

BALANCE AND PRUDENCE (OR DIPLOMACY AND MODESTY): THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SECCIÓN FEMENINA'S SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN THE NEWSREELS OF EARLY FRANCOIST SPAIN (1938-1949)

ELENA OROZ

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the representation of the sporting activities promoted by the Sección Femenina (SF) in film newsreels produced in Francoist Spain from 1938 to 1949. Founded in 1934 as the female branch of the fascist Falange party and active until Spain's transition to democracy in 1977, the SF received official status in 1939 as the government agency responsible for the indoctrination of Spanish women by means of initiatives including home economics schools (*Escuelas del Hogar*), mobile propaganda teams (*Cátedras Ambulantes*) and community services (*Servicio Social de la Mujer*). Thanks to support and training initiatives like these, the SF acquired considerable political influence during the dictatorship and established itself as an important state apparatus, providing the regime with a cheap, rudimentary social system (Graham, 1995) that facilitated pub-

lic surveillance (Blasco Herranz, 2003), while also taking part in promoting the policies developed and publicised by the regime to gain the approval of broad sectors of the population (Molinero, 2005).

Among the many areas in which the SF was involved, the promotion of sports constituted an important recruitment strategy and a project over which it had practically exclusive control in the education system and as a leisure activity (Ofer, 2009). In 1941, the organisation managed to add physical education (along with political science and home economics) to the public and private school programs, although in practice the subject would not be offered until 1948 (Richmond, 2004: 67). The power the women of the Falange thus acquired was viewed as interference by the Catholic Church and sparked a rivalry between the two institutions. Moreover, the ecclesiastical authorities proved extremely determined to put a stop

to some of the SF's more progressive initiatives, including its sports training and summer camps for girls (Richmond, 2004; Ofer, 2009). Indeed, the mere idea of physical education for girls was considered "scandalous and lascivious", to quote the Archbishop of Seville, Cardinal Segura (quoted in Ofer 2006: 990).

In the context of the many Francoist policies related to the regulation of women, sport became a key issue due to the criticisms it incited from various sectors of the regime. An analysis of the role played by the SF in the promotion of sports can thus shed light on important debates over gender, politics and religion that marked the first years of the dictatorship (Ofer, 2006; Richmond, 2004). This area also offers an illuminating perspective from which to study the modernising dimension of the SF in relation to gender¹ and the rhetorical somersaults and concessions it needed to make in order to overcome what was referred to in a 1945 report by its Sports Council as "a pre-existing collective mentality based on backward ideas, mistaken notions [and] entirely theoretical concepts [...]", as well as "an attitude of women, the consequence of the old ideas that kept them in isolation [...] [and] an age-old attitude of Celtiberian man" (ANA, Serie Azul, folder 41, doc. 3).

An examination of the representation of the SF in newsreels can thus facilitate an evaluation of the level of agency and visibility that this Falangist women's organisation had as a promoter of physical activity for women in the medium that best embodied modern mass culture in the first half of the 20th century, as well as the political values and ideas about gender expressed on screen. This study, which covers the end of the Spanish Civil War and the decade of the 1940s, involves the identification of the SF's presence in newsreels and a textual analysis of their sports stories, drawing on key historical sources in order to properly contextualise and interpret the organisation's view of sport and its representation on film. The study period chosen reveals a substan-

tial variation of discourses and images, as a result of the SF's gradual shift from what was initially quite a radical Falangism towards a self-imposed conservatism over the course of the 1940s (Ofer, 2009; Richmond, 2004), and also of the changes to the regime's film production policy, given that the evolution of both over this period reflected the process of *defascistisation* of Francoist ideology (beginning in 1941 and becoming especially apparent after 1945) and its redefinition as National Catholicism (Saz Campos, 2004).

The sources analysed are *El Noticiario Español* (1938-1940) and the NO-DO newsreels. The first was the most important propaganda initiative of the Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (DNC, 1938-1941), the self-styled Nationalist faction's main project for organising and controlling all the reins of the Spanish filmmaking industry (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2011), in parallel with another, bigger project: the establishment of the first government under Franco's rule in January 1938 and the enactment of the State Administration Act. *El Noticiario Español* consisted of 32 newsreels that were notable for their function as propaganda rather than information, with a relatively bold formal approach and an extremely virulent tone (*ibid.*). The NO-DO newsreels began production in 1943. All Spanish cinemas were required to screen these newsreels, which thus became the official mouthpiece of the Franco regime and one of its main mechanisms of public indoctrination (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2006; Rodríguez Mateos, 2008).

Although this study is limited to newsreels, it is worth noting that the sporting events organised by the SF in this period were also featured in documentaries about the organisation's political activities, which were filmed at its request. These included *La Concentración de la Sección Femenina en Medina del Campo* (1939), produced by the DNC, and *Tarea y Misión. Segunda Concentración de la Sección Femenina en El Escorial* (1944), produced by NO-DO, a summary of which was included in one

of its newsreels (81B, 1944). These two documentaries reveal a shift in the kind of physical activity encouraged for women to conform with acceptable gender norms (Oroz, 2013). This same idea is observable in the newsreels, although there are no references in the latter to the eugenic benefits of sport (as a means of strengthening the Spanish “race”), a notion that was so central to fascism (Coronado, 2013; de Grazia, 1992) and so explicit in the documentary *Tarea y Misión* (Oroz, 2013).

THE SF AND THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN’S SPORT: TENSIONS AND CONCESSIONS

Even during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the SF was already taking an interest in sport as an important part of its mission to educate well-rounded women. When the war ended, a restructuring of the organisation resulted in the creation of the Physical Education Council, directed by María de Miranda. In 1939, de Miranda published a document that outlined the council’s objectives in ambitious and monopolistic terms:

We strive to reorganise this central department whose work must produce strong and healthy women capable of forging a race of Titans [...]. The physical education of women must be entirely in our hands. We want to be the official authority and to create a national school (quoted in Ofer, 2009: 993).

That same year, on the occasion of the Spanish University Union’s First National Sports Championship, the SF’s national representative Pilar Primo de Rivera summed up the guiding principles of women’s sport in the New Francoist State: “perfection of the body, necessary for the balance of the human person; spiritual health, which in turn requires this balance as part of religious education; [and] a competitive spirit that teaches women to participate in all tasks” (quoted in Suárez Fernández, 1993: 115).

However, these ideas positing a relatively equitable conception of women, calling for their

personal development and autonomy, were ultimately short-lived as their implementation proved complicated. In the years after the war, the debates over women’s physical activity acquired a markedly moralistic tone, and to legitimise its power and institutional status, the SF was constantly forced to renegotiate its principles and practices with reference to the values espoused by the Catholic Church. Thanks to its diplomatic approach, it was able to promote innovation in this area while at the same time dodging any accusations of feminism (Richmond, 2004: 60).

This is reflected in an account of the impact of women’s sport in the early 1940s offered by the ideologically sympathetic historian Luis Suárez Fernández, who notes that the press began “to be filled with images of girls in sporting outfits, with new colours, in hitherto unheard-of numbers. The importance of sport, which the Sección Femenina had been highlighting since the beginning of the war, was steadily growing” (1993: 124). Suárez Fernández goes on to point out the consequences of this unprecedented public display of the female body: “It is difficult to appreciate the outrage caused by the appearance of these short-skirted youths, as [Falange leader] José Antonio [Primo de Rivera] would call them, competing in sports stadiums. The leaders had to find a balance, to progress without compromising anything essential

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and to do so prudently to avoid unfair criticism” (Suárez Fernández, 1993: 149).

This prudence crystallised into the official position of the SF on physical exercise, which was conceptualised as an activity consistent with the Christian spirit, and consequently as a moral duty. In 1941, the Councillor of Sports declared: “while we women may not be called to be preachers of morals, we have the duty to facilitate the fulfilment of Catholic obligations. The spirit of the Falange: religion and military service, spirituality and discipline” (quoted in Ofer, 2006: 995). By 1952, this conciliatory vision had been fully assimilated, as the Council declared that while “it was obvious that women should enjoy the benefits that Physical Education offers the individual” in terms of health and personal well-being, this had to be combined with moral, religious and intellectual education, and “we must not lose sight of the fact that these three activities must complement rather than obstruct one another” so that ultimately, the “perfection of the body” could be a vehicle to “best serve the interests of the soul housed within it” (*La Sección Femenina*, 1952: pp. 87-88). Falangist women thus confirmed their loyalty to the National Catholic cause: “Spain has always placed the interests of the spirit above all others, and we have remained faithful to this principle” (ibid.). In short, over these ten years, the SF always proceeded with extreme caution, taking special care to stress that sport was not an end unto itself, that the organisation’s guiding principles were in line with Catholic tenets and, just as importantly, that women’s exercise had nothing to do with mere entertainment or the frivolous bourgeois obsession with beauty, despite the fact that some of its documents and activities may have contradicted this claim.

This caution in turn had consequences for the implementation of the SF’s sports program. First of all, it affected the activities deemed appropriate for female instructors, and by extension for women in general. While in 1938 and 1939 these activities included gymnastics, athletics, swim-

ming, tennis, hockey, basketball, mountaineering, skiing, and traditional and contemporary dance (Ofer, 2006: 996), the list was very quickly reduced to include only those that did not compromise femininity. Wrestling, football, cycling and rowing were all ruled out from the start (Richmond, 2004: 67), while athletics was deemed too masculine and was barred until 1961 (Ofer, 2006: 996), although the study plans for SF instructors allowed running and somersaults (Zagalaz & Martínez, 2006: 94). Secondly, it had an impact on the way the sports were played, as to avoid the “unfair criticisms” mentioned by Suárez Fernández (1993: 49) and accusations of ostentation, the SF channelled most of its funds and efforts towards the creation of a national training system rather than competitive activities (Ofer, 2006: 994), while also eliminating any individual competitive sport (Richmond, 2004: 67).

Nevertheless, the tournaments received particular attention in the newsreels due to their spectacular, colourful and dynamic appearance, their value as propaganda, and of course the fact that they took place outdoors, making them easier to film. Moreover, the SF promoted these events actively, conscious of the persuasive power of the media (Gallego, 1983; Oroz, 2016). Viuda-Serrano (2014) documents the many letters to the National Press Office requesting maximum exposure in the press and on radio of the reports issued by the SF about the national championships in gymnastics, basketball, swimming, handball and hockey. In the case of cinema, the propaganda was disseminated via two channels. The first was through the SF’s own Department of Cinema, created in 1940 at a particularly unproductive moment for the DNC (Oroz, 2016), which drew attention to the need to produce films documenting the organisation’s work in this area. Thus, in 1942, it was reported that a series of handball, basketball, swimming, skiing and gymnastics competitions were being filmed for the documentary *Juventud Sana* [Healthy Youth] (AGA, Cultura: 3/51.41, Box 629),

although no record of the completion of this film has been found in this research. The second channel was NO-DO, which the SF Press and Propaganda Council—with the mediation of the National Propaganda Office—asked to film specific events, including sporting events, for their inclusion in its newsreels (AGA, Cultura: 3/49.1 21, Box 649).

SF SPORTING ACTIVITIES ON EL NOTICARIO ESPAÑOL: PROUD YOUNG BODIES AT THE SERVICE OF THE FATHERLAND

The physical education and training of young women with the first sporting activities organised by the SF during the Civil War and the period immediately after it are featured in three of the nine newsreels of the DNC's *El Noticario Español* dedicated to the organisation. The newsreel titled "Campamentos de nuestras Organizaciones Juveniles" [Camps of Our Youth Organisations] (No. 5, September/October 1938) shows young women of the Falangist forces training and working in images explained by a voice-over narration:

The young women enlisted in the Spanish Falange hone their bodies and spirits for the greater glory of the fatherland. These girls [...] are helping the country's peasants with their gruelling tasks, taking classes in manual labour, attending talks and engaging in constant organised gymnastics exercises.

The footage in this newsreel conveys the essence of Falangist values, albeit with less intensity than what is suggested by the stern tone of the voice-over: effort and service (women harvesting in the fields), respect for tradition and rural life (girls in regional dress taking part in traditional dances) and, above all, order and discipline (the shots of girls marching, the female officers commanding them and the Swedish gymnastics exercises that take up much of the footage and which are shown during

the voice-over's concluding statement: "In short, they are preparing to serve their nation."

The next newsreel (No. 7, October 1938) presents the first course for female physical education instructors organised in Santander late in the Civil War. This initiative was also covered by a revealing account published in *Y* magazine titled "Carta de una cursillista" [Letter from a Trainee], written by Lula de Lara (Figure 1). In the letter, the future instructor stresses the emancipating quality of Falangist discipline and exercise while challenging prejudices about sport's masculinising effects and vehemently criticising bourgeois women, whom she describes as "eternally weary [and] spiritless". In Lula's words, physical education is:

Something wonderful that absolutely every woman should learn and engage in. There is nothing lovelier, in the hours we dedicate to games, gymnastics and sports, than seeing a group of girls—there are just over thirty of us—on the field, dressed in short, bright coveralls, their young bodies standing proudly and attentively to the grace of the movements [...]. And all the girls [...] get to learn about the supreme beauty of physical action, of the trained and flexible figure, charm and the science of the posture (Lula, 1938: 54).

Figure 1. Photographs accompanying the article "Carta de una cursillista" by Lula de Lara, published in *Y* magazine (No. 6-7, 1938)





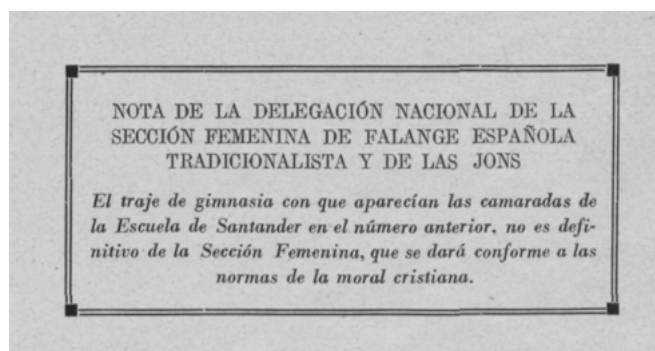
Figures 2 and 3. Still-frames from the newsreel "Santander: Organizaciones Juveniles" (*El Noticiario Español*, No. 7, 1938)

This idea of emancipation is also evident, although less explicitly, in the film footage of this "physical culture" course, as it is named in the voice-over. The cameras of the DNC linger on its most expressive aspects, the open-air gymnastics exercises whose harmony is highlighted in two shots: one wide shot showing two girls sitting in the foreground watching the movements of the group with the sea in the background; and a slightly angled shot showing the women with a building reminiscent of Greco-Roman—but also fascist—architecture behind them (Figures 2 and 3). The girls are dressed in light coveralls ending just above the knees and tied in at the waist, and the voice-over highlights the importance of ex-

ercise for the Falange: "the new Spain cultivates her body and spirit and prepares herself to create a better Spain." This newsreel is significant given that this was the period when criticisms began emerging about the young recruits' lack of modesty, as evidenced by the fact that the photographs of the course in *Y* magazine (No. 7, September 1938) warranted a clarifying note that the outfits shown in the pictures were only temporary and would soon be replaced with others more in keeping with "standards of Christian morality" (Figure 4). Nevertheless, these activities continued to be presented on screen, featured in the *El Noticiario Español* newsreel in October of that year.

The newsreel titled "Barcelona. Campeonato nacional deportivo de la Sección Femenina de Falange" [Barcelona: National Sporting Championship of the Falange's Sección Femenina] (No. 28, November/December 1939) offers a summary of the first public sporting competition for women with an audience made up of members of both sexes. This newsreel highlights the presence of national leaders—Pilar Primo de Rivera and General Orgaz—and lists the tournaments held both for competitive sports (basketball and hockey) and for those that could be classified as beauty sports

Figure 4. Notice published in *Y* magazine (No. 8, 1938)



(tennis and Swedish gymnastics). The voice-over narration is notable for its evasion of gender bias, describing the activities of the “comrades” as “a brilliant and hard-fought competition”, an “extremely competitive elimination” or a “game of great quality and sporting spirit”. As noted above, the discourse of the SF in these early stages had not yet acquired the openly puritanical tone that would be adopted later, as reflected in Pilar Primo de Rivera’s speech at the event, which, although it was not included in the newsreel, is worth citing here:

You girls, who are the youngest of our Women’s Section, may serve the cause best this way, outdoors, by showing Spain that the Falange is new and clean and agile like you... Train hard and be persistent because anything done by half never gives good results, and furthermore, you should know that nothing in life is gained by chance: the best always win out. (Quoted in Ofer, 2009: 112)

El Noticario Español presents physical education for women in accordance with the Falangist ideal that rejects the idea that the body itself should be an object of praise, insisting instead that gymnastics should serve only for the glorification of discipline (Richmond, 2004: 66). However, the footage does present women who are shown enjoying the sport they play, the values associated with it (competition, skill, camaraderie) and their own bodies; as Labanyi (2002) suggests, these performative practices gave these young Falangists a paradoxical sense of self through the submission of the individual to national unity.

SF SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN NO-DO NEWSREELS IN THE 1940S: CONCEALMENT OF WOMEN’S BODIES

Although the SF made an express commitment to enlisting the women of the Falange Movement and indoctrinating Spain’s female population through initiatives like community service and the *Cátedras Ambulantes* (reinforcing political, religious and gender values all at once), this social work and

proselytising, referred to repeatedly in its print publications, was rarely remarked upon in the official newsreels. In general, the image that NO-DO disseminated of the organisation was much more institutionalised and conservative, focusing on its political ceremonies and its promotion of regional dance (Ramos, 2011; Oroz, 2013). Moreover, in the decade examined here, the SF was featured in only 38 news stories, six of which reported on sporting activities. Specifically, these stories dealt with skiing courses (8 [1943] and 66B [1944]), basketball instructors (27A [1943]) and gymnastics displays (17 [1943], 76A [1944] and 253B [1947]), with a notable dearth of news coverage of the organisation in 1946, as will be explained below.

NO-DO’s first news story on the sporting activities promoted by the SF (8, 1943) focused on some skiing courses in Barcelona. Quite unusually for NO-DO, the commentator stresses the autonomy that exercise can offer, in keeping with the discourse described above:

The Sección Femenina [...] looks after the cultural and sporting education of Spanish women with an especially keen interest [...]. Our female comrades carry out their training with enthusiasm, taking possession of themselves and their muscles. Sport allows them to achieve that difficult and wonderful balance between body and soul.

The footage shows a group of joyful, active women dressed in two-piece uniforms on which the embroidered Falange coat of arms is clearly visible. At dawn, they line up for the flag-raising ceremony, enthusiastically prepare their skiing equipment, march in a line up the mountain, and glide smoothly down the slopes. In addition to serving to introduce this training activity—a sport with an obvious classist dimension that would soon cease to be considered a priority due to its high cost (Ofer, 2009: 115)—to a general audience, it is striking to note how the voice-over posits physical activity as a means of acquiring agency (“taking possession of themselves and of their muscles”). In 1944, NO-DO would publicise these championships again in a

newsreel (66B) that presents the winning team and reports on the trophy ceremony, while also showing fascist rituals such as the Roman salute and including shots of the proudly smiling winners of the Pilar Primo de Rivera Prize (Figure 5).

These shots of the winners are important because the SF also had to deal with the objections of the party's male authorities to the idea of women being involved in competitive activities. In 1945, sport became an object of debate in the SF's National Council, as "certain defects in need of correction were identified": specifically, the fact that "certain women excelled too much in a particular sport" (Suárez Fernández, 1993: 170). In response, Pilar Primo de Rivera wrote a letter to the Falange's Deputy Secretary of Sections, in which she had to clarify that "it was not the Falange's objective to produce elite sportswomen, but to ensure that all or most young Spanish women had the chance to play sports; always with the same principle of placing training above any other objective" (ibid.).

This directive—the group above the individual and above personal recognition—is palpable in NO-DO's subsequent coverage of sporting activities in the 1940s. Moreover, the tone of the newsreels discussed above represents an exception, as the visual parameters of physical exercise for women would be redirected, with the outfits worn being a crucial element due to the numerous criticisms they sparked among the Catholic authorities. Indeed, the rigid dress code imposed on Spanish women after the Civil War proved incompatible with virtually all sports (Blasco Herranz, 1997; Ofer, 2006), as the Sports Council established a whole series of rules that were particularly severe for sports such as swimming, but also extremely detailed in relation to the length of the uniform or the use of trousers, an item of clothing allowed for skiing and mountaineering, basically because SF members engaged in these sports.

This sociopolitical climate, characterised by vehement demands for the concealment of the female body, influenced the promotion of sporting activ-

ities by the SF, as reflected in various censorship orders. In 1942, the National Press Office issued the following directive: "Attention, censors! Any photographs taken at sports championships involving the Sección Femenina in which our female comrades are showing their knees are prohibited and should therefore be ruled out" (quoted in Viuda Serrano, 2014: 230). And in the file for the lost documentary *Academia Isabel la Católica* (Luis Suárez de Lezo, 1944), which depicted a day in the school where SF leaders were trained, the only annotation to the script presented to the censors is: "Shots 30 and 31 of the gymnastics should presumably not raise any objections" (AGA, 3/121, 36/04663).

The three news stories included in NO-DO about the various gymnastics events similarly reflect the limits imposed on the public display of the *genuinely Spanish* female body. The structure of all three is practically identical: all include long shots of the event (Figure 6) and of the traditional dance performances (Figure 7), which, as we are told in Newsreel 76A (1944), "also form part of the program of these exercises" along with previous "flexibility" and "balance" exercises. The news story about the Third Gymnastics Championships (17A, 1943) does include the trophy ceremony, although it only shows the Falange leaders, never

Figure 5. Trophy ceremony in the newsreel on the Sección Femenina de Falange skiing championship (NO-DO 66B, 1944)





From top to bottom. Figure 6. Third National Gymnastics Championships held at University City of Madrid (NO-DO, 17A, 1943). Figure 7. Dance presentations at a rural gymnastics event (NO-DO, 76A, 1944). Figure 8. Coros y Danzas presentation at the Castellón Gymnastics Festival (NO-DO, 253B, 1947)

the winners. On the other hand, Newsreel 253B (1947) ends with what almost seems like a mistake: a close-up shot of a participant receiving a bouquet of flowers and a trophy, although the image quickly fades to black. Moreover, in this last newsreel (the analysis of which is hampered by the fact that the audio track has been lost), the sporting display is presented as a festival with a markedly traditional tone and practically half the footage is dedicated to the *Coros y Danzas*, Spanish folk singers and dancers shown performing in a wide shot under the vicarious gaze of Franco, whose face appears on a large poster positioned high above them (Figure 8).

But what perhaps most characterises the representation of these displays in the NO-DO newsreels is the restraint of the women's bodies. First of all, their physical movements as shown in these films are much feebler and more reticent than they appeared in the DNC newsreels (1938-1941), which reflected an interest in underscoring the gracefulness of the choreography through the framing, camera movements and wide shots of the people. For example, the first propaganda productions analysed contain hints of a Nazi aesthetic in the framing of the young people and the exaltation of the culture of the body that would reach its peak in *Juventudes de España* (Edgar Neville, DNC, 1939), a documentary about a sports display held in Seville in 1938 to celebrate the Day of the Fallen (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2011: 355-360) with the participation of 1,600 girls and young women recruited by the SF. Secondly, this modesty is also evident in the outfits the girls are wearing, with the adoption of what would become the distinctive uniform of the organisation: the *pololo*, which served as a clearly palpable symbolic emblem of the strict gender boundaries in place and the delicate balance that the SF had to strike to remain within them if it wanted to make sport popular among women. A hybrid garment that was basically a pair of trousers with the appearance of a long skirt that buttoned up

on the side, the *pololo* allowed women to exercise discreetly, while at the same time marking their bodies as clearly feminine and, in keeping with a conservative conception of gender roles, limited their mobility. As Carmen Martín Gaité suggests (1987: 69), the *pololo* ended up turning what could have been “pleasure” into “sacrifice”; it was a garment that “hindered”, turning the experience into a “painful imposed pregnancy that has never known the pleasure of a body in freedom.”

Although the SF's sporting activities increased during the 1940s, their representation in NO-DO newsreels was limited, which could be interpreted as a sign that some of the SF's more innovative initiatives needed to be toned down. Although the gymnastics displays reflected Falangist principles of order and discipline, their depiction on screen was less spectacular than it had been previously, while the addition of traditional dance introduced a graceful and delicate (i.e., acceptably feminine) dimension that largely determined the perception of the sports promoted by the organisation. According to Simón (2019), this would prove contradictory for the audience of the period, given that the official newsreels included international stories provided by Actualidades UFA or Fox Movietone about women's swimming or mixed competitions that praised the physical abilities of the female athletes.

As the last news story discussed above suggests, the depiction on screen of the dynamic dimension of the SF began giving way to a more re-

gressive image: its role in promoting the essence of the nation according to the Francoist and Falangist mythos (Tranche & Sánchez-Biosca, 2006; 2011) through the traditional singers and dancers of the Coros y Danzas. As the organisation would stress, the performance of traditional song and dance also represented a *national* variant of sport:

The Sección Femenina recognises the vital importance of Spanish folk dance, which encapsulates the Spanish sense of rhythm and movement in its purest form, as an essential foundation for the achievement of the genuinely Spanish gymnastics to which we aspire (*Medina*, 17/7/1941, quoted in Martín Gaité, 1987: 69)

CODA: A PERIOD OFF SCREEN

A crucial aspect of the representation of the SF in the NO-DO newsreels of the 1940s is the two-year hiatus between the reports on the last sporting activities discussed above, an absence that forms part of a general dynamic of visibility/concealment of the organisation in the early years of the dictatorship, with a substantial break identifiable in 1945. In numerical terms, the SF appeared in 14 news stories in 1943, nine in 1944, only one each in 1945 and 1946, two in 1947, four in 1948, and six in 1949. In discursive terms, a regression can be discerned in the on-screen representation of the SF in the DNC's productions, as noted above. In 1943, a certain fascist undercurrent is still evident in the sporting and political events where SF members acquire an awareness of their bodies and confirm their commitment to the party and its ultranationalist project. However, this more progressive side of the SF—considering the ideological context in which the organisation was conceived, established and developed—was soon erased from Spain's film screens. This erasure or blurring cannot be dissociated from the development of the film production policy of the New Francoist State. While propaganda was initially managed by the Falange, in 1945 the Ministry of People's Education

THE THREE NO-DO NEWS STORIES ON THE GYMNASTICS DISPLAYS REVEAL THE LIMITS IMPOSED ON THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF THE TRULY SPANISH WOMAN'S BODY AND THE RESTRAINT OF ITS MOVEMENTS AND STYLE OF DRESS, WITH THE ADOPTION OF WHAT WOULD BECOME THE DISTINCTIVE UNIFORM OF THE SF: THE POLOLO

was created and NO-DO came under the purview of a government department controlled by the Catholic authorities. This political restructuring resulted in the abandonment of any expression that might identify the Franco regime with the recently defeated Axis powers of the Second World War, and, as Rodríguez Mateos (2008) points out, up until the early 1950s NO-DO was one of the media services that best reflected this propagandistic approach, involving the removal of the Falange from the country's film screens.

The internal documentation of the SF reflects this process in relation to the Falange's women's branch. The annual report presented by its Department of Cinema at the 11th National Council (1947) stated that over the previous year it had been unable to engage in its usual level of film production. Along with a lack of available film stock, the report noted that "the NO-DO organisation, which has always provided us with extremely effective assistance, for political reasons has deemed it inadvisable to film news stories and events related to the Sección Femenina" (AGA, Cultura: 3/51.41, Box 630). And indeed, in 1946 the presence of the SF in the newsreels was limited to a single 30-second appearance in the news story "Campaña de invierno de la Sección Femenina en Tarragona" [Sección Femenina's Winter Campaign in Tarragona] (159B). The same report stated that the SF's submissions to the Regulatory Sub-Committee of Cinematography requesting film stock to produce copies and documentaries had fallen on deaf ears. Aware of the crisis that its party was facing, the SF advocated prudence and discretion, focusing on local and rural activities (Richmond, 2004; Ofer, 2009). While the organisation withdrew into the background of Spain's social and political arena, NO-DO contributed from the outset to the fossilisation of its public image.

CONCLUSIONS

The discourse on femininity identifiable in the representation in the Franco regime's newsreels of

the sporting activities promoted by the SF, along with the speeches and documentation associated with it, constituted a challenge to the hegemonic model of the female (wife, mother and home-maker) and to the traditional public/private binary, given the clear characterisation in the texts analysed above of physical exercise as an *outdoor* activity. In general terms, as a result of the dynamic, virile image of the organisation disseminated during the Spanish Civil War (Blasco Herranz, 1999; Oroz, 2013), the subsequent tensions between two ideas of what it meant to be Spanish—the National Syndicalist/fascist notion and the traditional/Catholic conception—were expressed in the depiction of Falangist women as politicised female bodies, active and present in the public sphere. Sporting activity thus constituted a clear, visible sign of the gradual concealment of the female body from public view in the 1940s, as well as the special symbolic value that femininity acquired as a measurement of national morality during the dictatorship. The power of the Catholic Church and the reorganisation of power among the political elite of the regime over the period studied were determining factors in the redefinition of the SF's ideological principles and visual parameters for women's sports, with the adoption of an image that was modern but above all modest.

Initially, in the DNC's *El Noticiario Español* and the first two years of the NO-DO newsreels, sport was presented as a disciplinary mechanism aimed at placing women's bodies proudly at the service of the political and national unity (Falange and the New Spain), while displaying *masculine*—but adaptable from a rhetorical and militant Falangist perspective (Labanyi, 2002)—qualities that would later be erased: competitiveness, self-improvement, physical skill and camaraderie. Beginning in 1944, on-screen representations of the sporting activities promoted by the SF became less common as coverage of the organisation came to be characterised by domestication and the replacement of sports with more traditional activities

such as regional dance, in an effort to stress the symbolic dimension of the SF—and by extension, of femininity—as a repository of the essence of the nation and a link to the Francoist notion of Spain’s mythical past. There was thus a clear shift from a depiction of proud, energetic women associated with the virility and verticality of National Syndicalism towards a representation in accordance with the traditional female virtues of horizontality, submissiveness and modesty.

Although the news stories about women’s sports and the activities of the SF largely disappeared from film screens during the 1940s—only to become more ubiquitous than ever in the decades that followed (Gil & Cabezas, 2012)—they were significant for laying the foundations of a representation of women in sport that was conditioned by political and religious factors. Future studies are therefore needed to analyse the representation of sport promoted by the SF in the 1950s and 1960s, a period marked not only by modernisation and consumerism as Spain opened up to the outside world, but also by new calls for greater social participation and access to employment for women (Ofer, 2009), in which the Falangists and sport would again play an important—and contradictory—role (Ofer, 2009; Morcillo, 2015). For example, in 1965, despite having lost its monopoly over sport and much of its social influence, the SF consistently advocated for sport as a vehicle for the “promotion of women” in a series of speeches where the concept of promotion encompassed not only personal betterment but also better job opportunities (Zagalaz & Martínez, 2006) in sectors already deemed acceptable for women (such as social work and education), as well as others from which they had previously been excluded or were not openly recognised (such as the legal and economic sectors) (Ofer, 2009). ■

NOTES

- 1 Far from describing the organisation as a mere vehicle for the gender ideology of the dictatorship, current literature on the Sección Femenina stresses its level of political agency in the dictatorship and its embodiment of a distinctive female identity, contrary to the hegemonic Francoist model, which simultaneously contained traditional and modernising elements (including political awareness, participation in the public sphere and independence). Research on the SF has also examined the contradictions between its practices and discourse (marked by a rhetoric aimed at maintaining its authority without upsetting the patriarchy) and its complex, problematic objective to close the gap between the elite women who ran the organisation and the general female population. For further information, see the studies by Blasco Herranz, Richmond, Labanyi or Ofer.

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BALANCE AND PRUDENCE (OR DIPLOMACY AND MODESTY): THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SECCIÓN FEMENINA'S SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN THE NEWSREELS OF EARLY FRANCOIST SPAIN (1938-1949)

Abstract

This article analyses the representation of the sporting activities promoted by the Sección Femenina (SF), the women's branch of the Spanish Falange, in film newsreels produced in Francoist Spain in the period from 1938 to 1949: The sources analysed are the *El Noticiario Español* newsreels produced by the Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (DNC) from 1938 to 1940, and the Francoist government's NO-DO newsreels, which first appeared on Spanish film screens in 1943. Given the SF's total control over physical education for women and the value of sport as a propaganda tool, this analysis sheds light on the heated debates over sexuality, politics and religion that marked the early years of the dictatorship and their impact on the representation of women's sport on screen. This research involves the identification of news stories about the SF's sporting activities, which are analysed with the support of other historical sources. The aim is to examine the evolution of the discourse on sport promulgated by the women's branch of the Falange, its rhetorical expression and audiovisual representation, and to identify the factors that led to the gradual domestication of gender attributes and the representation of their bodies, as women who were politically active and present in the public sphere.

Key words

Sección Femenina de Falange; Francoism; Sports; Newsreels; Propaganda; Gender Politics.

Author

Elena Oroz is an Assistant Professor with the Department of Communication at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and a member of its Tecmerin research group and University Institute of Spanish Cinema. She is the author of more than 30 book chapters and academic articles and the co-editor of numerous books, including *Lo personal es político: Documental y Feminismo* (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011) and *Entrevistas con creadoras del cine español contemporáneo* (Peter Lang, 2021). Her areas of research are documentary film, Spanish cinema, and gender studies. Contact: elortega@hum.uc3m.es

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EQUILIBRIO Y PRUDENCIA (O DIPLOMACIA Y RECATO). LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LAS ACTIVIDADES DEPORTIVAS DE LA SECCIÓN FEMENINA EN LOS NOTICIARIOS CINEMATOGRAFICOS FRANQUISTAS (1938-1949)

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la representación de las actividades deportivas promovidas por la Sección Femenina de Falange en los noticiarios cinematográficos franquistas en el periodo comprendido entre 1938 y 1949: *El Noticiario Español* del Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía (1938-1940) y el noticiario de NO-DO que llegó a las pantallas españolas en 1943. Considerando el control total que la SF tuvo sobre la educación física femenina y el valor propagandístico del deporte, este ámbito permite iluminar enconados debates sobre sexualidad, política y religión que se produjeron durante los primeros años de la dictadura y su impacto en su difusión cinematográfica. Tras la identificación de las noticias dedicadas a la SF en este ámbito, se realiza un análisis textual que, junto con la consulta de documentación interna, tiene por objetivo examinar la evolución del discurso sobre el deporte por parte de las mujeres falangistas y su plasmación retórica y audiovisual, al tiempo que se exponen las causas que propiciaron una progresiva domesticación de los atributos de género y la representación de sus cuerpos, en tanto que mujeres políticas, activas y presentes en la esfera pública.

Palabras clave

Sección Femenina de Falange; Franquismo; Deporte; Noticiarios Cinematográficos; Propaganda, Políticas de género.

Autora

Elena Oroz (Soria, 1978) es profesora ayudante doctora en el departamento de Comunicación de la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid y miembro del grupo de investigación Tecmerin y del Instituto Universitario del Cine Español de la misma universidad. Autora de una treintena capítulos de libro y artículos científicos, ha coeditado, entre otros, los libros *Lo personal es político. Documental y Feminismo* (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011) y *Entrevistas con creadoras del cine español contemporáneo* (Peter Lang, 2021). Sus áreas de investigación son el cine documental, el cine español y los estudios de género. Contacto: elortega@hum.uc3m.es. Contacto: elortega@hum.uc3m.es.

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