



Summary

History, gender and power. Exploring football in Spain 3

This book is a continuation of the author's previous research on Spanish football in its historical-cultural and political-media contexts. However, unlike the previous two parts—which explored men's football—this volume is exclusively concerned with women's football. More specifically, it takes a look at how it has broken free of the patriarchal paradigm that is strongly entrenched in Spanish society. Analyzing women's football against the backdrop of Spain's history and changes in the notions of gender within the discourse of power, the author shows the arduous path that female footballers, referees, coaches, journalists and commentators have had to take so as to leave the private (domestic) sphere, to which they were confined by the male discourse of power in the 20th century, and enter the public sphere. The 21st century has seen them rise in the latter to a position which enabled them to produce a counter-narrative to that discourse.

As the outset, the author notes that the status of women's football invariably derives from the woman's place in a particular society. Spain is a special case, both due to the aforementioned societal circumstances as well as the place and role of football in the country. In this context, attention is drawn to the potential of football to drive women's emancipation and dilute the male discourse of power. After all, football has no gender, and the feminist wave within that sport is a prime example of women's emancipatory endeavour, by means of which they have challenged that discourse. Hence, even though the book is about Spain, it is conceptualized to reveal a transnational and transcultural matrix, one that may be used to study women's football in other countries.

In the first chapter, the author outlines the origins of women's football in Spain—the clubs and the national team—as well as introduces the female pioneers who, in the early 20th century, braved the obstacles rooted in the cultural standards of that period with their passion and perseverance, blazing the trail followed by their present-day continuators. Disregarding the social and linguistic stigmatization, as well as the ideal propounded by the *Sección Femenina* [Female Section] of the Francoist Falange, those pioneers defied the attempts at objectification, courageously and successfully opposing the official discourse of power, as they established the first women's clubs whose achievement laid the foundations for the national team. A number of representatives of the male discourse of power played an important role there, having recognized their passion for football. Indeed, thanks to the women pioneers playing football, what was initially a kind of Freudian anguish and social aberration became an embryo of cultural and social emancipation over time.

Chapter Two delves into sexism, which remains a serious issue at Spanish football stadiums. The author argues that sexist behaviour and attitudes are not the sole province of men, as they are also practiced by women. However, manifesting primarily in language, sexism by default stigmatizes and brands the women who are its victims. As the author's research demonstrates, such behaviours were a daily occurrence in the women's national team for a long time (*caso Quereda*), contributing to the trauma of many female players. Today, more and more women footballers targeted by sexist jibes no longer pretend that nothing has happened, but openly express their firm opposition to such behaviour, choosing to publicize its instances and combat them through social media.

In Chapter Three, the author discusses the dependence of women's football on the predominant socio-cultural and political contexts in Spain, given that the category of gender in the discourse of women's football in Spain strongly correlates with the categories of nation and politics. Among other things, it is questioned whether the female national team are a worthy representative of the Spanish nation. Still, the author demonstrates that, in certain circumstances, representatives of the male discourse of power include female footballers within the national- and club-level narrative. On the one hand, this may be interpreted as a manifestation of their empowerment and support in the emancipation process, and, on the other, as an attempt to neutralize them as figures of the female counter-discourse in order to preserve the status quo on which their privileged position is founded. This is corroborated by the examples examined by the author: the matches of women's La Roja or Copa de la Reina, as well as the women's version of El Clásico, which is in fact an extension of the male rivalry between Real and Barça, and therefore an element in the male power discourse.

Chapter Four continues to explore the issue of female emancipation in football. The author provides examples of empowered female footballers, who have not only become conscious and empathetic subjects,

liberated from the control of the male eye, but also redefined the male power discourse, becoming idols and role models for football novices in Spain, regardless of gender. It is therefore argued that they have thus become a mimetic subject in the positive sense of the word. Citing specific instances, the author shows how professional female footballers are treated by the contemporary Spanish media, which prioritize and spotlight substantive aspects of one's skills and the achievement in sports.

Chapter Five focuses on the numerous social media projects and campaigns, which seek to increase the visibility and popularize women's football in Spain as well as combat sexism, gender discrimination and stereotypes that women footballers, referees, coaches, journalists and commentators have to confront daily. In the 21st century, social media have become one of the leading emancipatory domains that enable extensive campaigns to be carried out so as to challenge the male discourse of power, in which women's football remains an inferior phenomenon. The author contends that without such undertakings, the success of women's football in Spain would not have been possible. The multiplicity of actors involved (La Liga, the Royal Spanish Football Federation, football clubs, etc.) shows that Spanish women's football today can count on support from many sides.

In Chapter Six, the author revisits the so-called *Vilda Gate*, a conflict within the Spanish national team between female footballers and its coach Jorge Vilda. A closer look at how it arose and unfolded reveals it to be a gender war and a clash of two discourses. Since the conflict was extensively covered in the media from the outset, it was necessary to include multiple points of view, deriving from the different interests and ideological notions of those who reported on it.

The practices of deconstructing the dominant male power discourse in Spanish football are the focus of Chapter Seven. Again, drawing on specific stories, the author demonstrates how the emancipatory actions of female footballers, referees, coaches, journalists and commentators contribute to breaking glass ceilings and establishing a new relationship between genders, which instead of the dominant and exclusionary position of one relies on the principle of gender interaction, both on the pitch and within institutional frameworks. In this context, the analysis is concerned with the individual and collective achievements of female footballers and their consequent entry into domains hitherto traditionally reserved for men, by means of which they reconfigure the discourse of power and, simultaneously, make history.

Finally, Chapter Eight examines the so-called Luis Rubiales Case (*caso Rubiales*), the now former president of the Royal Spanish Football Federation, who upon the victory of the Spanish women's team against England in the 2023 World Cup final, publicly made sexist gestures while celebrating the success, causing a worldwide scandal. The author demonstrates how Rubiales' conduct, as well as his attitude during the Federation's extraordinary congress—during which he refused to resign

and accused “false feminism” of stirring up the scandal—triggered a series of events, including the emergence of the #SeAcabó social movement, which directly undermined the male hegemonic discourse of power, in a sense compelling it to redefine its previous approach to the female representatives of the counter-discourse.

In the Conclusions, the author recapitulates the methodological premises of the book, whereby gender category is applied to examine football discourse in Spain whilst taking into account the historical development of its society and changes in power relations. Such a research strategy, the author notes, in which specific events are studied in the light of the three eponymous categories, enables one to challenge stereotypes and entrenched notions concerning women’s football in Spain, so as to arrive at entirely new interpretations. In the author’s opinion, the emancipatory achievement delivered primarily by Spanish female footballers and referees, and to some degree female coaches and commentators, deserves to be recognized as a football feminist wave. More specifically, their emancipatory project, culminating in the revolution epitomized by #It’sOver, represents the fourth wave of feminism that swept mainly through the virtual space which, next to online debate and strategy-building, became the platform of protest and resistance.