open veins of Latin America* (1980), whose first edition is from 1971, became both a liberation libel and a diligent study, embodied in data statements and in the belief of the systematic despoilment the region has undergone over the centuries of colonization and independence.

In a panoramic view, the contribution of literature in the constitution of the Latin American imaginary of the period should also be highlighted. The literary influence was manifested since at least the 19th century, when its function is not only fictional but also foundational, constitutive of history and identity conformation of each country in the region (SOMMER, 2004; SCHWARTZ, 2013).

In the contemporary phase, during the second half of the 20th century, the so-called "Latin American boom" occurred, with the affirmation of literature through writers such as the Colombian Gabriel Garcia Marques, the Peruvian Manuel Scorza, the Mexican Juan Rulfo, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier, the Guatemalan Miguel Ángel Asturias and Uruguayan Cristina Peri Rossi, among others. The international critics endorsed the work of these writers and gave it the cognomen of "magical realism".

Such literary movement was responsible for the projection of Latin America in the framework of the most cosmopolitan literate culture and obtained positive repercussions in Europe and the United States. Originally published in 1967, *One hundred years of solitude*, by García Márquez, was one of the highest-impact editorial works. Alongside the projection of the Latin American literature, the novel led the author to win the Nobel Prize in 1982, which inspired the speech "The solitude of Latin America".

Sports imaginary and construction of football identity in Latin America

The historical framework drafted so far stressed the great power of North American influence on the heterogeneous set of Latin American countries. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out the existence of singularities of the relationship between the United States and Latin America regarding sports culture, in general, and the football culture, in particular.

It is known that the introduction and implementation of modern sports in Latin America during the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century from the economic and cultural activities of imperial Great Britain over the region. The codification and irradiation of several sports practices conformed to the ideals of modernity and civilization were the clearest expression of this phenomenon.

The influence of England in the Victorian period was directly and indirectly noted. In many cases, the modalities of sports arrived at the Latin American cities by ports and rails through the action of other European contingents. While English engineers introduced the sports practice in the American continent, the nations of Continental Europe, for their part, also practiced modern sports such as football, for example.

By assimilating the habits and tastes of British countries they introduced those habits and tastes in other regions of the globe. The Platine region countries Argentina and Uruguay stood out in this process, both in the absorption of physical activities invented and coded in Britain, and in the filtering of their moral values – race, fibre, elegance - as the Argentinean anthropologist Eduardo Archetti elaborates in an exemplary manner.

One of the explanatory factors for the creation of sports clubs in Latin America was due to the massive exodus of European emigrants that came from Italy, Spain and Portugal, among others, to take rooted in the American continent. English historian Bill Murray synthesizes this phenomenon with propriety:

At the end of the 19th century, the economy and the football expanded in the southern coastal regions of South America, especially in large cities located in the estuary of Río de la Plata: Buenos Aires and Montevideo. In this region, sailors and British workers, especially of railways, played football in the 1860s. Twenty years later, several clubs appeared, some of them still very well known. Early in the 20th century, the British influence was replaced by the one of southern European immigrants, mostly Italians. However, teams with British names refused to change them when Italians took control. (MURRAY, 2000, p. 55)

Therefore, the introduction of football in South America has made the zone of influence of the United States limited in terms of sports culture. A multi-sports country in which activities such as baseball, - created in 1839 – American football, – different from soccer and adapted from Rugby in 1869 – basketball, – created

in North American soil in 1891 – and hockey stood out, the USA influenced the Caribbean and Antilles region (ECHEVARRÍA, 2004) but only affected the Southern Cone countries in a transitory manner. According to British historian Peter Burke, in the article "Football vs. cricket in the new world" (2009), the U.S. Army was the introducer of baseball in Cuba and in the Dominican Republic in the late 19th century.

Thus, the "criollization" of sports, that is, the hybridization of which Eduardo Archetti spoke to address the polo and the football in Argentina (2003; TOLEDO, 2009) manifested a hegemony in the reverse direction with the process of assimilation by native elites of a British sports-cultural phenomenon. In regard to the American territory, this favoured to some extent a backwards Pan-Americanism, as advocated by the Brazilianist Richard Morse.

This point is developed by Uruguayan historian Andrés Morales:

The Pan Americanism on the one hand and the Hispanic Americanism on the other hand, sometimes opposed, sometimes together, were two distinct forms of constructing national identity. In football speeches, both postures were present at the time of narrating victorious Cups and championships. The football is appropriated as a tradition but in this period and in the triumph speeches, the idea that the Uruguayan were the inhabitants of the Republic started to take shape. It is in *Ariel*, by José Enrique Rodó, that we have found the biggest influence of the speeches that revolve around victories.

In 1924's victory, the idea of a team formed by hispanic-latins - fundamentally conformed by players of Italian and Spanish origin - had proved to be superior and won national representations of Anglo-Saxon countries as Holland, the United States or Switzerland. It was proudly said that the team that had conquered the gold medal spoke Spanish. In 1928, the identity construction was held in concentric circles. With the triumphs against Holland and Germany, once more there is the idea of the hispanic-latins' superiority over the anglo-saxons' in the football. But after defeating Italy (in which the confrontation is taken as a shock between two Latin football powers), the basic otherness comes to be America against Europe. (MORALES, 2013, P. 202)

The U.S. men's national soccer team actually participated in some World Cup editions in the first half of the 20th century, as in 1930 in Uruguay and in Brazil in 1950. However, it is only in the course of the 1970s, due to the world popularization of football, that the North American sports universe recognizes the value of *soccer* and starts to financially invest in this modality, by means of internationalized clubs, such as the New York Cosmos. In the 1990s, the country

which is increasingly housing Latin athletes, accepts the institutional incorporation of soccer and conquers the right to organize, for the first time, a World Cup in their territory.

Thus, it is possible to propose the reversal of the structural centre-periphery pair. While in the international relations the relations between the United States and Latin America polarized, the Latin American peripheral condition had to be relativized in the ambience of football. At least in South America, the fundamental otherness was formed against the institutional control of football by the Continental Europe. With the advent of the francophone FIFA in 1904, the relationship of South American sports bodies had to go through mediation policy of countries such as France and Italy, among others.

Firstly, until the 1920s the football meetings were due to the tours of teams and selected players, which crossed the Atlantic, from one coast to the other. Again, as stated by Murray: "The first foreign team to tour South America was the Southampton, in 1905. They won all five matches played in Argentina, conceding just three goals. Nottingham Forest, in the same year, won all seven matches, conceding only one goal "(2000, p. 63).

Then, the process expanded with the creation of competitions of international importance, such as the FIFA World Cup, since 1930. As we know, this organization becomes independent of the amateur modality - which is monitored by it in the Olympics - and creates its own international tournament. The World Cup, quadrennial event, presents the predominance alternating the technical supremacy that confronted the European and South American "schools", as said in the journalistic jargon of the time. In the wake of this event, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Chile professionalize their football between 1931 and 1933.

Football imagery, both of clubs and of national teams, was built in a dialogic sense and ascending scale order: from local to national to continental; and then to the international sphere. In 1910s South America, mutual knowledge of national selected teams intensified with the organization of tournaments contested between neighbouring countries.

There are examples of smaller competitions, such as Taça Bernardo O'Higgins (Brazil-Chile), Taça Rio Branco (Brazil-Uruguay), Copa Júlio Roca (Brazil-Argentina) and Taça Osvaldo Cruz (Brazil-Paraguay).

In the post-World War I era, South American participation in the football modality of the Olympic Games would be positively and negatively highlighted. In positive terms, the focus was Uruguayan two-time championship in 1924 and 1928, against Switzerland and Argentina, respectively. As for the 1936 Olympics, an incident in overtime of the quarterfinals of Peru - sole representative of South America - against Austria, has sparked a brawl. Austrian players clashed with Peruvian supporters who invaded the pitch at Hertha Berlin stadium (DIETSCHY, 2010, p. 248).

Eliminated from the tournament by the Organizing Committee, the Peruvian selected players and every athlete of that nationality withdrew from the competition, by order of general officer Benavides, the then President of the Republic. The case unleashed a series of diplomatic disputes between the leadership of Peruvian Football Federation and the International Olympic Committee members with threats to German and Austrian consulates in Lima.

Aside from that, we must recognize that the Olympics would not be enough to arouse great interest of part of the South American teams. This can be inferred if we observe that the Brazilian national team, for example, debuted at the Olympic football only in 1952, at the Helsinki Olympics, and until the 2016 Rio Olympics it had never won a gold medal in the sport (Giglio, 2013).

In the second half of the 20th century, another major competition occurred in the interior of the Pan American Games, whose first edition took place in Buenos Aires in 1951. In addition, from 1956 on, the Atlantic Cup based in Rio arranged matches among all these national teams. Such matches have allowed certain traffic of players and coaches, in addition to the playing styles.

One of their negative effects was the growth of rivalries within sports, potentiated by neighbouring relations. Government provocations, polemics between journalists, fights of players against fans, acts such as burning of flags and racist insults set the tone of a few matches of South American tournaments. After consecutive disagreements, Argentina and Brazil, through their representative entities, remained ten years without watching the dispute between their teams (1946-1956).

In a positive way, we can consider that the championship circuit also brought benefits. The largest stadiums were built, though under the mantle of the delicate relationship between football and politics (REIEN, 2015). In Argentina,

the general Agustín Justo contributed to the construction of *El Monumental* stadium, in 1938, which had the support of the municipality of Buenos Aires. At the expense of the government, already under the aegis of Peronism, in the following decade, the Racing stadium was inaugurated in Avellaneda to 60,000 fans, named after the President of the Republic, Perón (GAFFNEY, 2008; HÉMEURY, 2013).

In the field, the counterpoint with European football, for example, gave rise to the "diagonal", a Latin American variant of the WM, a system developed in Europe and seen as rational in the strategy of players distribution on the field. The change defined the Latin American style for at least 30 years, since the Uruguayan Olympic title in 1924. The internal circulation of coaches and players, at least in South America, was a contributing factor to this change.

As an example, the players strike in Argentina in 1948 should be remembered (FRYDENBERG, SAZBON, 2015), followed by the Argentinean exodus to the Colombian football in its gold phase, including Alfredo Di Stéfano, recruited by Millonarios of Colombia; the Paraguayan coach Fleitas Solich should also be evoked, who served in Brazil during the same period; and it is worth mentioning athletes like the strikers Leônidas da Silva, Domingos da Guia and Heleno de Freitas, who passed by Platine football clubs at different times.

Before the intensification of movement of footballers, coaches and leagues, the binational confrontations previously mentioned were the embryo of the South American Championship. Played from 1916 onwards, it was renamed Copa América in 1975, as the counterpart of UEFA European Championship. Whereas in South America the national team's competition took place during World War I, its continental scale correspondent would only be created in 1960 in Europe.

The event organizer was the South American Football Confederation, which brought together the football federations of each of those Southern Cone countries. In addition to Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay and Venezuela, these sports entities gave rise to CONMEBOL, formed by ten countries. To extend the range of action, two more countries from other regions have been invited since the early 1990s, being Mexico the most frequent of them. Mexico, country under the North American influence zone, integrates CONCACAF since 1982, body of countries of North, Central America and Caribbean, plus the three Guyanas.

Regarding the spectators, travels of football fans were multiplied by continental and world tournaments of national teams. The 1930 FIFA World Cup's final, contested between Uruguay and Argentina in Montevideo, was watched by more than 90,000 spectators. Of this total, about 20,000 were Argentineans. Using ships, thousands of Porteños crossed Río de la Plata to watch the match.

Despite the civilizing pedagogy embodied in modern sports, matches of national teams and clubs were marked by endemic hostilities, virulent clashes and serious tensions, inside and outside the field. Bill Murray documents as follows:

In South America in 1920 the police officers had to dig ditches and make a barbed-wire fence to keep fans off the field. Stadiums were overcrowded and fans loved invading the field to celebrate with the player who scored the goal, that is the reason for precaution. But there were also cases of violence against referees and players (MURRAY, 2000, p. 88)

Besides some occasional championships and friendly matches, fans of South American clubs had to wait until the 1960s to witness the emergence of a continental championship among clubs, the CONMEBOL Libertadores (Castro, 1988). With such competition, not only the South American clubs and their supporters began to circulate in the continent with greater regularity, but the event also allowed the confrontation of its champions with the victorious European clubs of UEFA Euro Cup. The structural relationship – South America versus Europe – was thus fed back in the second half of the 20th century, passing from the national team's level to that concerning national club associations.

Over 55 years of existence, Copa Libertadores has allowed the projection of the clubs such as Peñarol and Nacional, from Uruguay; Olimpia and Cerro Porteño, from Paraguay; Colo-Colo, Universidad Católica, Universidad de Chile and Cobreloa, from Chile; Once Caldas, América de Cali, Atlético Nacional and Deportivo Cali, from Colombia; LDU and Emelec, from Ecuador; Universitario and Sporting Cristal, from Peru; Bolívar, from Bolivia, among many others, out of a total of 168 teams that already contested in this cup.

The list can be expanded, when considering the Argentinean and Brazilian teams. As for Argentinean clubs, the most renowned on the continent were Independiente, Racing, Boca Juniors, River Plate, Estudiantes de la Plata, the

Argentinos Juniors, Vélez Sársfield, Newell's Old Boys and San Lorenzo, concentrated in the cities of Buenos Aires and La Plata.

With respect to Brazil, we should mention clubs such as Santos, Cruzeiro, Flamengo, Grêmio, São Paulo, Vasco da Gama, Internacional, Palmeiras and Corinthians, coming from the South and Southeast of the country, which arrived at decisive phases and won titles. Recently incorporated into the competition, the Mexicans stood out because of clubs such as América, Tigres and Cruz Azul. In addition to these three, from the capital, it is worth mentioning Chivas, from Guadalajara (Vital, 2014).

Conclusions and final thoughts

The previous description gives us elements to conclude with a few more general reflections on the potentialities and limitations concerning the existence of a Latin American football imaginary. First, we must consider the historical limits of the scope of the idea of Latin America as a cultural, intellectual and territorial unity.

Such limitations relate to the fragmented relationship of its countries with the various metropolises that colonized it, sharpening particularities. Perhaps one of the most clamant examples of that is the difference, in the 19th century, between the independent republics of the so-called Hispanic America and the case of Brazil, country of continental dimensions, colonized by Portugal and considered the "America's exotic plant", for keeping the monarchy after its independence.

The configuration of a unified Latin America acquires a more convincing sense in the course of the 20th century, less by its similarities and more by the growth of importance of the United States. The contrastive reaction of other countries on the American continent can be observed in the face of North American power in political, economic and cultural terms.

However, we suggest that, interestingly, despite all the penetration of the Anglo-Saxon values, modern sports codified in the Victorian England were partly undertaken by the US, which were not able to shape their own sports with the same force in the Latin American sports culture. In the particular case of football, the influence was reversed, from Latin America to the United States, with a initial resistance. Over time, the gradual incorporation of the world of *soccer* in the

United States, from the football popularization in the world and in the Latin American region in particular.

Thus, the specular relationship of football in Latin America continued to be built in relation to its European metropolises in either the economic influence of Britain, whether the various cultural and football exchanges among South American and Latin European countries. It is certain that the World Cups were essential in this process, as they allowed to contrast playing styles in continental scale, but it is also right that other competitions involving national teams were important.

In similar proportion, the tour of European clubs by Latin America in the 1910s, and the movement of Latin American clubs across Europe, from the 1920s on, are equally important in the formation of such exchanges and identities.

Of all the experiments lived throughout the 20th century, it can be concluded that the most important ones to reflect upon transnational identities in football, such as the region or the Latin American continent, are the clashes between national teams, especially for Copa América. This was created in 1975, as the expansion of the South American Championship, invented in 1916.

A landmark of this competition in this imaginary occurred in 1993, when Conmebol incorporates Mexico into Copa America, a nation that had joined NAFTA, an economic bloc, led by the United States and also composed by Canada. If from the geographical point of view Mexico officially composes North America, it is known that in social, ethnic and cultural terms the Mexican people has historical affinities with Latin America; this places the country to a certain extent in an ambiguous and frontier identity position.

As for the club context, the continental scale watched a decisive step with the creation of the suggestively titled *Copa Libertadores da América* (Liberators of America Cup) from 1960. The reunion of South American clubs in this tournament follows the guidance of what happened in Copa América and, at the end of the 1990s, it begins to invite Mexican teams to participate in the competition. Thus, this is an important reason in the scale expansion, from South to Latin America. This helps in the formation of a Latin American identity of football, although the Central American and Caribbean countries and Antilles continue without participating in the said competition, more integrated into the North American sphere of political, cultural and sports influence.

Far from being a passive reflection of what happens in society, the modern sports constitute thought provoking observation laboratories of decision-making powers, political directions at stake and vectors of identity collectively formulated by a certain people, by a particular culture or by a particular continent. The example of football in Latin America is one of the perfect expressions of that.

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