

It's her Gooaaaalll!!!!!!: Centering Latina Athletes in Yamile Saied Méndez's *Furia*

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There's a story my extended family likes to tell every time I visit them in Mexico. It was the year of the 1994 FIFA world cup and I, like all my cousins, was soccer mad, especially for the Mexican squad led by goalie Jorge Campos. Unlike my female cousins, and like my male cousins however, I also played. In fact, I had been playing already for years despite only being 10. That year, Mexico made a strong showing in the group stage making it to the final 16 to face Bulgaria. My cousins and I painted our faces and wore our finest jerseys for the match; I was decked out in full Campos tie-die gear. Mexico lost the game in penalties. We were devastated.

This is not the story though.

The next day my twelve-year-old cousin Luis and I decided to recreate the penalties of the game. I can't remember who played for Mexico and who played for Bulgaria. All I know is that I shocked the family, when to my delight, I won the battle for household soccer supremacy. Best of all, I made Luis cry.

I was used to this. As part of the all-girls soccer team, the Ithaca Thunder, we regularly faced and beat boys' teams, as there weren't enough girls' soccer teams to play against. And generally, the boys did not take it well. Women's soccer was still growing in the United States after the first FIFA recognized women's world cup soccer in 1991, which the US team won. And even though women's soccer was established in Mexico in 1963 when many countries still had bans on the female version of the sport, it never garnered the attention of women across the border (Nadal, "Costa Rica").

Still, the reason why I wanted to play soccer was to be like my Mexican male soccer idols. My love for *fútbol* came from my Mexican father and his family. Yet ironically, in that same Mexican family, my desire to be more than a spectator was looked upon as odd. I was able to play soccer, unlike my Mexican female cousins, because I grew up in the United States.

Camila Hassan, the protagonist of Yamile Saied Méndez's Young Adult (YA) novel *Furia* (2020) faces a similar irony. Growing up in Rosario, Argentina, Camila is expected to be a supporter of her older brother's soccer career, but the idea that she would be interested in soccer herself is unimaginable. Again, in one of the most soccer fanatical countries in the world, women are relegated to spectators and supporters, not protagonists.

Méndez seeks to change this narrative in her novel by centering a young female soccer player. Camila, 17, a mixed raced Argentine from a lower middle-class family, dreams of playing soccer more than anything else, a fact which she hides from her family. Her mother dreams of her becoming a doctor, while her abusive father barely sees her at all. They are all focused on her older brother Pablo's career as a professional soccer player for the local team. Unfortunately, when her team qualifies for a South American tournament, she needs her parents' permission to take her career any further. Her dream is to play in the United States on a soccer scholarship and by playing in the tournament she hopes to be seen and approached by a talent scout. There's also a love story in the book complicating Camila's life, but given the choice, she ultimately chooses soccer, joining the fictional professional team the Utah Royals in the end. Amidst the backdrop of femicide and with a multiracial cast not often highlighted in Argentina, Méndez creates a story in which cultural norms—especially patriarchy—must be critically engaged and addressed in order to achieve a fulfilling athletic career. It is exactly the type of YA novel I wish had been on my shelf alongside

those Jorge Campos and Mexican national team posters. Perhaps then I would have had more of a vocabulary for how out of place I felt both in Mexico as the only girl in my family who played soccer and in the United States, where I was the only Latina on the team.

As Frederick Luis Aldama notes, since at least the late 19th century, Latinx writers have begun to write for young readers, on a variety of topics (7).¹ As Latinx writers have moved into the 21st century, new authors have continued to push the boundaries and borders of young adult writing centering Latinx protagonists in many types of stories like noir, sci-fi, fantasy, historical realism, urban bildungsroman, and suspense, among many others (Aldama 8). One area, however, that still seems to be lacking is representation of Latinx characters in sport-themed young adult literature, especially young women. Here, *Furia* is a welcome contribution, a unique addition to a growing body of work.

Yamile Saied Méndez's *Furia* represents a new opening in Latinx YA representation, especially for young Latina readers whose dreams go beyond patriarchal cultural norms. In a world in which professional Latina athletes are often seen more as oddities than role models, *Furia* presents an alternative model, not just for sport enthusiasts, but for all those young women who are told their dreams make them unladylike, strange, or different. More than just a soccer story, Méndez's work comments on the gendered inequalities and assumptions, both in our public and private lives. Set in a country where one woman is killed every 32 hours, most often by former or current partners, Méndez powerfully connects young Argentine women's desire to play soccer, for example, with their demands to move freely in society without fear of bodily harm or violence (Valent). Thus, in *Furia*, soccer becomes a stage in which gender intersects with class, race and sexuality to dispel harmful stereotypes that hold back Latina excellence as well as address the epidemic of femicide in Latin America² (Valent).

Latinas and Sports: Few Athletic Role Models

As Jorge Iber, Samuel O. Regalado, Jose M. Alamillo and Arnoldo De León note in *Latinos in U.S. Sport: A History of Isolation, Cultural Identity, and Acceptance*, athletics have played a major role in Latinx life since the early 19th century. Sports have been part of Latinx adaptation to mainstream American culture, offered an escape from marginalized socio-economic realities, and also put into stark relief the way athletic participation represents the gendered, racialized, and classed realities of US society. Moreover, exclusion based on stereotypes about Latinx athletic abilities severely limited their participation, especially at the professional level, throughout history. And while Christopher González concludes that "where Latina/os were once excluded, they are now invited," his article, "Latina/os and the American Sports Landscape" focuses overwhelmingly on men, without addressing the gendered aspects of Latinx sports. Latinas are again overlooked in Iber's 2014 edited volume, *More Than Just Peloteros: Sports and US Latino Communities*.

This is not meant to be a criticism of the scholarship, but rather a recognition that when it comes to Latinas in sports, representation has a long way to go. As Iber notes in his essay for the National Park Service American Latino Theme Study:

"Unlike their male counterparts who look up to Latino sports heroes, Latinas have had few athletic role models and have encountered gender barriers in American sports. Latinas have faced reluctant parents who expected them to help with childcare after school whereas their brothers enjoyed more freedom playing sports. In addition, the concept of 'after-school sports' has been a new concept to many

immigrant parents arriving from poor Latin American countries” (“Beyond the Latino Sports Hero”).

Not surprisingly due to both lack of role models and cultural expectations, Latinas lag behind Latinos and white girls, in terms of participation on high school sports teams (Torres Burtka).³

One much touted area of athletic ascendance for Latinos is of course, soccer.⁴ According to The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports, “The 2020 Racial and Gender Report Card: Major League Soccer” Report, 33.4 percent of Major League Soccer players are Latino. As Christopher Shinn has noted, for U.S. Latinx communities, *fútbol* has constituted a source of cultural pride and a way to stay connected to their homeland. Meanwhile, at the local level, Latinos across the country have created adult soccer leagues which have served as social clubs, helped immigrants adjust to life in the US and integrate into local community, and strengthened family and kinship ties (Price and Whitworth, Pescador). These leagues are especially important as the professional soccer pipeline overwhelmingly relies on a youth club system that favors white middle and upper-class communities, excluding Latino players who cannot afford high costs of club soccer (Andrews).

Unfortunately, these economic realities alongside cultural norms of gender have gravely impacted the participation of Latinas in soccer, despite its huge importance in many of our countries of origin. Since winning the first women’s world cup in 1991, the United States women’s national soccer team (UWNST) has inspired a huge increase in girls and women’s soccer participation and viewership (Baxter). Nevertheless, again Latinas are being left behind. As Michael Simon Johnson and other have noted, no members of the UWNST are Latina, reflecting larger systemic issues:

Though they may be the current world champions and holding the most world titles, the United States women’s national soccer team is far from a beacon of diversity, especially when compared to their male counterparts. With few women of color — and no Latinas— the team is extremely white, in spite of soccer’s entrenched place in Latin American culture. The problem, though, is not that Latinas and other girls of color aren’t interested in the sport, but that youth soccer’s pay-to-play system favors not necessarily the most talented children, but the children of parents who can afford elite clubs’ steep fees.

To this, a former Mexican Women’s National Football Team member adds:

There’s a lot of documented and undocumented Latinos in the United States that don’t have transportation, they can’t get to the teams here in Houston, which is where I’m at now. There’s nothing inside the 610 loop, there’s no club teams. All of the good club teams are all out in the suburbs. If you’re a Latina girl and you are going to high school in one of the lower income areas there are no soccer programs there (Elsy and Scott 26).

As a result, according to the latest NCAA reports from 2017-2018, while 14 percent of the NCAA soccer players were Latino men, only 8 percent of female soccer players were Latina women (Plaschke). Significantly, not only does this affect the make-up of professional women soccer players, but opportunities for college scholarships.

As Paul Cuadros has noted, Latina soccer players are pulled between traditional expectations of women's roles and their love of the game (227). This schism is even more extreme in Latin America. As Joshua Nadal has written in *Fútbol!: Why Soccer Matters in Latin America*, soccer is more than just a sport. Rather, "it is woven into regional identities and the historical narratives of Latin American nations" (2), narratives which celebrate masculinity, unity, and progress across the entire region. Part of that narrative has been the exclusion of women, for whom soccer was considered incompatible. Instead, "motherhood was seen as the patriotic duty of women—especially women with the 'right' racial and socioeconomic profile. The nation needed healthy mothers to raise good citizens to benefit the *patria*" (*Fútbol!* 218). Thus, while Nadal shows that Brazilian, Mexican, and Costa Rican women have played soccer since its arrival in Latin America, their participation was seen as threatening to men's control. Although women's soccer was popular and organized enough to fill Mexico City's Estadio Azteca with 110,000 people for the 1971 Women's World Cup, hostility, lack of support, and outright legal bans have stunted Latin American women's involvement in the sport. For example, in the first book on women's soccer in Latin America, *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America*, Nadal, joined by Brenda Esley, narrates how in most of Latin America, little has improved in recent decades (145). Instead, the 1971 Women's World Cup (composed of just six squads), would not be followed up by FIFA until 1991 reflecting what Nadal and Esley describe as "the history of women's sports in Latin America: brief periods of effervescence followed by long periods of apparent inactivity" (245). For example, Mexico did not establish a women's league until 2016, Colombia established its league in 2017, and Argentina in 2019. Most other countries do not have professional leagues, and even those who do are paid very poorly (Lombo).

Argentina, the setting of *Furia*, has a long history of women's soccer despite its most recent debates about lack of support and gender inequality. Nadal and Esley, for example, find examples of women's soccer teams in Argentina from as early as 1923, and futboleras popped up on factory teams in increasing numbers in the 1930s (*Futboleras* 28-29). Female participation, however, was not without controversy. According to Nadal and Esley, "As women's sporting activity increased, so did concern over its impact... While male footballers were seen as models of virility and heterosexual prowess, journalists, officials, and fans cast doubt on women athletes' femininity and heterosexuality" (30). Significantly, Camila's father calls her a "marimacho," a derogatory term for lesbian, more than once in the novel, reflecting how little has changed for female athletes in Argentina. Despite these barriers, Argentina was one of two teams from Latin America to participate in the 1971 Women's World Cup (Alabaceres and Esley). Unfortunately, this pioneering role in women's soccer did not translate to financial support or opportunities for the Argentine *futbolera*. By Dec. 2016, the Argentine men's team ranked first in the world, while the women's team was inactive between 2015 and 2017 (Alabaceres and Esley). Active again in September 2017, they went on strike due to the lack of basic compensation – for several months they were not paid the approximately \$8.50 per diem for training or agreed upon travel costs for national players to reach practice (*Futboleras* 255). Later, in July 2019, Head Coach Borrello left off the team numerous players, including the team captain from participating in the Pan American games because they criticized the professionalism and efficacy of team management (Alabaceres and Esley). To add insult to injury, their male counterparts don't support them either, openly opposing gender equality (Alabaceres and Esley). As a result, the only real option for top Latin American female soccer players is to head to the United States National Women's Soccer League. The fact that Marta Vieira da Silva, a Brazilian soccer player often regarded as the greatest female soccer player of all time, plays in the United States professional league, rather than Brazil's,

underscores this reality. For this reason, it is no surprise that in Yamile Saied Méndez's fictional rendering of Argentine soccer, the young women in her narrative dream of US soccer scholarships.

Nevertheless, women's soccer in Argentina has found an important ally in the current feminist movement known by the hashtag #NiUnaMenos. Organized around the issue of epidemic femicides and other forms of gendered and sexualized violence, the coalition of feminist organizations has inspired many demonstrations and activist actions across Argentina and spreading throughout Latin America since 2015 (Friedman and Tabbush). Their rallying cry of "Ni Una Menos" ("Not One Less") reflects both the simple demand that not one more woman is the victim of violence perpetrated by a male and more broadly, a call for women's empowerment and equal representation (Capece). Expanding to also address issues of unequal working conditions, cultural representation, and reproductive rights, #NiUnaMenos has brought millions to the streets, inspiring female soccer players to see themselves as part of the feminist movement. According to the team's captain Estefanía Banini, the feminist movement has "been very important and has given us a lot of support ... It is important as women to raise our voices and let everyone know we are equal, that we want the same rights" (Elsy and Nadal, "How Argentina"). As a result, #NiUnaMenos has not only resulted in increased reporting in Argentina and the passage of local laws against gender violence, the movement has also helped to trigger a larger conversation in Latin America about male-female relations, machismo, and human rights (Luengo 411-12).

Fútbol Feminista: Furia's Representation of Latin American Women in Soccer

Significantly, the #NiUnaMenos movement forms an important contextual background for *Furia*. As the novel opens, young women and girls are the victims of violence, splashed amongst the news. Yet in her family, as for many others, it is the women who are blamed for their fates – they hung out with the "wrong crowd" or stayed out too late. Amidst marches for justice, Camila's mother labels the #NiUnaMenos movement "all feminist propaganda" (4), while her brother warns that if she becomes the next missing girl on a poster, "it'll be your fault if you are" (203). Thus, throughout much of the novel the frequency of femicides reflect yet another way to control Camila's behavior into that of an ideal woman, virginal and subservient to men. Although she plays soccer against her family's wishes, she only does so clandestinely. Having been called a "marimacho" by her father at age twelve, she has learned that part of her identity is unacceptable to her family and must be hidden.

By the end of the novel, Camila is no longer willing to accept either her family's or society's treatment of women in Argentina. Once a bystander to the movement, when a sister of a former teammate goes missing and is later found dead, she joins the march in her honor with her team (294). Through #NiUnaMenos, Camila finds her voice: "Inside me, a fury grew and spread until I couldn't hold the words in anymore. 'Queremos Justicia!' I shouted.... 'Ni una menos,' I sang out. 'Vivas nos queremos.' The chant spread like wildfire. Every voice, every heart demanded that the world let us live" (294). Significantly, like the real life Argentine *futboleras*, Méndez makes the connection between the movement and soccer crystal clear through the coach's words:

Daring to play in this tournament is a rebellion, chicas. Not too long ago, playing fútbol was forbidden to women *by law*. But we've always found a way around it. Those who came before us played in circuses, in summer fairs, dressed as men.

How many of you had to quit when you were around twelve, the same age as Eda, just because you dared to grow up? ... Let's honor Eda and all the other girls we've lost by doing what we love and doing it well. (295-296).

It is no coincidence that Camila gains her voice in the women's movement at the same time she begins to share her soccer secret, first with her skeptical mother and then with her disapproving father.

This feminist awakening is incredibly important in Camila's story because the #NiUnaMenos movement is not just relevant to her opportunities and safety in public life, but in her private life as well. Her father is both controlling and mentally and physically abusive, a dynamic which escalates as the story develops. While in the beginning of the novel, Camila's father largely ignores her to focus on (and exploit) her brother Pablo's professional soccer career, he turns his attention to Camila when he learns of her relationship with childhood friend and international soccer star, Diego. However, when he learns Camila is both playing soccer and attending #NiUnaMenos marches, he explodes, physically attacking her and smashing her phone. A former soccer player himself, whose career was cut short by injury, he paints himself as a victim in a family led astray. But for the first time, neither Camila nor her mom will accept his abuse: "You can hit us, and yell, and try to run from the consequences, but your time to pay is here, Papá," Camila says, demanding accountability (307). Her mother echoes Camila: "'Go,' she yelled at him. 'You won't hurt us anymore' (308)." Shortly after, he is arrested by police.

In Yamile Saied Méndez's *Furia* then, soccer is both an escape for Camila and a reminder of the realities of women's position in Argentina. Her team plays on an uneven field with potholes. One teammate's abusive boyfriend makes her quit the team, echoing Camila's situation with her father. The players dream of careers in the United States because of a lack of opportunities in Argentina. Meanwhile her brother and childhood friend turned romantic interest Diego, have both local professional and international opportunities. When Camila plays soccer, she is lost in the game, but afterward she cannot celebrate her successes, hiding her playing from her parents in an act which is increasingly stressful on her psyche. Meanwhile every time she comes home late from a practice or game, she has to worry about becoming one of the many dead or disappeared young women who are then victim-blamed as much as they are mourned. As such, Yamile Saied Méndez's novel, like the work of Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadal, demonstrates the way sports, in this case soccer, intersect with gender, class, race, sexuality and notions of nationhood.

Argentina has long seen itself a white nation of European descendants (Bastia and vom Hau 475). Its black roots as well as the contributions of African descendants have largely been erased in popular memory (Edwards 8).⁵ Indigenous people don't fare better (Delrio et. al 138). This lack of representation also extends to soccer—Argentina's soccer roster is much less diverse than other Latin American or even European teams (Décoste). On the other hand, as Méndez emphasizes from the first pages of *Furia*, the Hassan family is not white, but rather a mix of Russian, Palestinian, Andalusian and Black grandparents (1). In her family, Camila is called "negrita" (127) and her best friend, Roxanne Fong, is Chinese-Argentinian. Nevertheless, this does not mean her family is not susceptible to ideals of white beauty. Hassan's father, for example, comments on the desirability of Diego as a love interest even though he was abandoned as a child because he is white, "blanquito, with his light brown hair and those greenish eyes" (123). As such, Méndez reimagines not just Argentina, but through it, soccer as its national pastime and pride. Through a diverse cast of strong female characters, she puts forth a version of Argentine soccer that is woman-centered and racially diverse.

In this new multiracial female-centered vision of Argentina, class realities also intersect with gender expectations. Camila's father Andrés puts endless pressure on her brother Pablo to "save the family" from their lower-class life, so much so that it becomes clear Pablo comes to resent the career his father chose for him (34-5). Meanwhile, Camila's contribution to the family's salvation only becomes relevant through her relationship to Diego: "You need to play your cards smart. He has a lot of money and an amazing career ahead of him. Imagine where he'll be five years from now. Your life could turn into a fairy tale if you're smart as you pretend to be. Yours and ours, because of course you'll help your family when fortune smiles on you" (122). At just 17, Camila is a stellar student with a certificate in English translation, yet in her father's eyes, her only utility to the family is through a wealthy relationship.

These gendered differences go far beyond one character though. Her older brother, though supportive, does not take her soccer aspirations seriously. Even in her neighborhood she is only known through the men in her family. As she reflects, "In my barrio, most of the people didn't know my name or even that I existed. To them, I was only Pablo's sister, or Andrés and the seamstress's daughter – my mom, too, was nameless. But I was determined to leave my mark" (31). It is perhaps in her relationship with international soccer phenomenon, Diego, that Méndez puts these inequalities in starkest relief. Camila and Diego are both from the same neighborhood, they are both natural players and once-in-a-generation talents. Yet it is Diego who becomes the global superstar, drives a BMW and lives a life of luxury in Italy. All Camila has is her dreams: "Diego was living a life that I could only dream of, no matter how much I loved fútbol, no matter how great an athlete I might be" (51).

For this reason, the final aspect of Camila's growth as a feminist *futbolera* is to stand up for her dreams not only to family and society, but to Diego as well. Though not a villainous character, Diego is not prepared for Camila's talent nor her dreams. Although he calls her a "female Messi" (190), he also admits he had very gendered expectations of what their relationship would be like: "Here I was, thinking I was coming back to rescue you, and you're becoming your own savior" (192). His desire to "rescue" Camila also does not immediately subside despite seeing her talented play. After her father is imprisoned for domestic violence, Diego flies back to Argentina from Italy with the intention of taking her back with him. When she declines his offer in order to play in her first international tournament, he breaks up with her. "What about *my* dreams?" "What about *my* career, Diego?" Camila asks before he walks away (317).

In this moment, Camila breaks an abusive family cycle dependent on victimhood and savior narratives. Her father "sacrificed" himself to marry her 17-year-old pregnant mother, giving up his dreams. Her brother Pablo needs to "save" the family. Diego must "rescue" her. Instead, alongside her newly single mother, the women of the Hassan family chart a new path of female empowerment and independence.

Whether I liked it or not, I had to acknowledge that my mother and I had a lot in common. We weren't as different as I liked to think. I wasn't better than her. Our family was stuck in a cosmic hamster wheel of toxic love, making the same mistakes, saying the same words, being hurt in the same ways generation after generation. I didn't want to keep playing a role in this tragedy of errors. I was *la Furia*, after all. I'd be the one to break the wheel (130).

In breaking this toxic cycle, Camila is able to both forge healthier relationships with the women in her life and embrace her place as a role model for young Latinas who now watch her play

professionally for the Utah Royals. Breaking both familial and societal expectations, Camila's trajectory represents the possibilities of a *fútbol* feminista - an empowered, independent Latina identity grounded in woman-centered action and activism that goes far beyond the soccer field. In this way, Méndez represents not just a soccer story, but also a flourishing Latin American feminist movement that is challenging both the region's misogynist cultures in a private sphere as well as the state institutions that enable systemic abuse and discrimination in the public sphere (Torres).

Conclusion: Increasing Diverse Characters in Latinx YA

Camila Hassan represents an important figure in contemporary Latinx YA for a number of reasons. First, there is almost a complete absence of YA novels about Latinas in sports. Likewise, more generally, there are also very few writings about Latinos in soccer despite the popularity of the sport. As writer and former teen librarian Kelly Jensen notes in her 2019 roundup for *BookRiot*:

Likewise, it's challenging still to find YA books about sports featuring teens of color. Certainly, there are a good number included on this list, but, it remains underrepresented in a number of arenas—there is a distinct lack of Latinx teens, for example, excelling in soccer in YA, despite the fact they do in the world around us, as seen from my own time working in libraries with teens (“Swish, Swing”)

While white author Kami Garcia (she is married to a Cuban man), introduces biracial (half-Cuban, half-white) soccer player Peyton Rios in her YA romance novel *Broken Beautiful Hearts*, the story centers more on an abusive relationship than athletic aspirations. And while Monica Brown, a Peruvian-Jewish writer, has created the *Lola Levine* children's series illustrated by Angela Dominguez about a biracial, bicultural second grader who loves soccer, this still leaves very little depth of content for Latina soccer loving teens.

In *Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks: Outsiders in Chicanx and Latinx Young Adult Literature*, editors Trevor Boffone and Cristina Herrera focus on authors who write Latinx characters that challenge mainstream or cultural pressure to be “hip” (3). Although their focus on “what it means to be an ‘outsider’ in Latinx and mainstream communities” emphasizes “artists and punks,” “superheros and other worldly beings,” “LatiNerds and bookworms” and “Non-Cholos in the Hood,” Latina athletes also fit into this outsider status. As studies on the low Latina participation in athletics and the marginalization of Latin American women's soccer alongside Camila's story of having to hide her playing from her parents for fear of being ostracized demonstrate, a love of sports is considered “weird” for Latinas (Boffone and Herrera 4). Moreover, although soccer has become increasingly popular for white women in the United States, lack of opportunities, alongside Latinx cultural ideas of womanhood, keep Latinas sidelined. However, as Boffone and Herrera also note, there is power and possibility in this outsider status. Building on Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of “El Mundo Zurdo” they add, “From here, they can transform the societies around them, the same societies that have previously marked them as outsiders” (Boffone and Herrera 7).

Camila is clearly one such character. In his 2019 column on Latina soccer in Los Angeles, Bill Plaschke notes how the young Latina soccer players struggle to look up to a U.S. women's soccer team “that doesn't look like them,” instead idolizing male players from Latin America (“Column”). Méndez is clearly aware of this reality. Significantly, she closes her novel with a scene that gestures to a different future. Camila, now playing for the US professional team the

Utah Royals, is approached by two Latina girls after one of her games for an autograph. Now in the US, Camila is clearly representing a new type of role model for Latina soccer players as Méndez is demonstrating the important role a former “outsider” can have on those around them.

Pointedly, this is a role Yamile Saied Méndez knows all too well is necessary for young Latina women. Despite her enthusiasm for the sport, Méndez never played soccer as a young woman. Like so many Latinas, she was never given the opportunity: “I grew up in Argentina and, at that time, they didn’t have teams or playing opportunities for girls. I did grow up a huge fan of the game like everyone else. The neighborhood you were born in determined which team you rooted for, forever” (Johnson, J.). Like Camila, however, Méndez had more opportunities in the United States, which she is passing down to a next generation. “When I came to the United States when I was 19 years old, I began to play recreationally and the girls I was playing with had so much more experience than I did because they grew up playing from a very young age. But, my children play now. We’re at the soccer pitch all day, every day” (Johnson, J.)

More than soccer however, Méndez presents a new version of Latina identity, one who is not only an outsider due to her athletic interests but also due to her politics. This is also an important emerging trend in Latinx YA. As Marilisa Jiménez García notes:

Whereas earlier generations emphasized stories of migration and assimilation, recent Latinx YA serves as a window into how authors narrate the promises and failures of cultural nationalism of past generations and how they imagine youth participating in revolutionary practices today, including accessing alternative forms of literature and education beyond and apart from established academia (231).

Through the inclusion of the #NiUnaMenos movement, then, Méndez demonstrates the way feminist social movements can lead to a reshaping of the family - and through that the nation - from one that is patriarchal and abusive, to one that is female centered and supportive. As such, *Furia* is both at the center of debates about what it means to be Latina, while arguing for expanded parameters for that debate. In dedicating her book “For all las Incorregibles” (incorregibles), she powerfully makes visible all those - from the soccer fields to the literary world- who have long been silenced, encouraging women to never be silent again.

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Endnotes

1 For more on the history of Latinx Young Adult novels, see Aldama, Rojas Clark et. al, Day, and York.

2 According to Roberto Valent, the UN Resident Coordinator in Argentina, Latin America alone is home to 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of women being murdered in the world.

3 Vera Lopez has further researched young Latinas' lack of sports participation. According to Lopez: "The Latina girls in this study most frequently cited gender-related barriers as the main reason for not feeling comfortable participating in school sports and physical activity" (388).

4 The other well-known exception, of course is baseball. On opening day in 2020 for example, Latinos made up 29.9 percent of Major League Baseball rosters (The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, "The 2020 Racial and Gender Report Card: Major League Baseball").

5 For more on Argentina's black population, see Andrews, Borucki and Gates and Lewis.