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The Beautiful Game? Hegemonic Masculinity, Women and Football in Brazil and Argentina

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The practice of football by women in Latin America is an integral part of historical patterns around the performance of gender roles and offers insights into how power, both symbolic and political, is subject to ongoing processes of negotiation. A study of women's involvement as spectators and players in Brazil and Argentina since the early twentieth century sees football emerge as a field in which the construction of gender identities, both personal and national, may be contested. More recently, a growing presence of female players, writers and academics suggests that female agency through football in Latin America is an increasingly realistic goal.

Keywords: Argentina, Brazil, football, Latin America, Marta, women.

Taking the Field

Football in Latin America has become firmly established as a subject of study for historians, sociologists, anthropologists and literary scholars, especially in relation to Argentina and Brazil, but the great majority of publications arising from such work focus entirely on the game as played by men. Indeed, some influential authors have depicted football in the region as an entirely male affair: Argentinian anthropologist Eduardo Archetti, for example, wrote in 1994 that football was and still is a typical and exclusively masculine sport in Argentina (Archetti, 1994: 226), reiterating almost a decade later that the world of football is exclusively male, an encounter in the stadium [...] between competing groups of male players and supporters (Archetti, 2003: 220). As will be seen, women have played football in Argentina and elsewhere in the region since the 1920s and have been a prominent feature of Latin American football crowds from the start of the twentieth century; Archetti's apparent gender blindness is striking in an author who devoted much of his research to the exploration of masculinities. Sports historian Joseph Arbena was among the first to note the under-representation of women's football (and of women's sport more widely) in Latin America (Arbena, 1989, 2002), and this lacuna has been addressed to some extent since the turn of the millennium through a recognition of women's place in football as part of national or regional studies (Binello *et al.*, 2000; Santillán, 2010; Elsey, 2011; Goldblatt, 2014; Nadel, 2014; Bocketti, 2016). An integral part of this process has been the rise in

women – especially Latin American women – writing about women and football in the region (Binello *et al.*, 2000; Goellner, 2000, 2005; Mourão and Morel, 2005; Votre and Mourão, 2003; Rodríguez, 2005, 2008; da Costa, 2007; Santillán, 2010).

Both as a practice and as a discourse, football in Latin America has constituted an important mode of hegemonic masculinity, understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). Football's status as the most popular sport in almost every country of Latin America, and its close association with concepts of a nationhood that is markedly gendered in much of the region, has resulted in its domination of print and electronic media over the course of the last hundred years. What French anthropologist Christian Bromberger termed the footballisation of society (Losson and Villepreux, 1998) has been evident across most of Latin America from at least the 1990s, which witnessed the colossal growth in the weight of sport as a media product (Alabarces, 2014: 205). The role of the media as one of the prime sites for the reproduction of gender divisions (Hargreaves, 1986: 151) has long been noted, and media coverage of sports events has given rise to a growing number of studies around gender issues. In keeping with the notion that media representations of sport constitute a site where meanings around gender are continually contested, not fixed (Brookes, 2002: 143), this study will explore the ways in which women in Brazil and Argentina have been represented – and have represented themselves – through football. On examining the practice of football and its representation as a discourse in a range of texts in the printed media, it is apparent that Brazilian and Argentinian women have created a space within football culture by engaging with it and contributing to it in various ways. Their participation in the sport has contested hegemonic masculinity and its counterpart emphasised femininity, which is defined around compliance [with the subordination of women to men] and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men (Connell, 1987: 183). The complex relationships that have arisen from these interactions offer new understandings of the place of women in relation to football and to the public domain more widely.

Women's football in Latin America has undergone significant change over recent decades, with the establishment of national teams across the region by the end of the 1990s and seven editions of the Copa América Femenina since the tournament was first held in Brazil in 1991. At the same time, women's leagues were founded in various Latin American countries around the turn of the millennium, giving rise to the Copa Libertadores Femenina since 2009. As the country in which football has perhaps been most closely allied to a sense of nation, Brazil has been the dominant force, winning the Copa América six times (they finished second to Argentina in 2006) and with Brazilian club teams winning each edition of the Copa Libertadores, with the exception of the 2012 final, in which the Chilean side Colo-Colo defeated Brazil's Foz Cataratas on penalties. The Brazilian *seleção* is the only national team from the region to reach the latter stages of the FIFA Women's World Cup (third place in 1999 and runner-up in 2007) or the Olympic Games (silver medal in 2004 and 2008, fourth place in Rio 2016), although Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Mexico have performed increasingly strongly in international competition over the last decade. Against such a background, Brazil and Argentina will constitute the primary focus of this study. The manner in which football has acquired a high degree of cultural capital in these nations in particular, thereby occupying a central place in the exploration of modern nationhood, makes the recent prominence of women in football all the more significant and challenging.

Early Representations of Women and Football

Evidence for the participation of Latin American women as football players prior to 1920 is scant. Among the earliest documentary evidence of women's football in the region is a record of an inter-district match in São Paulo in 1921 '*entre senhoritas "tremembenses" contra senhoritas "cantareinenses"*' (between young ladies from Tremembé and Santa Catarina) (Goellner, 2005: 146), while Rio de Janeiro's *Jornal dos Sports* carried reports of at least two matches between teams made up entirely of women during May 1931 (Mourão and Morel, 2005: 75–76). The first of these refers to '*gentis senhoritas*' (nice young ladies) (3 May 1931), while the second mocks the manner in which '*A partida estava sendo disputada com entusiasmo. As pequenas empregaram-se com extraordinário ardor. De vez em quando, uma acertava a bola ou esta batia nellas*' (The match was being contested with great enthusiasm. The little dears engaged with extraordinary passion. From time to time one of them managed to kick the ball or it bashed into them) (19 May 1931). In Argentina, the popular sports magazine *El Gráfico* published photographs of women playing football on 31 January 1920 and in 1924 poet Bernardo Canal Feijóo provided the earliest literary depiction of an organised match between women's teams in his collection of poems entitled *Penúltimo poema del fútbol*. Of 63 poetic vignettes that portray a single matchday, '*Fútbol de mujeres*' (Women's Football) is the penultimate entry, followed only by the epilogue. By opening with '*No podía prosperar el partido*' (The match could not prosper) (Canal Feijóo, [1924] 2007: 42), the author makes clear his opposition to the women's involvement and later unwittingly makes explicit the framework of normative masculinity (and expected female heterosexuality) within which he is working, describing how '*los choques trababan a las jugadoras en un abrazo lésbico inaceptable*' (the tackles entangled the players in an unacceptable lesbian embrace) (Canal Feijóo, [1924] 2007: 42). Such depictions suggest that women's participation in the sport had still to become separated from traditional visions of female roles and that the presence of women on the pitch was seen as an entertaining – or occasionally threatening – anomaly by the male writers of such reports, who gave early expression to hegemonic masculinity through football.

There are, of course, other ways in which women were involved in football from the early twentieth century, and there is ample evidence of their enthusiastic presence in the crowd at important games (Bocketti, 2016: 165–200). A newspaper report from October 1901 spoke of how prominent were the elegant women who lent a happy note to the festivities at the first match between representative teams from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (cited in Goldblatt, 2014: 8), while João do Rio described how '*moças de vestidos claros perfumam o ambiente com o seu encanto*' (women in pale dresses perfume the atmosphere with their charm) in his report for Rio de Janeiro's *Gazeta de Noticias* on a matchday visit to Fluminense (1905: 1). In the country's other major city, São Paulo-based Modernist author Alcântara Machado published in 1927 the short story '*Corinthians (2) vs Palestra (1)*' (de Alcântara Machado, 1927), which centred not on the male teams but on two young women in the crowd. One of them, romantically attached to a star player for Palestra, encourages her boyfriend to kick her ex-partner, now playing for Corinthians, suggestive of women's vicarious – and vigorous – participation in the action on the pitch. In similar vein, Argentinian Roberto Arlt wrote disparagingly of a '*regimiento de mujercitas de aspecto poco edificante*' (army of women of unedifying appearance) he saw in the stands at a match between Uruguay and his native Argentina in his 1929 essay '*Ayer vi ganar a los argentinos*' (Yesterday I Watched Argentina Win), one of the hugely popular *aguafuertes* he wrote for the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Mundo*.

By contrasting them with the beautiful girls who lined the streets of Buenos Aires once he had left the stadium, Arlt reveals that the public performance of gender through football was unacceptable, at least in his eyes and – it is implied – those of his readers. Like other modes of textual production dominated by men in the early decades of the twentieth century, short stories, chronicles and essays contributed to the development of football as a public discourse and domain characterised by its hegemonic masculinity.

Football as a Female Discourse: Brazilian Pioneers

Arguably the first woman in Latin America to construct a position for herself as a public subject in relation to football, Anna Amélia de Queiroz (1896–1971) was a poet, literary translator and prominent member of Brazil's early feminist movement. She requested a ball and football boots for her twelfth birthday (Coutinho, 1980: 114–115), and as a young woman was a regular member of the crowd at matches in Rio, where she met Marcos de Mendonça, goalkeeper for Fluminense and the Brazilian national team. The couple married in 1917 and in 1922 Anna Amélia published the sonnet 'O salto' (The Leap) inspired by her husband's performance in goal, thus providing the first football literature written by a woman in Latin America, or indeed anywhere. As its poetic form suggests, 'O salto' engages significantly with the European classical tradition and makes repeated references to sporting heroes of ancient Greece, whose ranks her husband joins through the graceful athleticism of his leap to meet the ball. At the same time, however, as she draws on a conventional and highly stylised discourse around athletic action as a male domain, she also expresses the erotic charge of watching her husband, describing how '*todo o meu ser vibrou num ímpeto frenético*' (my entire being trembled in a frenetic impetus) and '*estremeci fitando esse teu porte estético*' (I shuddered gazing on your aesthetic bearing). Although she is watching the game from the side of the pitch, her voice as a poet enables her to construct a position for herself as a subject who simultaneously occupies the conventionally private domain of emotional response and the public domain of the football match to invert the heterosexual gaze and challenge conventions around the expression of female eroticism.

The practice of football by women was largely mocked in the Brazilian media in the 1930s, as discussed above, but the country's successful participation in the 1938 World Cup finals in France led to the representation of football by another outstanding woman poet. Gilka Machado had previously gained notoriety among conservative sectors of society for her expression of women's erotic experience, but *Sublimação* (Sublimation, 1938), in which she published the lengthy 'Aos Heróis do Futebol Brasileiro' (To the Heroes of Brazilian Football), marked a shift to a preoccupation with issues of a broader, more social nature. The poem opens in the first person as the poet salutes the country's footballing heroes, whose excellence on the pitch has created '*uma epopéia internacional!*' (an international epic!) in terms that echo the references to Greek Olympians in 'O Salto'. However, as the poem progresses, the initial distance between the players and the Brazilian people is reduced and the national team becomes a symbol for the nation as a whole. In contrast to the teams that had represented Brazil at the World Cup in 1930 and 1934, with limited success, the team that reached the semi-finals in France consisted primarily of black players, selected from clubs across the country, and Machado's celebration of the team focuses on two of them, striker Leônidas and central defender Domingos da Guia. The poet's description of the '*penetração/dos gols de Leônidas*' (penetration/of Leonidas's goals) hints at the erotic charge of her previous

poetry, and the celebration of a black player's physicality by a white woman revealed the extent to which women were able to draw on football to offer alternatives to patriarchal norms. The poem closes with Machado referring to the players' achievements as creating '*um debuxo maravilhoso/do nosso desconhecido país*' (a marvellous drawing/of our unknown country), the use of the first person plural making clear that she includes herself as part of the nation that she constructs through football. In providing her own interpretation of the team from the perspective of a woman who invests the black players with erotic overtones and explicitly includes herself as part of the imagined national football community, Machado offers a vision of the sport that, to some degree at least, runs counter to its elaboration from within hegemonic masculinities of the time.

Banned in Brazil: the Difficult Decades (1940–1970s)

Just three years after Machado's representation of football as a national team that included women, the National Sports Council of President Vargas's Estado Novo banned women's football under Decree Law 3199 (1941), which stipulated in article 54 that '*Às mulheres não se permitirá a prática dos esportes incompatíveis com as condições de sua natureza*' ('women will not be permitted to practise sports that are incompatible with the conditions of their nature'). The effect of this decree was to block women's participation in football in Brazil – where the greatest involvement had been evident – for several decades, while socially conservative regimes elsewhere in the continent during the 1940s and 1950s did little to promote women's involvement in the sport. Despite the continuing ban, there are indications that Brazilian women had continued to play football through to the early 1960s, when they were emboldened by the socially progressive government of President Goulart. Any sense of opening or of challenge to football's connection to hegemonic masculinity as national practice, firmly established via the *seleção*'s victories in the 1958 and 1962 World Cups, was soon quashed after Goulart was overthrown by a right-wing military coup in 1964 that ushered in a far more conservative era. In the following year, the National Sports Council invoked Decree Law 3199 from 1941 to close down any openings that were being used by women, declaring via '*deliberação n. 7*' (deliberation number 7) that *não é permitida a prática de lutas de qualquer natureza, futebol, futebol de salão, futebol de praia, polo-acuático, polo, rugby, halterofilismo e baseball* (the practice of physical contests of any kind is not permitted: football, futsal, beach football, water polo, polo, rugby, weightlifting and baseball). Despite the legal and socio-cultural obstacles to the practice of women's football, however, women were far from absent from the realm of football as the national sport in Brazil and other countries of the region.

By the late 1960s, at the same time as the practice of women's football began to enjoy a degree of visibility in countries such as Chile (Elsey, 2011) and Peru, female fans had become a celebrated aspect of the matchday experience in some of the region's most well-known clubs. In Brazil, Elisa of Corinthians won the prize as the club's number one fan as early as 1953, and in 1956 Dulce Rosalina became the first female leader of an organised fan club with Vasco da Gama's TOV, also winning the *Revista do Esporte*'s award for Brazil's best fan in 1961 (da Costa, 2007: 9). In neighbouring Argentina, La Raulito and La Gorda Matosas were synonymous with Boca Juniors and River Plate respectively from the 1960s onwards, although it is worth noting that they both underwent a process of masculinisation during a period characterised by *fútbol fuerza* (strength football) and are celebrated primarily in terms of their transgressive

behaviours. María Esther Duffau took on a boy's name, clothing and appearance to become La Raulito, described on the DVD of her 1975 biopic as '*una muchacha asexual de apariencia masculina*' (an asexual girl of masculine appearance). For her part, Haydée Luján Martínez experienced a simultaneous de-sexualisation and synecdoche to gain her *nom de guerre* through an emphasis on her corpulent physique and the gift of a shirt from the Uruguayan River Plate defender Roberto Matosas, which she then wore to every match. These observations run counter to the findings of a more recent study of women's football in Argentina, which suggests that by the turn of the millennium women at football grounds '*no pierden sus atributos femeninos, antes bien, los exponen*' (do not lose their feminine attributes; rather, they display them) (Binello *et al.*, 2000: 35), resulting in acceptance at matches by men, whose heterosexuality and normative gendered behaviour thus goes unchallenged. Be this as it may, the emergence of right-wing dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and elsewhere across the continent in the 1970–1980s resulted in a general closing down of cultural spaces in which traditional gender roles might be challenged, including women's active participation in football.

'Screwed' as Female Football Writers: the Case of Clarice Lispector

A significant challenge to the stereotypes around women's involvement in football is found in the texts published by Brazil's Clarice Lispector in the late 1960s as Brazil prepared for the 1970 World Cup. Author of a weekly column in the influential Rio daily *Jornal do Brasil* from 1967 to 1973, Lispector's contribution on 30 March 1968 was entitled 'Armando Nogueira, o futebol e eu, coitada' (Armando Nogueira, Football and Me, Screwed), a title that was doubly challenging in its focus on football and in the use of traditionally masculine language. Despite proclaiming her '*ignorância apaixonada por futebol*' (passionate ignorance of football), Lispector declares her support for Botafogo, although her attendance at a single match makes her feel that '*isso é tão errado como se eu fosse uma brasileira errada*' (this is as bad as if I were a bad Brazilian). Associating football with Brazilian identity was nothing new, but to include the sport as an integral component in the construction of female Brazilian identity continued to present a challenge to normative views. Lispector also feminises football through her description of the sport in terms of its '*beleza própria de movimentos*' (own beauty of movement) and gently mocks the ban on women's practice of football by stating that she fears she would be sent off for violent conduct were she to play. The author closes her text, written in response to a challenge by renowned football chronicler Armando Nogueira, with a challenge of her own, inviting him to write a piece about his personal life, which would involve a crossing of the gendered boundaries of public discourses of the time in the opposite direction.

In the months following the publication of her first football text, Lispector conducted interviews with two of the country's leading football managers, both of which featured in the hugely popular glossy magazine *Manchete*. In her interview with the manager of Botafogo, Mário Zagallo, which appeared on 13 July 1968, Lispector draws on the notion of football as an aesthetic practice, prefacing the interview with the epigraph '*O futebol é uma arte*' (Football is an art), words uttered by Zagallo during the course of the interview. More daring is her description of him as '*fino de corpo, as pernas não são deformadas por uma musculatura violenta*' (slim-bodied, his legs are not deformed by a violent musculature) (Williams, 2007: 219), the de-masculinisation of football extending here to the physique of one of its most respected practitioners. João Saldanha, then

manager of the national team that would go on to win the World Cup in Mexico City to universal acclaim under Zagallo, receives similar treatment in an interview published on 7 June 1969, being described as '*um homem bonito*' (a nice-looking man) (Williams, 2007: 224), whose nonchalant air excites women. He too states that '*futebol é arte*' (football is art) (Williams, 2007: 226), but of greater note is the text that precedes her opening question to Saldanha:

Este diálogo foi especialmente escolhido tendo em vista o interesse das mulheres pelo futebol. É um jogo masculino, mas a frequência feminina nos estádios aumenta cada dia mais. [...] O meu diálogo serve também para a mulher entender um pouco de futebol. (Williams, 2007: 224)

This interview was specially chosen bearing in mind women's interest in football. It is a masculine game, but the presence of women in stadia is increasing daily. [...] My interview also serves for women to understand a bit about football.

In addition to the stated interest of women in football, to the degree that it justifies a piece in the country's most widely read magazine, and their growing presence at matches, Lispector lays claim to the dialogue as hers. By demonstrating an excellent knowledge of squad selection, tactical formations and the history of the World Cup that is completely at odds with her previously stated passionate ignorance, she engages Saldanha on an equal footing as someone completely at home in the discourse of football. Her ownership of the text is apparent too within the transcription of the interviews, both of which are punctuated by her reflections on the male football icons before her. In the case of Saldanha, these additions serve to introduce his wife to the scene and to emphasise Lispector's parity as they drink coffee and smoke together, concluding with a shared desire for victory in 1970. Towards the end of her interview with Zagallo, Lispector provides additional material to describe, in highly patronising terms, his features as he considers his response to a difficult question: '*Seu rosto demonstrava o esforço mais bonito do homem: o esforço de pensar e de se autoconhecer*' (His face revealed man's most beautiful effort: the effort to think and know himself) (Williams, 2007: 222). And when he finally replies, she refuses to accept his response before telling the reader what she feels he really wanted to say. Through the combination of the features discussed above, Lispector asserts her authority as a female writer in what she describes – in terms the reader can now see as ironic – as '*um jogo masculino*' (a masculine game) (Williams, 2007: 224). By displaying her position of authority in relation to two of the most influential men in football at the time, taking the role of interviewer, being at ease with the terminology of the game and conveying the difficulties that the eloquent Zagallo in particular encountered in expressing answers to her questions, it is clear that this is no longer simply a man's game.

Creating Space: the 1980s and 1990s

Paradoxically, the existence of a ban on women's football in Brazil meant that when this was removed, under President Geisel's policy of *distensão* in 1979, the impact was more significant than in countries where the relaxation of restrictions on women's roles was less clearly marked. Although women's football in Brazil was only formally recognised by the National Sports Council in 1983, it boomed in the early 1980s, with as many

as 3000 women's teams and organised championships for these teams in eleven states (Goellner, 2005: 145–147; Knijnik, 2014: 122–123). Such levels of participation were unique to Brazil, where football had become an integral component of national identity for many women as for men, and where the emphasis on an aestheticised *futebol arte* had been embraced most fully as a response to the more overtly masculinised *futebol força* advocated by the military dictatorship through the 1970s (Kittleston, 2014: 133). It is important here to note that the low profile of the women's game was not restricted to the rest of Latin America, and it was only in the wake of calls from Norwegian delegates at the 1986 FIFA Congress in Mexico City that women's football came to be recognised and supported by FIFA. The most visible outcome of this was the first 'official' Women's World Cup, held in China in 1991, at which Brazil was Latin America's sole representative. Following the success of this tournament, women's football was admitted to the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, almost a century after men's football first featured in the 1900 Paris Games, with Brazil once again the only Latin American team present.

The third wave of athletic feminism in the 1990s, of which the rise in international women's football is an important strand, coincided with a period of political liberalisation across South America after various long-standing dictatorships had relinquished power and traditional restrictions on women's roles were once again open – at least in part – to significant challenge. One of the most striking features of this process throughout Latin America was the emergence of women as actors in national politics and the fact that women have in recent years served at least one presidential term in the countries where women's football has enjoyed high levels of visibility and/or international success (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica). The everyday experience of women enacting political power as representatives of the nation, a function hitherto almost exclusively the preserve of men in Latin America, has to be seen alongside the symbolic power increasingly attributed to women as football players, two key facets of recent challenges to hegemonic masculinity in the region.

The Rise of Female Football Stars: Marigol and Marta

As women's football has become increasingly widely practised across Latin America in recent years, it has also come to enjoy greater public visibility through various means, involving both printed and electronic mass media. Studies of this still recent phenomenon are to date scarce, but confirm this trend in both Brazil and Argentina (Binello *et al.*, 2000; Votre and Mourão, 2003; Goellner, 2005; Mourão and Morel, 2005; Knijnik, 2014). The twenty-first century has seen the emergence of the first women football superstars on the continent, celebrated for their ability with the ball and their achievements on the pitch. Maribel Domínguez, the star forward of the Mexican women's team, scored 76 goals in 110 appearances between 1998 and 2014, a record that earned her the nickname 'Marigol'. A skilful and quick player, she signed for Mexican second division club Celaya in December 2004 in response to the absence of a professional women's league in the country. The move, however, was blocked by FIFA, whose ruling on the case stated that there must be a clear separation between men's and women's football, to which there would be no exceptions (Tuckman, 2005). The case of Domínguez reveals repeated obstacles to the practice of women's football across Latin America: after her initial desire to play foundered on her father's disapproval, she began to play in boys' teams after his death, gaining acceptance by pretending to be a boy, known to her

team-mates as Mario (Las guerreras del Tri, 2011). The physical appearance she cultivated that allowed for the deception, in addition to the football skills she developed during those years, subsequently caused problems when she was forced to undergo a full body inspection on joining a women's team in 1997 because of her ability to play like a man (Grainey, 2012: 160–161). Marigol's case reveals how, despite her public recognition through footballing prowess, women and football occupy spaces that into the twenty-first century continue to be seen by many – including the international governing body – as gender-determined, and all too often as mutually exclusive.

Even more well-known than Domínguez, Brazilian Marta Vieira da Silva is arguably the greatest woman football player of all time. FIFA's world player of the year for five consecutive years between 2006 and 2010 (she was runner-up on a further four occasions) and all-time leading goalscorer at the Women's World Cup, Marta has joined the ranks of football's international superstars in being immediately recognisable by a single name. However, in contrast to her male counterparts, such as Maradona, Zico or Pelé, in her case it is a first name that stands as a gendered marker of her status as a woman, and her ability has been repeatedly framed in terms of the skills of male players, Pelé himself celebrating her ability by declaring that '*A Marta é a Pelé de saia*' (Marta is Pelé in a skirt) (Paiva, 2008). Notwithstanding such considerations, Marta was named as one of six football ambassadors for the World Cup in Brazil and on 4 June 2014 inaugurated Rio's Football for Equality Plaza, where a multi-media exhibition '*Women on the Pitch*' explored almost a hundred years of women's football in Brazil.

At the 1999 Women's World Cup in the United States, the last before Marta broke into the national team, the renowned football chronicler Armando Nogueira, challenged by Lispector in her 1968 article discussed above, explained the lack of support for women's football in Brazil as follows:

Unfortunately, women's soccer doesn't have a chance in Brazil. The best woman player in Brazil will never be as popular as the worst male player, and the main reason is that women have been idolized as delicate objects of desire, incapable of playing a physical-contact, body-to-body sport. (cited in Grainey, 2012: 145)

It is unclear whether these are the views of Nogueira himself, but they offer a direct echo of the 1941 law that prohibited women from playing football, even if that law had been revoked a full twenty years prior to his declaration. What is clear is that less than two decades later such a view would be unsustainable in the face of Marta's success, which resulted in her being one of eight Brazilians selected to carry the Olympic flag during the opening ceremony at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Her strong performances as captain of the women's team in the group matches, which they won convincingly, played out in marked contrast to the disappointing results of the men's team, captained by Neymar, also wearer of the iconic number 10 shirt. Indeed, large sections of the crowd chanted her name during the 0-0 draw between the Brazilian men's team and Iraq and pictures of national team shirts on which Neymar had been crossed out and replaced with Marta enjoyed wide circulation on electronic and social media (Pina, 2016). Ultimately, however, the women's team lost on penalties in the semi-final and the men's team recovered from their poor start to defeat Germany in the final, Neymar scoring both a free kick during normal time and the decisive penalty that earned Brazil their first Olympic football title. The transruptive potential of Marta's success and iconic status was only partly realised: the threat to hegemonic masculinity, and to the historical connection between masculinity, nationhood and football dissipated as the 'normal' order,

where men's football served to represent the nation to local and international audiences alike, was restored. That this championing of Marta's symbolic power came weeks after President Dilma Rousseff had been suspended from office ahead of her eventual impeachment, and that she and her diverse government had been replaced by a male president and an all-male cabinet, is intriguing, suggestive of new levels of connectivity between women's symbolic and political power.

Public Portrayals of Women's Football

Notwithstanding the achievements of figures such as Marta and Maribel Domínguez, representations of women's football have tended to coincide with an ongoing eroticisation of the female body, an emphasis on the 'feminine' qualities of players who are framed within a heterosexual male gaze. This situation resonates with that described in studies carried out in the United States, according to which these "feminized" images represent a modernized attempt to reinforce traditional stereotypical images of femininity and female sexuality, such portrayals constituting a mode of ongoing patriarchal control over women and their bodies (Kane and Greendorfer, 1994: 28–29). Perhaps the most infamous example of hegemonic masculinity's insistence on emphasised femininity in Latin American football was the decision in 2001 by the São Paulo Football Federation to start a women's championship, for which they called hundreds of women to trials. The preference for blonde, fair-skinned players over more talented darker-skinned players, the banning of short haircuts and an upper age limit of 23 led to the organisation being formally denounced to the public prosecutor (Knijnik, 2014: 121–128). In the context of Argentina, the authors of a study of women's football there conclude that:

tanto las representaciones como las prácticas reproducen las gramáticas de producción pertenecientes al universo simbólico masculino, y no aparecen intenciones de prácticas que permitan habitar dominios culturales de la masculinidad de otro modo que no sean los modelos definidos culturalmente. (Binello *et al.*, 2000: 47)

both the representations and practices reproduce grammars of production that belong to the masculine symbolic world and there is no sign of practices that allow for the masculine cultural domain to be inhabited by any means other than culturally defined models.

While their study focused solely on Argentina, the findings can be seen to apply across the continent, evident as much in the everyday media discourses that routinely sexualise women footballers as in official initiatives such as the logo reproduced in Figure 1.

At the same time as it provides a powerful example of the continued presence of hegemonic masculinity, even within a tournament for women, this image is also a reminder that discourses around football in Latin America interact with those elsewhere, echoing the movement of players to women's leagues in Europe and the United States. Adapted from a 2007 advert for Sky TV that featured the black stiletto football boot and an accompanying slogan 'Football explained to women', created by Milan-based advertising agency 1861 United, it illustrates the degree to which football's association with hegemonic masculinity extends well beyond Latin America as part of the flow of images within global capitalism.

Figure 1. Poster for the 2012 Under-17 South American Women's Football Championship



Source: Alexander Mantilla. Reproduced under Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 3.0.

In the wake of the 2015 Women's World Cup, which saw the participation of five teams from Latin America, women's football has become an increasingly normalised feature of print and electronic media. Mexico's matches in Canada were broadcast across the country by three channels, Colombia's matches were shown on Caracol TV, and the Brazilian team's participation at the tournament was free to view on the federal government's TV Brasil, which has since 2015 also shown matches from the newly created Campeonato Brasileiro Feminino. National newspapers ran features on the women's teams and followed their fortunes at the Women's World Cup, which on the whole compared favourably with their male counterparts at the concurrent 2015 Copa América. In the context of the Olympic women's football tournament in Rio 2016, the furore at the lack of Brazil shirts featuring Marta's name in sizes appropriate for men, and the crossing out of Neymar's name on the iconic No. 10 shirts to be replaced by Marta's, provided a potent symbol of a woman footballer becoming widely acclaimed as representative of the nation, perhaps for the first time in Latin America. Such episodes enjoyed viral coverage through social media, which offer routes of expression that may circumvent the hegemonic masculinity of traditional media, while in the realm of electronic gaming Brazil (and Mexico) feature among the women's teams that appear

in EA Sports FIFA2016 for the first time. In contrast to the notion that the feminisation of football in Brazil may have extended to the women's team appropriating the national style of the beautiful game (Bowman, 2015), the Colombian team are routinely described in print media and social media alike as '*las superpoderosas*' (the super-powerful). For their part, the Mexican and Ecuadorian women's teams are known as '*Las guerreras del Tri*' and '*Las guerreras de la Tri*' (the warriors of the tricolour) respectively, aligning their endeavours to the national flag. Instead of football being feminised through their achievements, it instead appears that by representing the nation via football the women on the teams come to acquire traditionally masculine characteristics that enable them to enter the realm of national iconography. In Uruguay, where football and gendered nationhood are closely aligned through the heavily masculinised notion of the *garra charrúa* (indigenous fighting spirit), the relative underdevelopment of women's football in relation to the men's game leads Lucía Pimentel to ask whether women's resulting lack of involvement in the construction of national identity renders the sport there '*un relato parcializado*' (a partialised or biased narrative) (Pimentel, 2014: 105). This situation is perhaps symptomatic in a country that figures at (or near) the bottom of tables for women ministers and women parliamentarians in Latin America (OECD, 2014: 65).

Conclusions

Over the course of the last hundred years there is no doubt that the relationship between women and football in Latin America has undergone fundamental changes that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Media reports, chronicles and short stories have included women as part of the footballing landscape since at least the early 1920s, as players, as spectators and, in some cases, as authors of texts that drew on the game for their creative inspiration. The production of discourses on women's football from a male perspective during this period was challenged on rare occasions by women writers who subjected men's football to a female gaze, but the dominant narratives culminated in the banning of women's football in Brazil in 1941, symbolic of the wider exclusion of women as players of the game at a continental level. Radical political developments through the 1960s, combined with changing attitudes to women's position in society, led to rapid changes in the socio-cultural landscape, in which women's football began to appear with some force, only largely to disappear again under the dictatorships that held sway across much of the region in the 1970s, although Mexico provided a notable exception. It was only following the return to democracy in the 1980s, and the emergence of third-wave feminism that continued to challenge masculine control – both literal and symbolic – over the female body, that women's national teams, national leagues and international tournaments arose across Latin America.

The symbolic power achieved by women in recent years as a result of their excellence in various public domains of footballing practice and representation must be understood alongside the election of women presidents in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica, especially the re-election of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil. Both presidents acknowledged the significance of football via their visibility around the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, and there is evidence of movement in the other direction as women footballers convert the symbolic power they have gained in a previously masculine domain into political power through public positions. In addition to the profoundly symbolic national roles she has occupied, described above, Marta

has, since 2010, been a goodwill ambassador for the UN Development Programme, while Maribel Domínguez made her first incursion into politics with Partido Acción Nacional (PAN, National Action Party) in the state of Hidalgo for elections held in March 2015. Latin American women from other sports, such as Mexican Ana Guevara (athletics) and Peruvians Cecilia Tait, Gabriela Pérez del Solar, Cenaida Uribe and Leyla Chihuán (all volleyball), have entered national politics since the turn of the millennium, and whether or not women footballers go on to do so they have already made an arguably more significant contribution to challenging norms around the public presence of women in a key realm of national life. The growing presence of women in the practice and discourse of football marks a clear trend towards the representation – and, crucially, self-representation – of female agency in the sport, simultaneously symptom and cause of a challenge to hegemonic masculinity across the region. However, as some of the examples discussed here have shown, the ongoing representation of that presence often remains problematically constructed (implicitly at least) via a masculine gaze that sexualises female players and fans alike. Las superpoderosas, las guerreras de la Tri, Marta and Marigol, like women footballers across Latin America, are not only playing the opposition, but also gender conventions and deeply ingrained cultural norms that continue to be experienced on a daily basis throughout the region. It is almost 30 years since Messner drew attention to the manner in which women's greater participation in US sport constituted a challenge to the ideological basis of male domination (1988: 198), while at the same time acknowledging that the framing of that participation remained subject to perspectives that tended to obstruct their counter-hegemonic potential. More recently, Connell (2014) called for a reconsideration of masculinities from a perspective that moves beyond the global North, advocating a decolonisation of debates around masculinity. Messner's portrayal of the female athletic body as a contested ideological terrain (Messner, 1988: 198) may continue to hold true in the context of twenty-first century Latin America, but at the same time women's football in Brazil and Argentina reveals how that process of contestation has been under way for the best part of a century. This is a field that has much to offer ongoing debates around the ways in which individual subjectivities and national identities are constructed in terms of hegemonic masculinities, while also undoubtedly having a part to play in relation to the decolonisation of such issues.

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