

Women, Football, and Francoism: Lesbians and the Formation of Social Networks through Women's Football in Barcelona, 1970–1979

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to analyse the appearance of women's football in Spain in the 1970s and to show the links between the sport and the creation of a lesbian community in the city of Barcelona. The study will examine the ways in which the construction of women footballer's sexual identities was shaped by their participation in this sport, given the repressive context of the era. Oral interviews constituted the main method used in the study. This historiographical technique allowed us to gather oral histories from a number of women footballers, most of them lesbians. The information provided by these first-hand sources was also enriched and corroborated through the use of additional documentary sources (both from the sporting press and from other publications), which placed the first-hand testimony in the proper context and served to confirm some of the information collected in the interviews. By way of conclusion, the study established that, in the context of the lack of visibility of female homosexuality in the era and the hostility of the authorities and the public institutions under the dictatorship, women's football provided a valuable space.

Women's football in the final stages of the Franco regime, between 1970 and 1979 – a period that witnessed the decriminalization of homosexuality in Spain – saw the development of interesting social networks formed by lesbians who took part in this sport.¹ Academic publications on the social and cultural history of sports during this period are far from exhaustive, however, and much of the work that has appeared on the topic has been limited in scope to specific issues or focused on certain geographical areas.² More specifically, there is an overall lack of comprehensive studies of the issue dealing with Spain as a whole.³ Nonetheless, in recent years a considerable number of publications have touched on women and sports under the dictatorship.⁴ The same period also saw a proliferation of research on men's football,⁵ but the scholarly interest in women's football has not grown at the same pace. Notably, the links between women's football and lesbianism in Spain toward the end of the Franco regime has yet to be explored within the historical literature on the country. In fact, no historical studies of the broader issue of homosexuality and sports in Spain have been published at all. Within this article, then, an attempt is made to break new ground in the emerging field of sports and sexuality.⁶

International researchers like Erik Jensen who have studied sports and sexuality have noted that both male and female homosexuality have long been present in sports, dating back at least as far as Ancient Greece, and in the twentieth century this presence has only expanded.⁷ It is true that during the twentieth century the issue of homosexuality (among both men and women) was often the sort of taboo subject that fuelled public controversy in the sports world, along with other issues connected to race and differences in social groups. The big difference between lesbian and bisexual women and their male counterparts was that 'women athletes are often expected to be lesbians; men athletes are seldom expected to be gay'.⁸ In any case, lesbians who participated in sports found it easier than gay men to form communities where they could express their sexual

identities, even though both homosexual men and women did create these kinds of spaces starting in the 1970s. That decade saw the advent of the first gay sporting associations, groups in which both male and female gay and bisexual athletes came together to fight for their rights.

The principal research method used in this study was oral history, as 'memories, autobiographies and life stories have opened up possibilities to gain access to new historical subjects and areas that had traditionally been undervalued or largely excluded from more traditional historical accounts'.⁹ This is the case with the voices of women under the Franco dictatorship. These voices were largely silenced, and as such, oral history research helped to gain access to their experiences. The information in this study was gathered via semi-structured, open-ended interviews. It was then expanded upon and confirmed using documentary sources (from press accounts, official documents and academic literature) in order to ensure the truthfulness and reliability of the first-hand data.

A single case study is used in this article, which provides an analysis and comparison of the experiences of five women who played football for the Club Deportivo Español Femenino (CDEF) women's football team in Barcelona (Catalonia) in the 1970s. This was a period that spanned the last five years of the Franco dictatorship and the start of the transition to democracy in Spain. The information gathered from the interviews was analyzed using a series of categories, each with its corresponding descriptors and indicators. These categories were established on the basis of three dimensions: sports, identity and sexual orientation, and lesbian social networks in football. As a result, a total of 11 categories and 45 indicators were created, which are described in the following Tables 1–3.

The sample was taken from CDEF players because of the club's reputation as a pioneer in women's football over this period. The accounts of these women were contrasted with written sources. The results of this study should be understood as representative of a limited circle of sports practice in a specific urban setting, namely Barcelona at the end of the dictatorship. Understandably, a broader vision of the phenomenon in Spain should be based on new works with different geographic scope.

Table 1. Sports dimension.

Table 2. Identity and sexual orientation dimension.

Table 3. Lesbian social networks in football dimension.

The re-emergence of women's football at the end of the franco era

Starting in the 1960s, Spain under the Franco dictatorship experienced an unprecedented era of economic growth that was accompanied by some timid gestures toward political reform. The period saw a generational turnover in the regime's leadership, and the growing number of technocrats present in government agencies worked to bring Spain into line with other Western European countries in a number of areas.¹⁰ The social changes that had occurred elsewhere in the continent finally spread to Spain thanks to tourism, emigration and the media, and the country gradually began to free itself from some of the strict constraints of the Franco dictatorship. These stirrings of transformation were expressed in the emergence of social movements and student groups.¹¹ But the structures of state power under the regime remained intact and largely unaffected.

Members of the younger generations, who had not lived through the country's Civil War or experienced the great hardships of the immediate post-war years, expressed a strong desire for

greater freedom and a yearning to escape from the moral strictures that had been imposed by the Catholic Church over the first few decades of the dictatorship.¹² As part of this transformation, beginning in the 1960s tourists visiting Spain began to introduce locals to more contemporary leisure activities, as well as to new customs and modern lifestyles. Spain's social structure and economic landscape were transformed in a rapid process of urbanization and industrialization, driven by foreign investment in the country, demographic growth, migration from the countryside to cities, and emigration abroad.¹³

This modernization also included an increased interest in participation in sports—an interest that truly intensified with the return of democracy to the country. However, even during this final period of the dictatorship, Catalonia recorded 'an increase in the number of sports clubs joining federations and of licenses issued by these foundations'.¹⁴ Several factors contributed to these increases. Firstly, economic growth led to greater consumer demand for leisure activities, sports among them. Meanwhile, the arrival of televised sporting events in 1959 brought a new model of sports journalism to Spain and the world at large, and it helped elevate some of the male athletes of the time to mythical status. Beyond professional sports, the regime's avowed policy to ensure access to football for everyone led to a huge increase in participation.¹⁵ Intellectuals on the left criticized the promotion of football as an 'opiate' for the masses and lamented a lack of commitment to cultural activities.¹⁶ In any case, the efforts to popularize football were aimed exclusively at men.

Women's sports in the country received much less public support, but with little fanfare a number of Spanish women athletes were able to compete at the highest levels of some sports. Under Franco, Spain was slow to send women to compete in the Olympics, but in 1960 the regime allowed 11 women to attend the Games in Rome to compete in fencing, gymnastics and swimming. These sports and others allowed a first group of Spanish female athletes to gain public recognition. They included the swimmer María Paz Corominas (born in 1952), the skier Conchita Puig (born in 1953), and the ice skaters Pepita Cuevas (1942-2014) and Ascensión Villagrà (born in 1955). The track star Carmen Valero (born in 1955) merits special mention here. Although the regime had barred women from the sport as recently as 1961, Valero won world titles in cross country in 1976 and 1977.

Public sports policies and the creation of new sports facilities also played an important role during this period. Of special importance was the National Sports Facilities Plan of 1969-73, which called attention to the country's lack of these spaces and the great economic cost involved in addressing this issue.¹⁷ To make this plan a reality, local governments had to invest heavily. Meanwhile, the central government carried out a number of noteworthy campaigns to promote sports. Juan Antonio Samaranch, the National Delegate for Physical Education and Sports (1966-1970), sought to raise awareness of the benefits of participation in sports via initiatives such as the 'Contamos contigo' [Transl.: 'We are counting on you'] campaign. 'The vast majority of the Spanish public was familiar with this campaign, but this did not make sport more accessible to them'.¹⁸ Juan Gich, Samaranch's successor as the National Delegate for Physical Education and Sports (1970-1975), also oversaw a number of campaigns to promote participation. However, Gich himself admitted that in the 1970s the Franco regime's sports system collapsed as it was 'overwhelmed' due to both a lack of resources and to opposition from within the regime.¹⁹

This was the context for women's football when it returned to Spain, just as the sport was beginning to formalize its international institutions. In fact, though, the history of women's football in Spain can be traced back further, to 1914 and the first matches between the teams Giralda and Montserrat.²⁰ A number of women's matches were held during the Second Republic.²¹ This led in 1932 to the founding of teams such as Levante, España, Atlético and Valencia, which would go on to tour Latin America.²² However, the start of the dictatorship in 1939 meant the end of women's

sports, at least as they had been played during the Republic. The Franco regime's view of women, the body and physical activity differed sharply from the more liberal attitude that had prevailed during the republican years, as revealed by several recent studies analyzing the dictatorship's perspective on women's sports and their moral, cultural and physical effects on women.²³ In the words of Luis Agostí, the advisor to the Sección Femenina de Falange (the women's branch of Franco's Falange party), 'the idea was not for women to participate in sports like men, but rather to do so in accordance with their own forms of expression'.²⁴ Agostí also thought it was absurd to encourage women to take part in football, boxing, wrestling, rugby or in many gymnastics activities such as the horizontal bar, the rings, the parallel bars, and track and field, as these sports 'demanded qualities that were diametrically opposed to those of women's bodily constitution'.²⁵ The feminine qualities to which he was referring were both physical, related to motherhood and a supposed lack of strength, and moral, based on the period's dominant social stereotype of women as self-sacrificing, submissive, beautiful and fragile.

The year 1970 saw the re-emergence of women in football for the first time since before the Spanish Civil War. In several Spanish regions – including Catalonia, Andalusia, the Basque Country, the Levante region, and Asturias – new clubs were founded and competitions were organized thanks to a patchwork of private initiatives that were often met with disdain from football federations that did not look kindly upon the granting of any kind of official status to women's football.²⁶

These initial stirrings of women's football in Spain coincided with the emerging recognition of the sport in several other European countries. Between 1969 and 1971, the French, German and English football associations all granted official recognition

to women's football.²⁷ To cite some examples of the changes taking place, prior to 1970 the sport had been banned in Germany because it was thought that football went against women's nature, while in 1971 the English Football Association (FA) abandoned a fifty-year-old policy that had deemed football unsuitable for women and had asked member clubs not to allow women to play on their pitches²⁸.

The rise of women's football in Europe led to the founding of the Federation of Independent European Female Football (FIEFF) in Turin, Italy on February 25, 1970. The organization won the backing of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) in its efforts to promote what was sometimes called 'football for the fairer sex'. The first women's football conventions were held, along with the first world championships, although they were unofficial, in that they lacked the recognition of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA).²⁹ Teams from several countries were invited to play in the first Women's World Cup at the Stadio Comunale in Turin, with the Danish team ultimately winning the final over the Italian selection.³⁰

The Danish women would repeat their title a year later,³¹ again beating the host team in Mexico City.³² The tournaments were marked by the presence of some sexist stereotypes, including the use of pink goals,³³ and there was more of a focus on the commercial aspects of the events than on promoting the sport itself.³⁴

Despite the growth of women's football elsewhere in Europe, women in Spain were still facing opposition from federations and from the Sección Femenina del Movimiento (1936-1977), which was the Franco regime's Women's Section that was charged with indoctrinating Spanish women under the dictatorship and ensuring that they acted in accordance with the Falange's ideals of femininity. In 1971, the Sección Femenina went so far as to distribute a letter to its delegations asking them to 'abstain from promoting any activities related to women's football, as said activities do not have the approval of the Sección Femenina'.³⁵ However, the reality of the rise of women's football stood in stark contradiction to the regime's position. New teams were emerging around the country, a National Council was founded to help the sport develop,³⁶ a magazine covering women's

football was launched,³⁷ and the Spanish national women's football team played its first unofficial international matches.³⁸ All the while, the regime's Seccion Femenina and the Spanish Football Federation attempted to discredit and eradicate the sport. Jose Luis Perez-Paya, who served as the Spanish Federation's president from 1970 to 1975, said: 'It's not that I'm against women's football, but I don't like it either. Aesthetically, I don't find it very feminine. Women don't look very good in T-shirts and shorts. They would look better in any kind of traditional regional dress'.³⁹

The sport's rise and the accompanying contradictions were also apparent in the 1972 recommendation from UEFA that encouraged the group's member federations throughout Europe to consider measures to regulate and develop 'football for the fairer sex'. This interest on the part of football federations was not always a clear sign of a desire to include women in the sport, but instead often took the form of the instrumentalization of women athletes to attract mostly male spectators.⁴⁰ Despite the clear hostility of the Seccion Femenina and Spain's public institutions to the genuine promotion of women's football, the country was selected by the FIEFF to host the 3rd Women's World Cup, which was slated to be held in 1972. The Spanish government, however, ignored the federation's invitation, and the tournament was not held.⁴¹

After its initial success, women's football was able to sustain its existence thanks to teams that organised friendly matches or extra-official competitions, often involving difficult travel for participants, all made possible economically via help from neighbourhood businesses or the sale of raffle tickets. The girls bought their own cleats, travelled in private cars and played on dirt fields.⁴²

After a great deal of effort, women's football finally gained the recognition of the Royal Spanish Football Federation in 1980, 10 years after the sport's emergence and after most European countries had already officially recognized it.⁴³ Consequently, the Spanish national team was able to play its first official match against the Portuguese selection on February 5, 1983 in La Guardia.⁴⁴ It is perhaps not coincidental that women's football was officially recognized in Spain not long after the decriminalization of homosexuality in the country in 1979.

Women's Football and Lesbianism: A Path to Liberation

From its very start, the Franco dictatorship had been explicitly committed to 'encouraging heterosexuality, determined by reproduction and regulated by a bondvboth legal and divine'.⁴⁵ However, in the waning years of the regime, Spain's socioeconomic growth was viewed by the regime officials as a potential threat, as they believed it could undermine their ability to exert social and moral control over the population.⁴⁶ This concern helps explain the repressive new plan against homosexuality that was implemented during this period. Under the dictatorship, it was expected that 'The woman of the new Spain would be surprisingly similar to the woman of the old Spain, and the legislation of the new State made every effort to ensure this similarity'.⁴⁷ Among these legal measures was the Law on Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation of 1970. This legislation replaced the earlier Vagrancy Law (1933), a measure that the Franco regime had amended in 1954 with language criminalizing homosexuality. The 1970 law represented an attempt to maintain strict social and moral control over sexuality. At the same time, the regime introduced other new instruments of control and repression via the schools, religious institutions, the family and the media.⁴⁸

In spite of all these efforts at repression, there is very little data to either confirm or deny whether any legal action against lesbians was taken. Two women were prosecuted, according to research conducted by Ricardo Llamas and Fefa Vila, but there is insufficient detail about the cases, and of data on lesbians convicted under this law, in general.⁴⁹ From the perspective of the Spanish government, it was unnecessary to enforce these laws to imprison lesbians, because the responsibility for controlling women, viewed by the state as 'eternal minors',⁵⁰ lay with men (their fathers, brothers or husbands), as women were considered their dependents under the law. Thus, in Spain during the 1960 and 1970s, according to Perez-Sanchez, 'it was hard for homophobes to even conceive of lesbianism. They were incapable of imagining a form of sexual pleasure independent of male

heterosexual pleasure, and lesbianism was erased from the sexual scene of the late Franco era'.⁵¹ In a Catalan conference on women (Jornadas Catalanas de la Mujer, 1976) it was observed that female homosexuality is the most overlooked and unknown form of sexual behaviour.

This is no coincidence, but rather a symptom of the patriarchal ideology that denies the existence of women's sexual needs or only allows those needs that are devoted to serving men's will. The analysis of female sexuality is a key starting point for any liberation movement.⁵²

Thus, lesbians were invisible to society toward the end of the dictatorship in big cities and, of course, in rural areas. Unlike countries like the United States, where the gay communities in cities like San Francisco and New York had been organized since the 1960s, in Spain the repressive legislation and the culture of fear made gay activism all but impossible. The emergence of women's football in the context of the regime's heightened concern about homosexuality represented a highly dangerous scenario from the point of view of the authorities. The legislators and authors of the time believed that there should be no room in sports for 'any freedom that went against good habits',⁵³ and that in sporting activities 'lesbians were most often found'.⁵⁴

It is true that football represented a space for socialization where women could come together to escape from the asphyxiating pressure of the dictatorship, but important questions remain. What were these women who began to play football in Barcelona in the 1970s like? Why did they take up the sport in such a hostile context, and how did their participation in football affect their sexual identities?

The footballers interviewed in this study were all born around the time of the 1955 Mediterranean Games held in Barcelona. Like other girls, their childhood exposure to sports came in traditional gymnastics classes in the regime's schools, and those who played football as children did so in the streets with their brothers or with neighbourhood boys. It was quite uncommon for girls to choose to play football in the late 1960s, as the regime had imposed a sexist culture and a feminine ideal that confined a woman's role largely to the home rather than the playing field. In the words of an official Franco era publication:

As a woman must attend to domestic chores with the greatest consistency, she gets the opportunity to do more exercise than she would ever really do if she worked outside the house. The very cleanliness and shine of the sidewalks is a highly effective example.⁵⁵

In the face of this ideology, and often with some resistance from their families, some girls still went out on the street to kick the ball. 'My father didn't like it', one interviewee remarked.⁵⁶ The view of women's role in society and in sports long espoused by the regime had been adopted by much of the population. 'My mother said to me, "Now you're old enough to stop playing football in the street"'.⁵⁷ All these obstacles caused the girls to gradually forget their interest in the sport, but their interest and passion were reawakened when they heard a story on a radio programme called *Contraste de Pareceres* on the station *Radio Reloj*.⁵⁸ Either by chance or because their mothers were listeners, the girls heard on this 1970 programme that three teams, *Sant Andreu*, *Atl etic Sabadell*, and *Club Deportivo Español Femenino (CDEF)*, all from Barcelona and nearby Sabadell, were looking for women footballers. A women's section of *F.C. Barcelona* had already formed and had played a match against a team from *Centelles* on December 25, 1970 in preparation for a friendly match against *CSKA* from *Sofia* and as part of a charity campaign organized by *Radio Nacional*.⁵⁹

The goal was to recruit players for the first four-team women's football tournament in Catalonia. The event was called the *Copa Pernod*, and it was held on March 21 and 28, 1971 at the stadiums of *Español (Sarría)* and *F.C. Barcelona (Camp Nou)*. The final was played before 30,000 spectators, with the sports newspaper *El Mundo Deportivo* writing that the players were not very technically trained, but that 'women's football is just starting, and for the moment we can't expect more'.⁶⁰

Our interviews show that the factors that originally drove these women to play football were not tied to issues of gender or sexuality. The women were mostly inspired by their interest in the game.

One interview reflected: 'Well, it was the sport that I had always liked. I've done other things, but not seriously. I've played tennis, I've swam, but it's football that I've always really liked'.⁶¹

In fact, the interviewees were unaware of the existence of lesbians in football, with one saying, 'As far as I know, there [weren't many lesbian girls playing football]'.⁶² Many were even unaware of their own sexual orientations.

Most of us, at least at first, I don't think knew we were lesbians ... Maybe some suspected or knew, but it's not that we sought out sports to seek out our lesbianism. At least for me and the people we know, we started to play football because we liked it.⁶³

In fact, many of the players on these teams initially had male partners, as one recalled: 'We would meet up in a group, and on Sundays there would be a dance and we would all go there with boys as our partners'.⁶⁴ However, this would change, as later, 'in general there were more lesbians on the teams than heterosexuals,' and the women started to discover their sexual identities in the social context of the sport. They would go on to form what this article calls lesbian social networks via football.

This sexuality initially 'was something a lot of people hid',⁶⁵ because of the social and cultural context of the era, in which public displays of homosexuality were rare. 'In the late 70 s, it was very hard for a girl to come out and tell others she was a lesbian', one interviewee recalled.⁶⁶ Although accounts of the time have shown that, of course, there were some lesbians in the Secci on Femenina Española who did not fulfil the role of women prescribed by the regime, female homosexuality remained socially invisible and culturally unacceptable.

Under these circumstances, there was a space for a sort of 'hidden visibility' for sexuality within the team. The players were able to experience a certain degree of freedom, which found expression in the football social networks they formed: 'In the world of football, you can feel a bit freer because you see other girls like you ... It's true, but it took me a while to admit it'.⁶⁷ For others, it was a way to lend normality to what they had felt for a long time; although some initially 'didn't know how to express their feelings for other women, [when they could see themselves reflected in their peers] things became much clearer'.⁶⁸ Others said that they 'fall in love with individuals, and that by chance most of these people have tended to be women'.⁶⁹

Lesbian identity through football

The fact that players could see their teammates display their homosexuality with a certain degree of normality allowed many to come to grips with their own sexuality. The players' family, school and social environments were not accepting of any identity that departed from heterosexuality and from a brand of femininity that was totally submissive to men. In football, they found an opportunity for the sort of selfdiscovery that was hard to achieve anywhere else at the time but that was possible ways of socialising. One player who at the time was unaware of her own homosexuality recounted a story of a gathering at a hotel in Zaragoza prior to a match in the early 1970s.

I suddenly saw things clearly. They were dancing ... I was there, but I wasn't dancing, but then the girls were kissing, and obviously things were totally clear ... I felt something in a flash. Before, I had known or intuited, I had covered for them and helped them, but I had never seen it.⁷⁰

Once the women were able to consider their sexuality, many went through significant processes as they moved toward self-acceptance. 'I knew, we knew that they were couples and everything. At the time, to be honest, I felt a bit sad to realize that... my teammates were lesbians', recounted one player who had difficulties in acknowledging her own sexuality and that of her teammates.⁷¹ For others, including players who had been aware of their sexual preferences since the age of 16, the process was faster. Many fell in love, as one remembered: 'I started to be attracted to this person, and it was mutual'.⁷² For others, the respect of their teammates played a key role. 'At the time, well, they really respected the fact that I didn't want to admit it', one player recalled.⁷³

Having discovered their sexuality and that of their teammates, they created an affinity group where they could enjoy themselves safely and freely: 'We had a great time together because we were always goofing off'.⁷⁴ In general, the players reported that the relations between the lesbian and

heterosexual footballers were good, but one heterosexual player explained that for her – like for most people at the time – homosexuality was a taboo subject. She said that in the early 1970s she had never been exposed to homosexuality before and that when she realized that some of the players on the team were couples, she did not identify with the group or with some of the comments she received. She gradually distanced herself from her teammates and left the team in 1978.⁷⁵

The interviewees reported that the kinds of lesbians they met changed over time. One stated: 'When we were playing football, almost all of us were more masculine'.⁷⁶ However, later the players opened up socially to other groups of lesbians, some athletes and others not. They went beyond the immediate circles of their own clubs and met other girls when they were out at night or when a teammate had a girlfriend who was not on the team. 'That way, we met a lot of people who were very feminine, masculine, all kinds of people', as one player described.⁷⁷

The players identified one another as feminine or masculine more according to behaviour than appearance. 'You could see a teammate who was extremely butch, but who had long, blonde hair',⁷⁸ and this person would be identified by her rougher or more masculine, less refined gestures, not by her personal appearance, as they associated masculinity with lesbianism. Undoubtedly, the lesbian players of the period adopted as their own the broad stereotypes of lesbian women held by the dominant heterosexual culture. This acceptance of stereotypes may seem contradictory, but it was perhaps inevitable in the context of invisibility and disinformation that existed at the time.

In the complex and contradictory social context of the end of the dictatorship, lesbianism, according to one interviewee, 'was frowned upon' and lesbians were not openly visible.⁷⁹ This social rejection often took the form of verbal hostility, which the interviewees experienced on the playing field and in their everyday lives. They were insulted with slurs such as 'tortilleras, bolleras'.⁸⁰ They referred to themselves and one another with terms such as 'rebels',⁸¹ 'torti',⁸² and 'camionero', 'but we didn't mean it pejoratively', one stated.⁸³ Later, when their circle expanded and they started to go out to gay clubs and bars in the city like Padmos, 'the term we used was Mari Loli',⁸⁴ which was probably frequently employed because it was not very explicit. They also had other, more playful ways of making reference to one another. For example, the sometimes referred to the lesbian identity of other girls by imitating a buzzing sound or the 'sound of a wasp', in order to avoid using more explicit language.⁸⁵

The women report having few points of reference in terms of other women footballers, and even fewer in terms of other homosexual women, and say they did not seek out these role models or peers because of the fear instilled in them by social or family pressure. 'No, we didn't look for role models', one player stated, 'because at that time ... first of all, I wouldn't have known how to do it, and second, I was scared ... and above all, I didn't want to hurt my mother'.⁸⁶ Later, though, during the transition to democracy, a number of films about football or featuring lesbians appeared, allowing the interviewees to see themselves reflected on the screen. Some of the titles they mentioned were *Las Ibericas* (1971), *Me Siento Extraña* (1977), *Carne Apaleada* (1978), *Personal Best* (1982), *Media Hora mas Contigo* (1985) and *Berlin Interior* (1985).⁸⁷ The release of the first of these films, Pedro Maso's *Las Ibericas*, coincided with the reawakening of women's football in the country and with matches like the one held between finolis and folkloricas,⁸⁸ which served to express contempt for women's football in a sexist and heteronormative society. The interviewees say they were sometimes unhappy with the depiction of their sport in films as they often painted a less than flattering portrait of the players.

The characteristics of social and affective networks in women's football in the 1970s

In the 1970s, women footballers formed friendships during team road trips and practices, often under the explicitly watchful eyes of the authorities of their own clubs. One stated: 'We kind of got together on the team bus, those of us who had more in common',⁸⁹ and when they got to the hotel they would find that the team delegate 'had split up the couples into separate rooms'.⁹⁰ Sometimes, they criticized and protested against these measures. 'They refused, they said "We're paying for this trip ourselves, and we can sleep with whoever we want"', one player recalled.⁹¹ There were also parties in the hotel rooms: 'They came prepared. They had brought tape decks, tapes with music, bottles of Coke and gin. They would have a little party in one of the rooms. Obviously, not everyone was invited, but I used

to go'.⁹² They would even meet up at bars. 'Later, when the match was over and we would go back to Barcelona, we might meet up for a drink', it was recounted.⁹³ There were also private and/or clandestine parties held 'by other teams, because we were friends and, of course, we knew what was going on. You would go from one team to another ... and they would rent houses and have private parties'.⁹⁴ They managed the events themselves:

We would gather in a bar that was run by two lesbians ... and when they closed ... at about 10 each night ... we would play cards, two or three of us, and then we would have a gathering and talk about things.⁹⁵

The interviewees widened their circle as they met other girls at gay bars and members of other teams. Early on, 'Our circle was not very big. At the beginning, it was pretty much just those of us from the team'.⁹⁶ Later, 'we met people from other teams we played against',⁹⁷ and then 'when we started to go out to pubs and everything, then you meet all kinds of people'.⁹⁸ They discovered the pubs gradually and went out together following in the path of a leader, as one recounted: 'The trailblazer for all of this was M.D., who was the most driven of all of us. She would come and say "I found you some pubs"'.⁹⁹ Some of the most popular places were Daniels, which opened in 1975 and was Spain's first lesbian bar,¹⁰⁰ Chemaite, which they defined as a dive bar, and Padmos, which was more modern than the others. Later, in 1985, Members and Gris would open, followed by Imagine, which was owned by one of the interviewees. The players also vacationed together in small groups and many of them also worked together in a laboratory, so their network was not just based on sports, but also on friendship and work.¹⁰¹ One player reflected: 'Well, later a lot of us went to work together, and all of us were lesbians'.¹⁰²

With regard to the visibility of their lesbianism during this period, the women say they 'hid it',¹⁰³ and that in the streets 'at the time you couldn't go to the pub Padmos, for example, holding hands with someone, you just couldn't'.¹⁰⁴ Some of them even kept the places they visited a secret from their mothers, as one player recalled: 'Of course, you would go out, but you wouldn't tell your mother that you went to those places'.¹⁰⁵ In short, in the late Franco era 'it was normal to keep it hidden'.¹⁰⁶

For the interviewees, having their parents find out about their sexual identities was a big turning point, although in some cases they never came out to their parents. According to one, 'It wasn't necessary. I think parents aren't stupid ... I never told them, but I don't think I had to ... My partners would come over for lunch, and we didn't do anything'.¹⁰⁷ Another recounted that 'after talking to my mother, it seemed like a weight had lifted from my shoulders',¹⁰⁸ because in general 'women who lacked social or economic privileges suffered from the imposition of rigid norms of social behaviour, and those who disobeyed gender laws were severely punished, mostly by their own families'.¹⁰⁹

How, then, can we sum up the lesbian social networks that emerged via football in Barcelona in the final years of the Franco dictatorship? From the accounts of the interviewees, these networks can be defined by seven of their basic characteristics. First, they were informal networks without any institutional backing. They were managed by the players themselves, although individual leaders did often emerge within the groups. Secondly, the networks were built upon affinity in terms of sexual identity, even though it is true that some non-lesbian players did take part in some activities. The third characteristic is that the activities that occurred within these networks were not limited merely to sports and the football clubs themselves, as the players shared other leisure experiences and worked and went on vacation together. Fourth, the networks were silent and publicly invisible, not openly apparent to the participants' families or friends. Fifth, the networks played a key role in facilitating the sexual lives of the participants, something that was very difficult in other social contexts at the time. Sixth, the networks provided participants with the confidence they needed to more resiliently face the environment of homo-negativism and hetero-sexism that surrounded them.¹¹⁰ Finally, their participation in the networks gave them greater freedom to discover and express their own identities in a friendly context in which these identities were viewed as normal and where they could feel safe.

We asked the interviewees whether, in the context of this feeling of liberation, they had joined any gay rights groups, but most agreed that this kind of political activism did not necessarily emerge from involvement in football: 'Not through sports, no. Well, there was a bar, La Illa, and a lot of people

were involved in the struggle'.¹¹¹ However, they were not involved as a team in the fight for gay and lesbian rights or in feminist movements. In fact, it is worth noting here that the feminist movements that had occurred in the US and Europe did not really reach Spain until 1975, twenty years after they had emerged elsewhere. Earlier, feminist and gay rights movements had had to operate underground in Spain. In 1976, Victoria Sau insisted on the political character of lesbianism and the control of women's bodies, saying that lesbians should join other feminists to struggle against patriarchy. The Partido Feminista Español in 1979 published a document on this relationship between lesbians and feminists.¹¹² In the 1980s, many gay rights groups had only a small number of lesbian activists as members, as many lesbians were not interested in the struggles of gay men, with some saying that men within these groups expressed misogynistic attitudes. By the same token, within feminist movements some activists were afraid of being mistaken for lesbians. In an effort to 'find their place', lesbians came together in Madrid for a meeting under the title Primeras Jornadas de Lesbianas on sexuality in June 1983. At that point, many lesbians distanced themselves from the broader feminist movements and joined the Gay Liberation movement.¹¹³

Football and lesbianism: a window to the sexual freedom of the 1970s

A great deal of research has confirmed the significant presence of lesbians in the world of sports. However, there has been little historical study of the issue and even less research examining authoritarian contexts such as the Franco dictatorship in Spain. A few scholars have looked at the topic, including Susan Cahn, who wrote that, for many athletes in North America in the mid-twentieth century, sports played a key role in facilitating their individual processes of constructing lesbian identity. This occurred well before the appearance of gay rights movements.

With regard to the final stages of the Franco era in the city of Barcelona – the key focal point studied in this article – it is clear that football also played this facilitating role in a context of double repression. Firstly, lesbians in Spain, like those elsewhere, suffered from discrimination from the dominant homo-negative culture.¹¹⁴ In Spain though, they faced the additional political and legal pressure of the Franco dictatorship. Indeed, through football they were able to develop their sexual identities – a process that tended to be difficult and was certainly dangerous in the Spain of 1970 – and to find other girls similar to them. They were able to see themselves reflected in their peers and to forge relationships, and they found a space of acceptance and personal liberation in a context otherwise marked by the need for concealment and stealth for gays and lesbians. The women interviewed truly did create lesbian social networks within the framework of their teams. The networks were characterized by their informality, the sexual affinity of their members, participation in activities other than sports, their invisibility to the wider world, their ability to normalize homosexuality within the group, the increased resilience of the athletes and, finally, their liberating character. In other words, for the interviewees and other athletes during the 1970s, sports became a refuge where they could feel protected and valued and could escape the bonds and limitations placed upon them as women.

Notes

1. On January 1, 1979, Law 77/1978, of December 26, was published in the official state digest. It modified the Law on Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation and its Regulation.

2. Some important studies on the topic have been conducted in Galicia by Domínguez Almansa; in Catalonia by Pujadas and Santacana; in Andalusia by Gómez Díaz; in the Canary Islands by Almeida and in Madrid by Bahamonde. They shed light on sports around the country. Andrés Domínguez, *Historia social do deporte en Galicia: Cultura deportiva e modernidade: 1850–1920* (Vigo: Galaxia, 2009); Xavier Pujadas and Carles Santacana, *Historia il·lustrada de l'esport a Catalunya (1870–1975)* (Barcelona: Columna and Diputació de Barcelona, 1995); Donato Gómez, 'Política y fútbol. La necesaria fundación de la Unión Deportiva Almería en el decenio de 1940,' *Materiales para la historia del deporte 2* (2004): 151–77; Antonio S. Almeida Aguiar, 'Británicos, deporte y burguesía en una ciudad atlántica: Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (1880–1914)' (PhD diss.,

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2005); Carles Sirera, *Cuando el fútbol no era el rey. Los deportes en el espacio público de la ciudad de Valencia (1875–1909)* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2008).

3. Worthy of special mention is the publicly financed national research and development project aimed at meeting the challenges of society: *Women, sports and dictatorship. An oral history of women athletes under France (1939–1975)*. (Reference: HAR2013-43652-R). There is also the reference work: Xavier Pujadas, *Atletas y ciudadanos: historia social del deporte en España, 1870–2010* (Madrid: Alianza, 2011).

4. In Spain, there was little research into women in sports before the late 80s. In general, most studies have focused on the incorporation of women into sports under Franco. Nuria Puig, 'El proceso de incorporación al deporte por parte de la mujer española (1939–1985)', in the seminar *Mujer y Deporte* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura. Instituto de la Mujer, 1987): 83–91. The first general studies appeared during the decade that followed: Milagros García Bonafé, 'Las mujeres y el deporte: del "cortés" al "andalés"', *Sistema* 110–11 (1992): 33–5; Luis Carrero Eras, 'La actividad físico-deportiva de la mujer en España (1938–1978)' (PhD diss., Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 1995). Later, studies on women and physical education would appear, as during the dictatorship the regime had a specific physical education policy aimed at women. See, for example: Juan Carlos Manrique, *La mujer y la educación física durante el franquismo* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid. Secretariado de Publicaciones e Intercambio Editorial, 2008). As for more local studies, see: For Asturias: Concepción Carbajosa Menéndez, 'La mujer y el deporte (1940–1978)' (PhD diss. Universidad de Oviedo, 1988); Concepción Carbajosa, *Participación deportiva de las mujeres asturianas (1939–1977)* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1999). For Madrid: María Rosa Fernández, 'Mujer y deporte en Madrid durante el primer tercio del siglo XX', in *Orígenes del deporte madrileño 1870–1936* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1987). For Cataluña, the PhD dissertation: Dolors Ribalta-Alcalde, 'Dones, esport i dictadura: la memòria oral d'esportistes catalanes durant la primera etapa del franquisme (1939–1961)' (PhD diss., Universidad Ramon Llull, 2016). Finally, also worthy of mention are the studies conducted by the Red de Investigación en Historia de las Mujeres y el Deporte (RIHMUD), led by the research and innovation group on sports and society (GRIES, Universidad Ramon Llull, Barcelona) which has carried out a number of projects around the country.

5. To cite a few examples: Carlos Fernández, *El fútbol durante la guerra civil y el franquismo* (Madrid: San Martín, 1990); Teresa González Aja, 'Le football... ambassadeur du franquisme', in *Sport as Symbol, Symbols in Sport*, ed. F. Van der Merwe (Cape Town: Academic Press, 1995); Duncan Shaw, *Fútbol y franquismo* (Madrid: Alianza, 1987); Alejandro Viuda-Serrano, 'Santiago Bernabéu y el Real Madrid: un análisis histórico del mito del fútbol: Política y deporte en la España franquista', *AGON International Journal of Sport Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2013): 33–47; Eduardo González, 'Deporte y poder: El caso del Real Madrid C. de F.', *Memoria y Civilización: anuario de historia de la Universidad de Navarra* 7 (2004): 79–127; Eduardo González, 'El Real Madrid, "Equipo del Régimen"? Fútbol y política durante el Franquismo', *Deporte e Sociedade* 14 (2010): 1–19; Juan Antonio Simón, 'La utilización del cine y el fútbol durante el franquismo. Kubala en los asés buscan la paz', *Historia y Comunicación Social* 17 (2012): 69–84; Juan Antonio Simón, 'Fútbol y cine en el franquismo: La utilización política del héroe deportivo en la España de Franco.', *Historia y Comunicación Social* 17 (18 de enero de 2013): 69–84, doi:10.5209/rev_HICS.2012.v17.40599; Carles Santacana, *El Barça y el franquismo: crónica de unos años decisivos para Cataluña, 1968–1978* (Madrid: Apostrofe, 2006).

6. Erik N. Jensen, 'Sports and sexuality', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, ed. Robert Edelman and Wayne Wilson (Oxford: University Press, 2017), 525–40.

7. *Ibid.*, 526–27.

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62. Interview with Interviewee 3, fragment, 20.
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65. Interview with Rosa Pedrosa, fragment, 8.
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69. Interview with Interviewee 3, fragment, 52.
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71. *Ibid.*, 114–116.

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73. Interview with Isabel Ruiz, fragment, 306.
74. *Ibid.*, 1344–6.
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89. Interview with Isabel Ruiz, fragment 320.
90. *Ibid.*, 100. The team delegate was a volunteer. In this case, she was the mother of one of the players and was responsible for making sure the girls followed the rules for their behaviour during trips and matches.
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92. *Ibid.*, 134.
93. *Ibid.*, 322.
94. *Ibid.*, 334–50.
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