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## FIFTY YEARS OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN PLACAR: FROM DISALLOWED GOALS TO WINNING AT HOME?

*CINQUENTA ANOS DE FUTEBOL FEMININO NA PLACAR: DE GOLS ANULADOS A TRIUNFOS EM CASA?* 

*CINCUENTA AÑOS DE FÚTBOL FEMENINO EN LA REVISTA PLACAR: ¿DE GOLES ANULADOS A TRIUNFOS EN CASA?* 

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**Abstract:** Proliferation of sports coverage in the media over recent decades provides rich material through which to explore a range of socio-cultural issues. A growing number of international studies have focused on questions of gender, while in Brazil the focus has been on (men's) football as the national sport. The success of the women's national team and the global profile that women's football has come to enjoy has led to the first considerations of the ways in which the women's game in Brazil has featured in the country's printed media, especially since 2000. This study will focus instead on the ways in which women's football was discussed and represented in the country's most popular sports magazine during the period when women's football was formally prohibited in order to understand how the visual and textual discourses that have frequently been used to delegitimise women's football came to be established.

**Keywords:** Women. Football. Gender inequality. Mass Media.

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## 1 INTRODUÇÃO

In January 2020, *Placar*, Brazil's longest-running and best-selling sports magazine<sup>1</sup>, published a special issue to mark 50 years since the publication of its first edition in March 1970. Prominent among the collage of front covers from across the half century that made up the cover of the commemorative issue was No. 1457 of November 2019, devoted to women's football and featuring on its cover six-time FIFA World Player of the Year Marta, wearing the shirt of the Brazilian national team. By thus foregrounding Marta and connections between women's football and nationhood, the magazine suggests that such coverage will feature as part of what the publication itself describes as "a delicious journey through time", and that coverage of women's football has been part of its "exclusive news, tasty interviews and memorable photos [that] were and will continue to be our fundamental pillars"<sup>2</sup>. This article will explore the extent to which the representation of women's football in *Placar* has conformed to such an expectation, and to the implications of such representations, with a particular focus on the period 1970-1983, when women's football was prohibited by law in Brazil.

## 2 REPRESENTATION AND SPORTS MEDIA

For the purposes of this study, we will consider the question of representation not as an abstraction or primarily as a matter of aesthetics, but rather as a central aspect of social, political and gender issues. As Dyer reminds us:

[...] representations are presentations, always and necessarily entailing the use of codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation. [...] Representations here and now have real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society (DYER, 1993, p. 2-3).

Moreover, just as in the fields of society, politics and gender, and as we shall see in the case of *Placar*, modes of representation are subject to change, meaning that "media representations of sport constitute a site where meanings around gender are continually contested, not fixed" (BROOKES, 2002, p. 143).

Another starting point in this study is the understanding that media representations have repercussions on daily behaviours, with the role of the mass media central in "promoting and reinforcing sexist ideas about women" evident since at least the 1960s (DOUGLAS, 2019, p. 37). The subject of sport in the media, and specifically the representation of women in sport, has proved fruitful since the late twentieth century (CREEDON, 1994; WENNER, 1998; SCRATON; FLINTOFF, 2002; BROOKES, 2002; GUIDO; HAVER, 2003), although the emphasis has tended to be overwhelmingly on North America and Europe, with studies of the situation in Brazil only gaining momentum fairly recently (SOUZA; KNIJNIK, 2007; MARTINS; MORAES, 2007; SALVINI; MARCHI JÚNIOR, 2013a, 2013b, 2016; SILVA, 2015). What all of these studies have in common is that they find that women athletes and

1 Data from Editora Abril from 2014 give *Placar* 1.528 million readers and a print run of 101.035 copies, with 88% male readership (SALVINI; MARCHI JÚNIOR, 2016, p. 101).

2 The cover of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary special issue and its accompanying promotional blurb can be viewed online at <https://veja.abril.com.br/placar/cheга-as-bancas-a-edicao-comemorativa-dos-50-anos-de-placar/>.

their achievements are largely ignored; and where they are reported in the printed media, they receive far fewer words per article than equivalent coverage of male athletes, while at the same time being accompanied by text and images that undermine their achievements and/ or focus on their physical appearance/ sexuality. This use of images in particular brings to mind the observation that “the photograph clearly only signifies because of the existence of a store of stereotypical attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification”, with the ways in which such images are used over time creating the potential for “a ‘historical grammar’ of iconographic connotation” (BARTHES, 1977, p. 22). As we shall see in the case of *Placar*, people wearing football shirts, shorts, socks and boots is an apparently “ready-made element of signification” in Brazil, as are images of semi-naked women, although both are the result of an “invention of tradition” (HOBSBAWM; RANGER, 1983) that has come to be questioned and challenged in recent years.

### 3 PLACAR: THE FIRST 50 YEARS

Since the rapid growth in the study of sports media since the turn of the millennium, *Placar's* undisputed status as Brazil's top sports magazine, with a focus on Brazilian football throughout its existence, has made it an attractive object of study, greatly facilitated by the existence of a digital catalogue of almost all editions between 1970 and 2010, and, most recently, a *Placar* app<sup>3</sup>. Studies by Saldanha (2009), Saldanha and Goellner (2013), by Salvini and Marchi Júnior (2013a, 2013b, 2016) and by Silva (2015) provide a solid base on which to consider the representation of women's football in the magazine, although only Silva considers the period of prohibition that will be the focus of this study, the others concentrating instead on later periods.

Since first appearing in 1970, and despite consistently maintaining football as its primary focus, *Placar* has gone through several phases, some of which have had a marked influence on the representation of women's football. For each of their articles, Salvini and Marchi Júnior follow a decade-by-decade approach to the magazine's phases (2013a, 2013b, 2016), which does not coincide with the magazine's own announcements of new formats over the years. Far more coherent in terms of *Placar's* own statements is the genealogy adopted by Saldanha, who identifies four phases: 1970-1990 as a weekly informative magazine covering a wide range of sports in Brazil, albeit with football as the main one; 1990-March 1995 (the publication's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary) as a monthly football magazine with each edition devoted to a different theme; 1995-1998 as “Futebol, Sexo e Rock & Roll”, a monthly magazine aimed at a male teenage and young adult readership; and 1999-2009 as a monthly magazine focused exclusively on football (SALDANHA, 2009, p. 23-31). A more recent significant change saw Editora Abril, the publisher responsible for *Placar* since its appearance, sell the magazine to Editora Caras in June 2015 as part of a package of seven titles, only for it to be transferred back to Editora Abril in October 2016. Although this interlude represents only a short period during the life of the magazine, it is nonetheless crucial as in the intervening months Editora Abril had stopped publishing the Brazilian edition

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3 This catalogue can be accessed to view most of the various articles and images discussed in this study via [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QXW27JKseFQC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QXW27JKseFQC&redir_esc=y).

of *Playboy*, apparently because of falling circulation and rising royalty costs (ABRIL retoma ..., 10 Oct. 2016). This resulted in the end of the regular full-page *Playboy* feature adverts in *Placar*<sup>4</sup> a fixture throughout much of its existence and an important consideration in the broader representation of women in the magazine.

#### 4 1970-1979: BANNED, BUT PLAYED

When considering the representation of women's football in *Placar* during the magazine's first two decades it must be remembered that women had been prohibited by law from playing football in Brazil since the introduction of presidential decree 3,199 by President Vargas in 1941. This law was reinforced in 1965 to exclude beach football and futsal as sports for women and was only revoked in December 1979 as part of a broader relaxation of social and political measures as Brazil began to emerge from 15 years of repressive military dictatorship. However, it was not until April 1983 that Brazil's Conselho Nacional de Desportos (CND, National Sports Council) set in place the bases on which women could officially participate in football. Against this backdrop it is not surprising that women's football rarely appeared in *Placar* throughout the early years of the magazine's existence, and this is the justification for using 1980 as a starting point by Salvini and Marchi Júnior (2016, p. 101). This is not to say that women – and indeed women's football, in Brazil and elsewhere – were absent from its pages during the 1970s, and these early representations established both an invented tradition for the magazine as well as “a ‘historical grammar’ of iconographic connotation” (BARTHES, 1977, p. 22). For example, in the first edition (13 March 1970), women did not appear as athletes in any of the coverage of various sports, but the wives of Scala, Garrincha and Eusebio appeared in photos alongside their husbands in articles on each of the renowned football players. In the same number, an advertisement for instant coffee carried a full-page photo of a man sitting on a stool with hands clasped on his lap and looking shyly at the floor, wearing a child's sailor outfit, complete with shorts and beret, ignoring the cup of coffee that is offered to him by a woman's arm (p. 25). The question asked of this emasculated man-child in large bold font across the top of the page is: “Do you depend on your wife even to make you a cup of coffee?”. For anyone who falls into this category, the paragraph of accompanying text reassures us that this instant coffee offers the solution, and: “if she offers any resistance, the reason is psychological: she wants to keep you a slave to the specialisation of women. So use your authority as a man. Give an order. You have the right to give orders in your house. Or don't you? When the strength of rights ends, the right of strength begins. Come on, macho man!”. The explicit mention here of gender-appropriate activities complements the pictures of wives alongside the football stars, undoubtedly reflecting the gendered social expectations of the dictatorship and simultaneously constructing a domain of iconographic connotation that established the place of women in *Placar*.

The representation of women as wives of famous football players continued to characterise their presence in *Placar* through the first half of the 1970s, while hundreds of action shots of men playing football marked, by contrast, their agency as subjects in

4 As publications in the same “Men's Magazines” section of Editora Abril, they shared free advertising space (Cris Veit, former Diretora de Arte at *Placar*, personal communication).

this domain. Recent studies have shown that women were playing football in various parts of Brazil during this period, a continuation of the situation in the decades since the ban was introduced in 1941 (COSTA, 2017; RIBEIRO, 2018; RIGO, 2008; SILVA, 2015), and the first two years of *Placar* provide further evidence of women's activity in this field. A brief item on the Women's World Championship in Italy in July 1970 included a photo of Danish players holding the trophy and the suggestion that it would be good for Brazil to have a team at the next edition of the Championship (n. 19, 24 Jul. 1970, p. 39), implying the existence of women players in Brazil who could form such a team. In the event, Brazil did not send a team to the Women's World Championship in Mexico in August-September 1971, but the tournament did spark several mentions of women's football in the magazine. An article charting the eight-year struggle of Lea Campos to be recognised as a football referee in Minas Gerais concluded by stating that she would be travelling to Mexico at the end of the month to watch the event (No. 75, 20 August 1971, p. 35), but this generally sympathetic item was offset a few pages later by a male fan's letter: "Women's football will be much appreciated in Brazil, not by the players themselves, but because, at the end of each game, the opposing teams will swap shirts. That will be a *fiesta* for the fans" (No. 75, 20 August 1971, p. 45). As well as constituting the first mention of the notion of women players exchanging shirts, repeated on many occasions over the years in the magazine's pages, this letter illustrates the hegemonic discourse of football that assumed the crowds in the stadia, and the readers – and writers – of sports magazines, to be male and heterosexual. The results section of the following edition of *Placar* flagged in its headline the start of the Women's World Championship in Mexico and gave the results of matches played to that point, as well as noting that the average crowd size was 80,000 "because of the good football that they are offering" (No. 76, 27 August 1971, p. 37-38).

Such enthusiasm proved short-lived, however, and there was no coverage of the later stages of the tournament, nor of Denmark's second title, in subsequent editions, although there was evidence of Brazilian young women playing football in the form of Heloísa Alves de Oliveira, another aspiring referee, who had enjoyed playing football at school in Bahia. The (male) interviewer was quick to reassure his readers that she "has no pretensions to be a feminist leader" and that her "figure is most feminine" (No. 77, 3 September 1971, p. 43), thereby re-locating her within the established parameters of her gender and resolving the potentially transgressive charge of a woman claiming a place in the domain of football. Further evidence that Brazilian women were playing football despite the long-standing prohibition, and that *Placar* sought to return the women players firmly back to the realm of what they felt were properly feminine modes of representation, is found in letters published in two editions from December 1971. Two women sent a letter offering to provide photographs of the women's teams that they had founded in Brasilia so that they might be published; the magazine's response was to ask for photos of the teams in "mini-bikini" (10 December 1971, p. 46). The pressures evident above for women to conform to what Connell refers to as "emphasised femininity" (CONNELL, 1987, p. 183) in the domain of football appears to have been internalised by some: another letter from a woman complaining about the difficulties of finding other women's teams to play against in Guarapiranga, and inviting others to come and play against them, ended

by stating that “we don’t play in football kit, but in little bikinis. We play football, but we are women and are very feminine” (31 December 1971, p. 33). This emphasis on their femininity may be taken as evidence of the effectiveness of hegemonic discourses, but it could also be seen as a means of women consciously using, perhaps tongue in cheek, strategies that might enable their presence in a domain that was legally denied to them. By diminishing to a largely male readership (and to male authorities) the disruptive and transgressive potential of what they were doing, they created a space in which they could be football players.

In addition to textual references, this period also sees the start of women in football being visually represented as objects of a heterosexual male gaze: the wives of four players for Feyenoord, then champions of the Intercontinental Cup, appeared in full-length photos wearing long-sleeved Feyenoord shirts (No. 44, 1 January 1971, p. 34-35). Beyond the bottom of the shirt, however, the fact that they all have bare legs and feet and are looking directly into the camera represents them as models rather than football players, thus establishing an iconographic difference in relation to football, based on gender. Such patterns of representation were maintained in the following years, as women appeared occasionally as athletes in sports that Brazilian law defined as gender-appropriate (such as volleyball and swimming), or as wives and mothers of male football players (as on the front cover of No. 178, 10 August 1973), or in adverts, part of a broader process of eroticisation of the female body in Brazilian media (SILVA, 2015, p. 27), which saw models wearing tight-fitting football shirts to promote, for example, the range of colours available in a brand of paint (No. 311, 26 March 1976, p. 2).

Women’s football as a sporting practice made its first appearance as a feature article in No. 438, the front cover carrying a small photo of a female footballer and announcing “Holland: Women Contest a Championship”. The three-page article had as its headline: “Swapping Shirts, the Best Part of This Game”, while the subtitle declared that “After the carousel, Holland has invented, seriously, women’s football. There is an organised championship and even a national team. And the crowd doesn’t leave before the end of the game, because swapping shirts is an important part of each spectacle” (15 September 1978, p. 23). This aspect was discussed further – alongside illustrative photos – on the following two pages together with coverage of the match itself. This article revealed several elements that became features of the representation of women’s football in subsequent years, all of which implicitly challenged the possibility of women’s football being taken seriously as a practice. Firstly, the trope of swapping shirts at the end of the game – evident in *Placar* since August 1971, as discussed above – called attention to the chance to see the players’ breasts, a key feature in the historic construction of femininity and the feminine role of childcare. Secondly, the “invention” of women’s football and its novelty repeatedly denied the women’s game the historical legitimacy that is the basis of (invented) tradition enjoyed by men’s football; and finally, the practice of women’s football was described in comparison to the reference point of men’s football, here coming “After the carousel”, while the elements of the Dutch carousel on display in the women’s match were “slower, but also far more elegant than those of the team of Cruyff and Neeskens” (p. 24). These three strategies proved foundational to the historical

grammar of connotation, both iconographic and textual, that is employed in *Placar* to delegitimise women's football over the following decades.

In the months that preceded the lifting of the ban on women's football in Brazil, evidence of its practice re-emerged in *Placar* after several years of silence, during which time it was undoubtedly being played (COSTA, 2017; SILVA, 2015), well before the supposed "invention" of women's football in the Netherlands in 1978. A short item, under the suggestive title "Women in Sergipe Get Warmed Up" (No. 461, 23 February 1979, p. 25), told how Confiança FC in NE Brazil decided to relaunch the club's women's team, which "exhibits itself" before "official matches" to attract more fans to the stadium. An accompanying photo of the forwards for the women's team allowed readers to appreciate their "excellent physical condition and stand-out qualities that heat the blood of any fan". While the distinction between the matches of the women's team and "official matches" may be understandable given the legal prohibition still in force, the sexual innuendo evident in the description of the women players was not related to the prohibition, but instead served to attribute to them the distinctive physical and erotic attributes historically and repeatedly associated with the "exhibition" of femininity in Brazil. Of particular interest in this regard is a full-page article entitled "Essas Meninas Tem Peito!" (These Girls Stick Their Chests Out!), featuring the first action shot of Brazilian women's football in *Placar*, a full-length photo of Neide "Dinamite" in football kit as she jumped to control the ball on her chest, a visual non-sequitur in the "historical grammar of iconographic connotation" (BARTHES, 1977, p. 22) associated with football in Brazil. The paradox of a woman football player continued in the textual elements of the article, which described her as the star player of the three women's teams in Campo Grande – reported as being active for five years and playing weekly matches as well as training regularly – at the same time as highlighting her blonde hair and shapely body (No. 467, 6 April 1979, p. 28). However, this emphasised femininity was later called into question by her declaration that she had lost numerous boyfriends as a result of her interest in football, implicitly drawing attention to the potential rejection of heterosexual relationships by women playing football, thereby directly echoing the anxieties that had led to the ban on women's football almost 40 years earlier (FRANZINI, 2005). A brief follow-up item noted that the team of Neide "Dinamite" had received invitations to play in São Paulo state and expressions of interest from women keen to join them (No. 474, 25 May 1979, p. 36), but ultimately it seems that the public profile achieved through this media coverage proved fatally negative: three months later a note revealed that the state football federation in Mato Grosso do Sul had resolved to put an end to women's football and had even reported the matter to the Federal Police (No. 486, 17 Aug 1979, p. 21). This sequence of events, in relation to a team that had been training and playing regularly for the previous five years, indicates that the problem was not so much women playing football, but being seen to play football and so threaten to occupy a key domain in the constitution of the nation that had hitherto been constructed as exclusively male.

The increased visibility of women's football as a practice represented in the media, and debates surrounding it, were, of course, part of a broader picture of questioning and challenging socio-political structures in Brazil in the 1970s with the military dictatorship still firmly in power. Rial highlights the role played by the growing feminist movement in Brazil, spurred by the return of feminists from exile in Europe



and elsewhere under the Amnesty Law of August 1979. These feminists were active in debates around physical education and influential in the promulgation of Deliberation No.10 of December 1979 that saw the end of the ban on women's participation in various sports, including football (RIAL, 2013, p. 122). It is also important to consider the changes that took place in Europe in relation to women's football during the 1970s: bans were lifted in Germany (1970), the Netherlands (1971) and England (1971), and in 1971 UEFA recommended that national federations should take responsibility for the women's game. Major national leagues were founded in Italy (1974) and France (1975), while in 1979 a European championship involving 12 national teams was held in Italy independent of UEFA, which decided the following year to hold its own women's tournament. Following the feature on the Dutch women's championship of 1978, discussed above, the frequency of articles in *Placar* discussing women's football in Europe increased, highlighting the significant differences between European sporting and political authorities and their Brazilian counterparts under the dictatorship. An edition from July 1979 discussed the women's European tournament in Italy, albeit incorrectly describing it as the "II World Championships of Women's Football" (No. 482, 20 July 1979, p. 26)<sup>5</sup> and a subsequent edition discussed the final, in which Denmark beat Italy (No. 486, 17 Aug 1979: 21). A few months later an item in the "*Placar* Mundial" section of the magazine told its readers that the situation in Germany increasingly disproved the saying that "football is a matter for men", detailing the existence of 2,238 officially registered teams and 334,000 women football players (No. 500, 23 November 1979, p. 82). The force of the assertion of women's place within the domain of football in comparison with the situation in Brazil was, however, significantly undermined as the author described the star player as a "pretty mulatta" and illustrated the item with a photograph, taken from behind, of a woman player bending over in brief shorts in a position that rendered her an object of heterosexual male desire rather than a sporting subject.

One week ahead of the meeting of the CND at which the 1941 ban on women's football was revoked, renowned Brazilian football manager and football journalist João Saldanha used his regular column to discuss women's football under the title "Football is For Women" (No. 503, 14 December 1979, p. 36-37). Over the space of five columns Saldanha apparently sought to offer the support to women's football that the title suggests, flagging women's minimal participation in the sport in the first column and declaring that "I always thought that women should be able to take part in everything [...] on equal terms to men or, where that is not possible, they should be helped". He went on, however, to discuss how the rules of the game, such as the weight of the ball, the length of the game and the size of the pitch have been designed with men in mind, clearly indicating that he felt that women were unable to play under the same conditions as men. A further problem he foresaw was of a more "socio-economic-sporting" nature as clubs might need to include additional items in the first aid kit, such as needle and thread, lipstick, rouge and sanitary towels, before moving onto the key reason why he believed that women could not play football with men on equal terms: biology. For Saldanha, a woman's physique did not equip her to deal

<sup>5</sup> *Placar* had itself reported on the "II World Championships of Women's Football" in two issues in August 1971, a fact clearly ignored by the authors of the article in question.

with the violence of a football match and while women could develop their muscles he wondered if “then, perhaps, we are no longer dealing with women”, leading him to conclude that a separate set of rules for women's football was required, with smaller pitches, lighter balls and “the slight modification of certain laws of the game”. He concluded by sharing his experience of women's football in England and Italy, which he described as “ugly” because “It has neither feminine grace nor masculine vigour”, a phrase that is highlighted in large bold letters as a caption to the article in the final column. The negative emphasis of this editorial decision is echoed in the three cartoon figures that were placed within the article: the first depicted a male football player wearing a shirt with large breasts and shouting “Henilda, you picked up the wrong shirt again”; the second simply showed a curvaceous female backside in a pair of tight football shorts; and the third portrayed a woman in a football shirt surrounded by speech bubbles that asked “Do you fancy a friendly”, “Look out for hard tackles” and “What position do you play in?”. Amid the debates taking place in Brazilian society and the country's highest sporting authorities in relation to the long-standing ban on women playing football (and several other sports), the contribution of *Placar* was to use a national footballing authority to point out the practical and biological obstacles to their participation and simultaneously ridicule the possibility by the reproduction of visual stereotypes around women's supposed biological and sexual function.

## 5 1979-1983: NO LONGER BANNED, BUT NOT YET AUTHORISED

The decision of Brazil's CND (National Sports Council) in their session of 21 December 1979 to revoke the ban on women's football was not reported in *Placar*, but its readers were certainly aware of the change and in the following months the magazine published eight letters sent by women either playing for or managing women's teams, several of them asking for the magazine's support in organising a campaign to promote the newly legal sporting practice (e.g. No. 540, 5 September 1980, p. 66; No. 544, 3 October 1980, p. 66). However, the CND resolution left women's football in limbo: at the same time as it revoked the 1965 ban (which reinforced the original ban of 1941), it specified that the previously banned sports could be played “in the form, modalities and conditions set out by the international bodies responsible for each sport”<sup>6</sup>. It further specified that this permission applied only to sports for which international tournaments were organised by the relevant authority, in this case FIFA; FIFA, however, had yet to embrace women's football, so these conditions were not met. In such cases, Deliberation 10/79 allowed for the national body of the sport in question to apply to the CND for authorisation for the sport to be played by women, but the Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (CBF, Brazilian Football Federation) showed no interest in developing and promoting the practice of women's football, a situation that has arguably only recently begun to change<sup>7</sup>. As a

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6 The text of Deliberation 10/79 can be viewed on-line at <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/3438879/pg-92-secao-1-diario-oficial-da-uniao-dou-de-31-12-1979>. Accessed: Oct. 22, 2020.

7 Following discontent from many quarters, including players on the national team, the CBF introduced equal payments for men and women on national team duty. A new structure for women's football was also put in place in September 2020, with Duda Luizelli and Aline Pellegrino assuming key leadership positions, alongside Swedish coach Pia Sundhage. For details, see <https://www.fifa.com/news/caboclo-there-is-no-more-gender-difference-in-brazil>. Accessed: Oct. 20, 2020.

result, women's football in Brazil fell into a power vacuum in which it was no longer banned, but nor could it be officially played, leading to many media reports referring to women's football as still being banned, and to the CBF even imposing fines on São Paulo FC for allowing a match in September 1982 between representative women's teams from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the Morumbi stadium ahead of a men's match against Santos (SILVA, 2015, p. 80-81; 97-100). This bizarre situation was resolved only in April 1983, when the CND approved rules for women's football that the CBF finally drew up and presented to them in accordance with Deliberation 10/79, even though FIFA had authorised a women's football tournament in Brazil 18 months earlier (SILVA, 2015, p. 110-112). *Placar* briefly reported on the newly official status of women's football in an item of 12 lines under the title "The Ball is (Also) for Women" (No. 672, 8 April 1983, p. 68), noting that women would play on smaller pitches with lighter balls, that matches would last for 70 minutes and that three substitutions per team would be allowed, differences from the men's game that addressed women's supposed biological inferiority in a direct echo of the views expressed by Saldanha in his column in December 1979. Before mentioning any of these practical differences, however, the article first highlighted the fact that women would not be allowed to swap shirts after a match, thereby appealing again to the (invented) tradition that *Placar* had established in relation to football over the previous decade, which framed the representation of women as erotic objects rather than subjects of sporting agency.

In the years between the revoking of the ban and the official recognition of women's football, *Placar's* contribution to the uncertain status of the women's game was to delegitimise it – when it included it at all – through repeated negative reporting and sexualisation, ignoring the calls from women readers and players, discussed above, to support a campaign for the promotion of the women's game. The only two substantial articles on women's football during this period were published in consecutive editions in September 1981, perhaps in response to a perceived threat of the women's futsal tournament that was scheduled to take place the following month in Formosa, Brazil, with the blessing of FIFA. The first of these articles, published over two full pages, carried the headline "Women Attack!", under which a subtitle read: "Women's football has no grace and even masculinises women. Despite these criticisms, in Brazil as in other countries, women continue kicking their little ball about, certain that another taboo is about to fall" (No. 592, 18 September 1981, p. 32-33). After mentioning what it described as the "shocking growth" of women's football in Europe, and its anticipated acceptance by both UEFA and FIFA, the article quoted the highly negative opinions of the President of the CND, the ex-manager of the Brazilian national (men's) team, two members of the national women's volleyball team, the leader of an organised fan group and a player from one of Brazil's most successful clubs, all of whom agreed that football is not for women. Support for the women's game, expressed by a single professional male player and the manager of a women's team, were immediately countered by negative opinions, while those of an "out-and-out feminist" were mocked as extremist. Of the three images that illustrated the article, a full-length photo from behind of a young woman in football shirt, football boots and bikini bottom contradicted entirely the subtitle alongside which it appeared, as did the inevitable trope of a woman player who had removed her shirt after a game. The third

photo showed two Brazilian women's teams in action in a packed stadium, disproving another of the reasons put forward in the article to argue against women's football, namely the lack of public interest.

The following edition carried a full-page article on the "Soccer Sex Stars", a team composed of actresses, models and dancers who were well-known from popular television programmes of the time, including the "fantastic mulatta" Adele Fátima, "banana girl" Wilma Dias and "the frenetic" Leiloca (No. 593, 25 September 1981, p. 67). The top half of the page was devoted to a colour image of the team, posing in the style of models "with tight little shorts and shirts with plunging necklines", a representation that legitimised the views of those in the previous edition who had opposed women's football on the grounds that "women have to be feminine" (No. 592, 18 September 1981, p. 32). Several of the women shared their experiences of playing, all of which confirmed the stereotypes of feminine frailty seen in the articles from the late 1970s discussed above: Leiloca regretted that the game could not stop for her to wipe the sweat from her face and re-do her make-up; Tamara – "poor dear" – complained that her body ached after the physical effort required by a match; and Adele Fátima would burst into tears if she suffered a hard tackle. The article concluded with their determination to play, despite such inconveniences; as Tamara explained, "football is good for the soul and for the spirit", to which the reporter responded that "it seems not to be too bad for the body either", returning the focus again to the notion of women's football as an erotic spectacle that reaffirmed heteronormative masculinity.

## 6 1983: AUTHORISED, BUT LARGELY INVISIBLE

The recognition and regulation of women's football by Brazil's sporting authorities had little immediate impact on its presence in *Placar*. Despite the fact that the magazine had published interviews and letters that attested to the existence of women players and teams in Brazil since 1971, its first significant item on women's football after its formal recognition in April 1983 came almost a year later. On a front cover that featured Socrates, an announcement revealed that "Women's Football Exists", immediately underneath another headline proclaiming "Aldine Muller, fan of Internacional" (No. 718, 24 February 1984). Over the course of three pages, under the title "Women's Football: the Charm of the Conquest", the magazine introduced its readers to a number of the players from "at least four good women's teams in Brazil" (p. 42), three of which were associated with professional men's teams, as well as Radar from Rio de Janeiro. There was some discussion of the players' ability and their teams' results, but the focus was consistently on aspects such as age and physical appearance (height, weight, eye and hair colour were mentioned for several players), and the first three columns of the article were devoted to the women's lengthy preparations in front of a mirror before a match, including whether or not they wore a bra to play. The three-page story closed with the observation that "women's football is a cheerful reality, made up of goals and charm", its potential as a serious sporting practice further delegitimised a few pages later by a two-page feature of a well-known soft porn actress lying provocatively on the netting of a goal, "with only a football shirt between her and nudity" (p. 49). This strategy of feminising football, repeatedly

drawing attention to the players' physical appearance and their feminine behaviours ahead of any mention of football prowess, was a mainstay of women's football articles in *Placar* over the following decades, when indeed there was any coverage at all. Feminisation turned into outright sexualisation from 1995 to 1998, when *Placar* was relaunched with the subtitle "Football, Sex and Rock'n'Roll", and the legacy of these heavily gendered representations of women's football was arguably only overturned in the second decade of the twenty-first century, notably through acceptance of the footballing excellence of Marta and other internationally successful Brazilian women players.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The representations of women's football in *Placar* have changed significantly since 1970, as has women's football itself in Brazil, although the move away from overwhelmingly feminised and sexualised representations has come only in the last few years. Banned by law during the first decade of the magazine's existence, a period that coincided with a right-wing military government that routinely exercised press censorship, it is perhaps no surprise that women's football was almost entirely absent at that time. To some extent, the problem for women's football in 1970s Brazil was not that it was played despite the long-standing ban, which it undoubtedly was, but that it was seen to be played, as evident in the case of teams in Mato Grosso do Sul that were to be shut down after appearing in *Placar* between April and August 1979. Women did appear regularly, however, as wives, girlfriends and mothers of the male players who filled the pages of *Placar*, and in numerous advertisements, all of which reinforced gender-appropriate activities for women according to the codes of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity of 1970s Brazil. When reports on women's football in Europe began to appear at the end of the decade, perhaps in response to anxieties around the growing feminist movement in Brazil, or as a way of highlighting the social restrictions of the dictatorship, these same codes were applied, prioritising the appearance and feminine attributes of the players while simultaneously belittling their physical skills as footballers. By the time structures and rules for women's football in Brazil were agreed in 1983, *Placar* had already delegitimised it by representing women in traditional gender roles in which the female body is constituted as the site of natural physical attributes associated with femininity and motherhood that render the female body an object of heterosexual male desire rather than as a form of physicality that results in agency or movement for the women themselves.

This "symbolic annihilation" (DUNCAN; MESSNER, 1998, p. 171) of women's football in *Placar* continued, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, over the following decades through the consistent feminisation and sexualisation of women players and of the women's game on those rare occasions when it featured at all. The repeated use of the modes of representation discussed here from 1970-1983 established "a 'historical grammar' of iconographic connotation" (BARTHES, 1977, p. 22) for women's football in Brazil through which it was associated with traditional notions of femininity and gender-appropriate behaviours, especially in relation to physical activity, thereby continuing to echo the views of those who had banned women's football in 1941. By

perpetuating such notions, and so marking clear differences vis-à-vis men's football, in which representations focused instead on skill, strength and tenacity as implicitly natural attributes, *Placar* also contributed significantly to the “invented tradition” (HOBSBAWM; RANGER, 1983) of football in Brazil as a male domain.

The prominent inclusion of the cover of the November 2019 issue of *Placar*, featuring a full-page photo of Marta in the iconic No.10 shirt of the Brazilian national team and the banner headline “Feminine” (see Figure 1) in the collage of previous editions that form the cover of the 50th anniversary edition is not representative of the magazine's coverage over the years of its existence.

Figure 1 – Front cover of *Placar* No. 1457



Source: *Placar* No. 1457, November 2019 (Image: David Wood).

Choosing to reproduce the only front cover from its 50 years that exclusively represents women's football as an athletic practice, in a non-sexualised manner (the banner “Feminine” continues to foreground femininity), can perhaps be seen as an effort towards correcting what that same edition called “its past errors in its treatment of women's football” (No.1457, November 2019, p. 4). In the months following the 50th anniversary issue, women's football has received little coverage as the men's game has continued to dominate representations of the national sport. However, the inclusion of an interview with Pia Sundhage in her role as the new coach of the women's national team (No. 1468, October 2020, p. 26-27), which draws attention to recent positive developments in Brazil and to the ongoing inequalities in the resourcing of

football for men and women, offers hope that *Placar* will at least continue to represent women's football in sporting – rather than feminised or sexualised – terms. In this way, the representations of women's football can challenge the traditional narratives and codes through which the sport has been framed for decades, and which *Placar* itself significantly served to establish and reinforce. The millions of Brazilian women who choose to represent themselves through football in various ways, and all those who came before them, deserve nothing less.

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**Resumo:** A proliferação da cobertura esportiva da mídia durante as últimas décadas oferece um rico material para empreender uma análise de vários temas socioculturais. Um crescente número de estudos internacionais vem se dedicando às questões de gênero, ainda que no Brasil se tenha estudado o futebol masculino como o esporte nacional. O êxito da seleção de mulheres e o perfil global que o futebol feminino conquistou têm resultado no estudo das formas como esta prática tem sido representada na mídia brasileira, sobretudo desde os anos 2000. Este estudo toma como ponto de análise as representações de futebol feminino na revista esportiva mais popular do país, durante os anos nos quais o futebol foi proibido, para entender como se estabelecem os discursos tanto textuais como visuais que serviram com frequência para deslegitimar o futebol praticado por mulheres.

**Palavras chave:** Mulheres. Futebol. Iniquidade de Gênero. Meios de comunicação de massa.

**Resumen:** El auge de la cobertura deportiva en los medios durante las últimas décadas ofrece un rico material para emprender un análisis de varios temas socioculturales. Un creciente número de estudios internacionales viene dedicándose a cuestiones de género, mientras que en Brasil se ha estudiado sobre todo el fútbol masculino como deporte nacional. El éxito de la selección de mujeres y el perfil global que ha conquistado el fútbol femenino, han llevado al estudio de las formas en que esta práctica ha sido representada en los medios brasileños, sobre todo desde el año 2000. Este estudio toma como punto de análisis las representaciones del fútbol femenino en la revista deportiva más popular del país durante los años en que el fútbol fue prohibido para entender cómo se establecen los discursos, tanto textuales como visuales, que han servido con frecuencia para deslegitimar el fútbol practicado por mujeres.

**Palabras clave:** Mujeres. Fútbol. Inequidad de Género. Medios de comunicación de masa.

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