

Forging an Organic Nation: Physical Education, Gender and Class (Spain 1939-1975)

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Recibido: 4 de octubre de 2017

Aceptado: 27 de octubre de 2017

Abstract: The current paper explores the fields of physical education and of women's sports in Spain during the years of the Franco dictatorship. It analyses the duality of these fields as both reinforcing unequal power relations and as potential arenas for resistance. The article focuses on the promotion of physical education as part of a wider effort to forge a new Fascist, and later on a National-Catholic, culture. My claim is that when it came to the issue of physical education and sporting activities the dictatorship was motivated first and foremost by the belief that the state of the individual body (both male and female) could affect and shape the condition of the body of the nation as a whole. Similarly to its early allays — Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany — the Franco regime adhered to a policy according to which individual bodies had to be monitored and strengthened in order to insure that they could fulfill the functions assigned to them by the state. Physical education, competitive sports and military training, therefore, were viewed as the means for fortifying the body and exposing diverse populations to the regime's surveillance and indoctrination techniques. The article examines some of the ways in which the implementation of physical education policies was used by the organizational entities in charge of mobilizing women and girls in order to undermine the official discourse on the role and the capacities of the female body.

Key words: Spain, Physical Education, Franco regime, SF de la FET.

Resumen: En este artículo se exploran los campos de la educación física y de los deportes de las mujeres en España durante los años de la dictadura de Franco. Se analiza la dualidad de estos campos al reforzar relaciones de poder desigual, así como áreas potenciales de resistencia. El artículo se centra en la promoción de la educación física como parte de un esfuerzo más amplio con el objetivo de forjar, primero, una nueva cultura fascista primero y, más tarde, una cultura nacional-católica. Mi argumento es que, cuando se trata de educación física y de actividades deportivas, la dictadura estaba motivada antes que nada por la creencia de que el estado del cuerpo individual (tanto masculino como femenino) podía afectar y dar forma a la condición del cuerpo de la nación en su totalidad. De forma parecida a sus aliados —la Italia fascista y la Alemania nazi— el régimen de Franco se adhería a la política por la cual los cuerpos individuales tenían que ser controlados y fortalecidos

para asegurar que cumplieran las funciones asignadas por el estado. La educación física, los deportes de competición y el servicio militar eran vistos tanto como medios para fortalecer el cuerpo como para exponer a la población a diversas técnicas de vigilancia y adoctrinamiento. En el artículo se examinan algunas de las formas más representativas con las que las entidades encargadas de la organización de la educación física de la mujer daban forma a este discurso oficial antes mencionado.

Palabras clave: España, Educación Física, Dictadura de Franco, SF de la FET.

Members of the *Sección Femenina de la F.E.T.* labor in their capacity as sportswomen [...] in order to celebrate the greatness of the Fatherland. It is through the practice of sport that a nation fortifies itself and its people prepare themselves for the great sacrifices required of them in order to reach the final and definitive victory. It is in the legions of sporting women that we witness in countless mass demonstrations that the Spanish nation finds its most efficient and dedicated defenders.¹

In the world of sport we give preference to those fields that are more effective pedagogically, as well as in hygienic and educational terms. We also promote those fields that are practiced in installations that yield the most profit in terms of their use.²

The Department of Physical Education of the *Sección Femenina* does not function solely in order to bring about an improvement in the state of the Spanish race. It exists as a means of spreading our doctrine. Hence our preoccupation:

[...] should the *Sección Femenina* participate in sporting events organized by the National Council of Sport? If we do so we shall be classified by others as simply one more [sporting] club. However, if we do not participate we are running the risk that the teams that we had formed through much effort will be taken over by other entities outside of the party and lose their specific national-sindicalist profile [...].³

The above citations reflect the complex evolution of the field of women's physical education in Spain during the years of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). They point to the confusion (sometimes intentionally created) between the concept of physical education and that

¹ Nivardo Pina, "El deporte en las organizaciones del Partido," *Arriba España*, 28 de abril 1943 in F. J., Caspistegui Gorasurreta 2006: 260.

² "Método, planes y objetivos de la educación física femenina en España," *Real Academia de Historia*, Fondo Asociación Nueva Andadura (henceforth ANA), Serie Azul, carpeta 41, doc. 3.

³ P. Primo de Rivera, ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 45b, doc. 1 (26.1.1943).

of sport and highlight the tensions between the wish to generate a new physical culture for the masses, on the one hand, and the demand for elite training, on the other. They also indicate the difficulties inherent in assessing the goals and impact of the policies which this authoritarian and ultra-nationalist regime formulated in relation to the female body: Its place and “appropriate” levels of exposure within the nationalist system of education and the Francoist public sphere; its expected functions; and the disciplinary measures applied to it.

Following the work of researchers such as Cathy van Ingen and Jennifer Hargreaves the current article views gender identities as developing relationally within different cultural spaces of which the classroom, the sporting club and the youth movement are but a few.⁴ Assuming agency and constraint to be dialectically interrelated, it examines the construction of such spaces as sites of struggle over meaning and practice. As Alan Bairner rightly noted sport often constitutes a conservative set of institutional practices that reinforce existing power relations. However, he adds that “[...] there is no reason why conservative approaches to a variety of human activities cannot be intrinsically progressive or, at the very least, serve a progressive social agenda.”⁵ In the pages that follow I would like to explore the duality of the field of physical education as both reinforcing unequal power relations and as a potential arena for resistance.

The first section of the article provides some working definitions, statistics and historical background regarding the institutional setting of the field of physical education under the Franco regime. The second section analyzes the promotion of physical education as part of a wider effort to forge a new Fascist, and later on a National-Catholic, culture. My claim is that when it came to the issue of physical education and sporting activities the dictatorship was motivated first and foremost by the belief that the state of the individual body (both male and female) could affect and shape the condition of the body of the nation as a whole. Similarly to its early allays — Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany — the Franco regime adhered to a policy according to which individual bodies had to be monitored and strengthened in order to insure that they could fulfill the functions assigned to them by the state. Physical education, competitive sports and military training, therefore, were viewed as the means for fortifying the body and exposing diverse populations to the regime’s surveillance and indoctrination techniques.

⁴ J. A. Hargreaves 1986; *idem* 2004; C. Van Ingen 2003.

⁵ A. Bairner 2014: 58.

The section, therefore, focuses on the disciplinary choices of doctors and administrators in relation to female physical education and on the ideological and moral rhetoric used in order to justify such choices.

The third section of the article examines some of the ways in which the implementation of physical education policies was used by the organizational entities in charge of mobilizing women and girls in order to undermine the official discourse on the role and the capacities of the female body. In Spain women entered the world of sporting activities and of physical education through a manipulation of the message that called for national regeneration and for a demographic revolution. The Female Section of the Spanish Fascist party (*Sección Femenina de la FET*, henceforth SF) was assigned the role of developing and monitoring physical education schemes for women. However, the SF constructed a discursive and an educational environment where the more traditional dictates emanating from regimes' official gender ideology were often subverted. The daily interactions between PE instructors and the girls and women who trained under their supervision within the school system, universities and the *Falange's* youth movement generated a space where, despite many prohibitions, a better understanding and a more positive image of the female body emerged. This final section, therefore, focuses on some of the subjective experiences of female practitioners and instructors.

Who Is in Charge of What? Working Definitions, Statistics and Organizational Structure

Within Francoist rhetoric the concepts of "physical education" and of "sport" were quite often used interchangeably. For the purpose of the current article, however, it is important to distinguish between the two. In order to do so I rely on the definitions provided by Richard Bailey. According to Bailey:

Sport is a collective noun and usually refers to a range of activities, processes, social relationships and presumed physical, psychological and sociological outcomes. These activities include individual, partner and team sports; contact and non-contact sports; motor-driven or perceptually dominated sports; different emphases on strategy, chance and physical skills; and competitive, self-development and purely recreational activities.⁶

⁶ R. Bailey 2005: 72.

Physical Education, on the other hand, is first and foremost:

[...] a statutory area of the school curriculum, concerned with developing pupils' physical competence and confidence, and their ability to use these to perform in a range of activities. Whilst the performance of physical skills forms a central and characteristic feature of the subject, like all other areas of the curriculum, it is fundamentally concerned with knowledge, skills and understanding.⁷

The above distinction singles out the classroom as a primary arena for the diffusion of physical education policies. However, in the case of Franco's Spain due to the distinct institutional structure within which the education of girls and young women took place, physical education policies were implemented in a similar manner and by the same agents (*instructoras de educación física* trained by the SF) within schools, the *Falange's* Youth Movement and certain professional spaces.

Generally speaking, during the first decade of its existence the Franco regime showed less interest than its Italian and German counterparts in the promotion of sports and of physical education. This is perhaps not surprising given that the dictatorship came into life following a civil war that took the lives of over 400,000 soldiers and civilians and set the development of the Spanish economy back by nearly two decades. During the 1940s little funds were available for the promotion of sporting activities and even less to the creation of adequate facilities. When it came to legislation and to the foundation of organizational structures, however, the dictatorship advanced in great leaps. The gap between legislation and reality was typical of the way in which the Franco regime conducted itself in various fields. It was especially apparent in areas where the *Falange* was eager to assert its administrative power by promoting policies that contradicted the aims of other prominent forces within the nationalist coalition such as the Catholic Church or the military.⁸

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Before proceeding further it is important to note that in Spain the Fascist party was but one of three political organizations or "families" that constituted the administrative backbone and provided the ideological framework for the regime. The Franco regime should therefore be viewed as a profoundly anti-liberal and nationalist regime of which a fascist movement, the *Falange*, was but one political force. If prior to 1942 it was the most significant force in ideological terms, following the end of the Second World War the balance of power shifted in favor of Catholic elements and the fascist influence, while continuing to exist was overshadowed by the ideology of National Catholicism.

While the administrative and ideological influence of the *Falange* greatly fluctuated throughout the dictatorship's existence its women's section was recognized already during the Civil War as the official women's organization of nationalist Spain. The SF was founded in June 1934. Throughout its 43 years of existence it was led by Pilar Primo de Rivera (daughter of the former Spanish dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera and sister of the *Falange's* founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera). At its height, in the early 1940s, the organization attained a membership of over 600,000. During the initial years of the regime Pilar Primo de Rivera used her unique position in order to attain direct control over all spheres of life where women operated. It monopolized the Spanish Syndicate for (female) University Students (SEU); the teachers and nurses' Syndicates; the Girls' Section of the *Falange's* Youth Movement; and the Social Service for Women.⁹ It was, therefore, only logical that the SF would extend its influence also into the field of women's physical education.

The first reference to the issue of physical education in nationalist Spain dates back to September 1938. As part of a general effort to legally codify the changes undergone by the nationalist education system it was decreed that all primary school children (girls and boys) would be entitled to six weekly hours of physical education, music and arts and crafts.¹⁰ The law of December 6th 1940 charged the *Falange's* Youth Movement (*Frente de Juventudes*) with the promotion of physical education amongst children and youth between the ages of 7-18.¹¹ A year later the regime announced the formation of the National Department for Sports and Physical Education under the supervision of the *Falange's* General Secretary.¹² The decree constituted a great victory for the SF, which had taken over the feminine section of the *Falange's* Youth Movement a year earlier. It now gained entry into the public school system when it was stated that all physical education classes would be administered by its instructors. In 1944 its mandate was further expanded when all university students were required to complete a gymnastic or folk-dancing course and one course in the fields of basketball, handball, hockey or tennis under the supervision of the SF's instructors.

⁹ I. Ofer 2009.

¹⁰ Ley de 20 de septiembre, 1938 de la Jefatura de Estado, in L. Carrero Eras 1995: 103.

¹¹ Boletín Oficial del Estado de 7 de diciembre de 1940.

¹² Boletín Oficial del Estado de 18 de octubre de 1941.

Before attempting to effectively implement its mandate in the field, however, the SF had to solve the acute shortage of professional teaching staff. In the 1930s relatively few qualified female physical education teachers could be found in Spain. A document published in 1939 indicated that the SF did not favor the option of employing male instructors. According to its National Delegate the promotion of physical education amongst women necessitated an exclusively female staff.¹³ The first course for PE instructors, therefore, opened in Santander already during the Civil War. Candidates had to be unmarried and between 17-27 years of age. They needed to possess a school diploma and had to further undergo an interview and an entry exam, but did not have to be affiliated with the SF. The SF kept to a minimum the students' expenses by providing uniforms, equipment and even scholarships for candidates who were recommended by the SF's local and provincial delegates. Training included theoretical and practical components: daily classes of anatomy and physiology; lectures on the history of physical education; training sessions in the fields of gymnastics, athletics, swimming, tennis, basketball, football, regional dancing, hockey, and outdoors games. Following the war the *Falange* founded two national schools for the training of youth and physical education instructors. In early 1941 it inaugurated the National School *José Antonio Primo de Rivera* for male instructors and months later the National School *Isabel la Católica* for female instructors. In 1956 a further national school *Julio Ruiz de Alda* was officially inaugurated.¹⁴

Against this background it is interesting to examine the effects of the SF policies. Until 1945 the SF trained 194 new female PE instructors. Between the years 1957-1976 further 705 PE teachers graduated from courses of between 3 to 4 years long and 155 instructors from short, one-month long, courses.¹⁵ While officially every school-girl in Spain was required to take part in physical education classes there are no reliable statistics as to the number of students who actually benefited from the new legislation, especially in rural areas. The SF's documents do not reveal differences in the budget allocated for different populations. However, the interviews I conducted with ex SF-members and PE instructors reveal the fact that such differences existed.

¹³ "Método, planes y objetivos de la educación física femenina en España", ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 41, doc. 3.

¹⁴ Orden de 7 de junio de 1945 del Secretaría General del Movimiento, L. Carrero Eras, 1995: 121.

¹⁵ M^a L. Zagalaz Sánchez & J. Cachón Zagalaz 2012: 163.

At least until the late 1950s some of the physical education classes in rural areas were administered by local priests, as part of their role as village teachers. Girls who came from such areas only arrived in the city in their senior year in order to be examined by qualified SF instructors. M.J. (a PE instructor from *La Rioja*) remembered the final exams which took place in *Logroño*:

In the mountains around *La Rioja* the girls attended physical education classes that were administered by the local priest. The SF ordered physical education manuals for high school students. The manuals included tables and sketches of the exercises to be given by the priest. [For] those girls who came from the sierra, it's clear that there was no [relation] between what was written down and what they actually did. But what could you do? You couldn't tell them [that]. You had to let them pass. Even if the exercises came out real bad we gave them a good grade. We didn't fail anyone.¹⁶

According to the testimony of Andresa López (who headed the SF's National School *Isabel la Católica*) this situation gradually came to an end during the 1950s:

In later years the SF recognized that there was a systematic problem in rural areas and this recognition brought about the creation of *colegios menores*. The SF gave out many scholarships, which enabled girls from the villages to receive a more comprehensive education. During the day they went to regular schools and in the afternoons they came to centers where there was a qualified physical education teacher.¹⁷

A general comparison between the overall number of women and girls who were either identified as members of the SF or took part in its activities over time and the number of non-members who took part in the organization's sporting activities sheds light on the two issues: the general view on women's physical activity within Francoist society, and the role of such activity as an ideological recruitment tool. During the early 1940s the number of girls who took part in the activities of the *Falange's* youth movement reached tens of thousand. According to statistics provided by the SF the overall number of girls and women who attended sporting activities within the SF's installations in 1943

¹⁶ An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).

¹⁷ An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).

was 5,919.¹⁸ At the height of repression immediately following the Civil War many viewed their children's membership within the *Falange's* Youth Movement as an act that signaled their allegiance (either voluntary or forced) to the new regime. However, during that period the public school system (largely controlled by the Catholic Church) did not approve of the institution of physical education classes for girls and the SF did not have sufficient funds to develop the field within its own institutions. By 1948 the number of girls and women who attended the SF's physical education classes increased drastically reaching 94,605 (of those almost 74% were not SF affiliates).¹⁹ Between the years 1952-1954 the number once again doubled.²⁰

These numbers are illuminating since by the mid-1950s the SF's recruitment levels were dropping drastically. The regime was fast approaching a phase where brute political repression was at an all-time low (although this would reemerge in the late 1960s) and a growing emphasis was put on indirect supervision through cultural enterprises. Under such conditions the organization's physical education and sporting policy played a central role in widening the SF's contacts with different female populations.

By the mid-1960s the situation started to reverse. In 1965 the number of non-affiliated women participating in the SF's physical education initiatives dropped by 39%. Internal documents from that time describe the growing resistance of many to take part in activities imposed upon them within different institutions. This lack of interest was compounded by newly found alternatives. The general improvement in the economic situation and the new Law of Association (1964) widened the choice of cultural associations available to women. During the second half of the 1960s the number of women athletes increased and more attention was paid to Spain's status within international sporting events. A large number of the women who made a name for themselves during that period were initially trained under the supervision of the SF, but the organization itself was losing its monopoly in this area. However, this loss of control did not result from the better services provided by private clubs or even from the general weakening of the *Falange*, but rather from a central paradox relating to the SF's policies. In the field of physical education, as we shall see, the SF managed to generate a more liberal value system and personal experiences than the ones

¹⁸ ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 41, doc. 66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Carp. 117, Doc. 69 & Carp. 80, Doc. 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Carp. 83, Doc. 35.

promoted by other sectors of the Franco regime. Over time, however, the organization proved unable (both ideologically and structurally) to meet the changing needs and aspirations of thousands of Spanish women. While some had come to see the SF as too radical, for others it was not radical or innovative enough. In the long run, therefore, this effective recruitment tool in the early years of the dictatorship could not boost the organization's popularity in its later days.

The Discourse on Active and Healthy Female Bodies: Physical Education between Moral and Ideological Dictates

Before analyzing the rhetoric that was employed in order to justify the engagement of Spanish women with the field of physical education it is important to understand what type of activities this field incorporate. During the late 18th and early 19th century three schools of physical activity emerged in Europe: the German, Swedish and the British School. All three schools viewed the world of sport as embodying the "learning of game skills [...] institutionalized through teaching and systematic preparation [...]."²¹ Just as important was the promotion of physical education in the wider sense of the term: as an on going activity taught within a non competitive environment. The German school of gymnastics developed through the influence of Johann Muth and Friedrich Jahn. It was less leisurely and was mostly practiced in gymnasiums. German gymnastics was closely associated with the formation of German nationalism. Muth and Jahn developed a system of drills (turn), which emphasized the importance of physical strength and the use of different apparatus such as ropes, bars and so forth.²² The Swedish school was founded by Pehr Henrik Ling, a fencing instructor who worked at Lund University. Ling's routines and drills built on the German School, but were aimed more at the restoration of public health through regular, light exercise. Ling's first and foremost concern was the promotion of physical activity as a way of preventing disease and encouraging the harmonious development of the human body. The Swedish school emphasized accuracy and style and called for a high level of discipline and attunement between the individual and the group.²³ Finally, the British school developed through a strong inclination towards outdoor games such as football and rugby and track and field sports.

²¹ M. A. Hall 2002: p. 4.

²² G. Mosse 1996: 43-44; R. Crego 2003: 146-147.

²³ S. Melnick 2015.

The German, Swedish and British schools shaped the nature and aims of physical education throughout Europe well into the 20th century. However, as each of these schools responded to somewhat different concerns in terms of morality and physical health they were soon adapted within different social and ideological contexts.²⁴ Following the Civil War the Franco regime certain elements from all three schools within the physical education programs for men. It was only natural, perhaps, that a stronger emphasis was put on the German school, which was highly dominant amongst instructors with prior military background. In the case of women the Swedish school carried the day. Doctors and educators preferred the Swedish school because of its emphasis on refinement rather than on activities that called for sweaty physical proximity. Dr. Luis Agosti, the SF's National Advisor in the field of physical education, explained the choice of this school "[which] can be applied to both young children and adults and offers varied degrees of intensity, with no need to deprive women of its benefits."²⁵

However, even this seemingly "appropriate" choice in gender terms was not easily accepted by parents, practitioners and educators. As historian Luis Carrero Eras rightly noted "the activities of PE instructors during the [dictatorship] played a decisive role in eradicating the taboos imposed on women who wished to participate in sporting activities."²⁶ The SF's achievements in this field constituted a marked exception in a society in which women (regardless of their ideological positions) suffered from continued discrimination, and in a time when attempts to nurture or even simply understand the functioning of the female body could be tagged as morally suspect. Such achievements, therefore, depended on the SF's ability to align its policies with existing moral, demographic and hygienic concerns.

Reviewing a conference on women's physical education that took place in Salsomaggiore (Italy) in September 1937 an article published in the SF's journal, *Y: Revista para la mujer nacional sindicalista*, attempted to sketch the organization's goals in the field:

We must keep in mind the need for all types of physical culture to be based on a rational and scientific direction. Such rationality is achieved only when physical exercise is executed in order to comply

²⁴ For more on the three schools and their implementation in Europe see: R. Naul, in K. Hardman 2003: 35-52.

²⁵ L. Agosti, in F. J. Coterón López 2012: 696.

²⁶ L. Carrero Eras 1995: 865.

with a specific end. These possible ends are all noble, but they may vary in nature and can include amongst others: fortification of one's muscles; the improvement of one's conduct; the prevention of illnesses etc. [...] Our overall goal is to improve the race in order to be able to serve Spain. [...] In order to do so we need to employ physical exercises which are concerned not only with esthetics but rather exercises that improve physical [stamina], hygiene and morality.²⁷

Allusions to the greatness of the race and the nation abounded in the SF's rhetoric regarding women's right to take part in physical activity, but so did religion. A document composed by the SF's National Delegate for Physical Education, María de Miranda, in 1942 stated for example:

In giving us this marvelous body, God provided us with an immeasurable gift. Abandoning such a gift, not taking care of it using the best measures offered to us by science, constitutes ingratitude. And while the mission we are called to fulfill is not solely a moral one [...] we are obliged to comply with our Christian duties, since the essence of Falangism is religion and militia, spirituality and discipline.²⁸

Another document by de Miranda from the same period claimed that the religious prohibition against suicide also implied a need to vigorously improve one's health. According to the SF, therefore, participating in physical education activities was tantamount to fulfilling one's obligation to both the nation and to God.

Within this socio-cultural context it is not surprising that the SF's leadership expressed public aversion towards the "professional woman athlete." However, lack of femininity had nothing to do with the SF's criticism, but rather the fact that female athletes were paid for their participation in the world of sports and that an extensive budget was required to train them at the expense of others, which was described as unjustified and unprofessional.²⁹ Historian Maria Luisa Zagalaz Sanchez referred to the alarm the idea of professional women athletes cause in the 1940s: The SF presented physical education and sports as an integral part of women's formation. However, the greatest contradiction inherent in its policies surfaced when a woman athlete truly stood out. Then the entire organization would raise its voice, up

²⁷ "Cultura física", in *ibid.*: 32-33.

²⁸ M^a de Miranda, "Necesidad de la educación física", ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 42, doc. 49.

²⁹ *Plan general de educación física*, *ibid.*, Carp. 80, Doc. 15 bis.

to a point where Pilar Primo de Rivera herself would declare that the *Falange's* objective was not to form elite sportswomen, but rather to bring physical education to all Spanish women.³⁰

During the late 1950s and early 1960s the SF's discourse on women's physical education underwent some changes. The new rhetoric was part of the more general realignment of the SF's discourse on gender identity and women's role in society. An example of this change can be found in a lecture given in 1965 by Concepción Sierra y Gil de la Cuesta (the new National Delegate of Physical Education and Sports). Gil de la Cuesta referred to the partial improvement in women's status within Spanish society, which in her opinion manifested itself mainly in the relation to the professional opportunities opened before them. She contemplated on the conditions that might enhance gender equality and presented the SF's on the necessity for long-term change:

The process of social promotion we are witnessing today does not push women to exhaust their full potential. This process is too limited and centers on institutional and structural aspects. We need to act further on the [...] educational, economic and social fronts [...].³¹

The National Delegate encouraged women to enter the field of physical education and quoted a recent study that pointed to a high correlation between the levels of institutionalized physical activities for women across the country and their integration into public life. She went on to make a case for the relationship between physical education and women's changing patterns of public activism:

The timidity and passivity exhibited by some women in high positions is at times nothing more than a pattern of behavior resulting from social conditioning. [...] There is no doubt that the sporting world [...] provides people with the strength to protect the essence of their personality. We therefore see in the [qualities] of leadership, initiative and decision-making that are required in the field of sports a perfect channel for promoting women's activism in society.³²

Javier Coterón López pointed to three perspectives from which the debate regarding the desirability of women's physical education

³⁰ Ma L. Zagalaz Sánchez, *La educación física femenina (1940-1970). Análisis y estudio en la ciudad de Jaén*, Tesis doctoral (inérita), ANA, Serie roja 1.086^a, 1997: 94.

³¹ C. Sierra y Gil de la Cuesta, "El deporte — ocasión y promoción de la mujer en la sociedad", *ibid.*, Carp. 118, Doc. 45.

³² ANA, Serie Azul, Carp. 118, Doc. 45.

was waged during the early years of the Franco regime: the scientific or medical perspective (which called for the foundation of health and hygiene related programs in relation to women's role as future mothers and wives; the Catholic perspective (which conditioned any type of physical exercise on the completion of moral dictates regarding uniforms and the level of exposure of the female body to the public eye and to the company of men); finally, there was the "neotraditional" perspective (which was close to the Catholic view but emphasized the need to fortify the body of women in the service of the nation as well).³³ During the years 1936-1939 it is clear that allusions to national regeneration carried the day. Following the Civil War the demographic perspective gained ground and the entire debate on the issue of physical education was conducted within the limiting boundaries of a deeply Catholic discourse.

Starting in the late 1950s the SF promoted several projects that were aimed at improving women's legal and professional standing and expand their political rights.³⁴ In line with this phase in the organization's development references to women's engagement in physical activity now focused on the empowering effects of such activities. However, even during that period it was not the yearning for individual freedom and new forms of personal expression that motivated the SF's physical education policy. It was rather the will to glorify discipline and the need to reach new populations within Spanish society, which "refused" to be converted to Falangist ideology. The very same resistance that the organization's policy encountered within the Francoist coalition turned it into a powerful recruitment tool by emphasizing the SF's uniqueness and establishing its position as an independent entity with a distinct political and social program. By presenting a more youthful and attractive facet of the regime and positioning its members as intermediaries between different female populations as well as public and private institutions, the organization proved its usefulness far beyond that of other organs within the *Falange*.

The Subjective Experience: Practitioners and Instructors

Hardly any research exist that can point to the ways in which physical education classes were experienced by the young girls and women who passed through the SF's institutions. What little information can be

³³ F. J. Coterón López 2012.

³⁴ For the law on the Law of Political and Professional Rights (*Ley de Derechos Políticos, Profesionales de Trabajo de la Mujer*) see: I. Ofer 2009: 86-96.

found has to be gathered from local studies that focus mostly on the experiences of PE instructors and to a lesser degree on those of some practitioners who took part in sporting activities over time. A series of oral interviews that were conducted with 24 women who practiced sports overtime during the years of the dictatorship pointed to the importance of the SF in promoting physical education and in funding installations for the practice of sports.³⁵ However, the same interviews also reflected the limitations of the SF's policies. One interviewee recounted: "In school there was a group of us, of friends, full of energy. And obviously physical education classes seemed to us a bit like a boring routine at the time. There were hardly any exercises."³⁶ Another added "I told you already, we were considered tomboys. But I knew many [female] basketball players and none of them was a tomboy. They were beautiful girls, but people had this concept of women athletes, they did not look on us favorably."³⁷

Many of the interviewees expressed their disappointment at the classes which they received within SF institutions and which were portrayed as boring and repetitive. The social perception of women who practiced sports, however, highlighted the importance of promoting physical education as a field appropriate for women. This task was entrusted to the SF's PE instructors. As the SF's internal correspondence demonstrates the instructors were perceived as the organization's spearhead in an indifferent, at times even hostile, education system. They were supposed to provide a personal example of the "New Falangist Woman." As one circular (written by the National Delegate for Physical Education and Sports) stated:

[The instructor] cannot wear in class the skirt, blouse or underwear she wears outside of class. She must be clean and look clean. She must keep her hair short and if she does not she must arrange it in an appropriate manner when teaching. She must — and this is of a special importance — watch her figure. It is important that the instructor maintain refined and attractive looks, so as to encourage her students to perform the exercises she gives them. [In order] to do so the instructor, who in some cases may no longer be young and may even be married, must keep her body beautiful, agile and elegant.³⁸

³⁵ X. Pujadas i Martí, B. Garay Ibáñez de Elejalde, F. Gimeno Marco, R. Llopis Goig, G. Ramírez Macías and J. M. Parrilla Fernández 2012: 1-14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 9.

³⁸ ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 81, Doc. 8. Text not highlighted originally.

But good looks and youthfulness did not impress churchmen, educators and parents. In 1952 the National Delegate wrote with disappointment: "After such a long time, and despite the fact that I feel as if we have been at it for ever, the photographs of our teams still tell the same story: the girls are badly dressed, with no belts, their shoulder-pads loose and their hair hanging down."³⁹ M. J. (a PE instructor from *La Rioja*) recounted in interview I conducted with her of the difficulties of controlling the content of her own classes. Following the completion of her training she was assigned to the same school from which she graduated ten years earlier. The headmistress was a young nun and a former classmate of hers. When at the end of the year she organized a display of her ten-year-old students. One of the exercises included a series of handstands. According to M. J. one of the older nuns was scandalized by the way in which the girls exposed their legs. At the end of the day she was informed by the headmistress that as impressive as the display was her students would henceforth refrain from performing handstands in public. M. J. made a decision to sacrifice handstands for the sake of good working relations.⁴⁰

In 1954 the National Delegate sent a report regarding the implementation of the SF's physical education policies to all her Provincial Delegates. Her harsh words reflected her disappointment and testified to the fact that the experiences recounted above were not unusual:

According to the information I receive you have not fulfilled the orders given to you. The result is that instead of gaining ground on this delicate field we are losing the battle. [...] In some places this happened because of obvious lack of tact. This type of work is not the work of the [instructors] but rather of the provincial delegate. It is she who has to approach the headmistress and reach an agreement, without resorting to threats.⁴¹

Magui de León Llorante (a former PE instructor from Castilla León) referred in her memoirs to the need to deal with inadequate facilities and constant criticism of her lifestyle:

With my Vespa I was at least spared the difficulty of moving between schools, but I would reach class half frozen because I couldn't wear

³⁹ "Regidora Central de Educación Física: actividades de Educación Física que deberán realizarse", in *ibid.*, Doc. 2.

⁴⁰ M. J. Interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).

⁴¹ "Delegada Nacional a las delegadas provinciales", ANA, Serie Azul, carpeta 81, Doc. 10 (2.3.54).

pants. They wouldn't allow it neither at school nor at some of the private centers in which I taught. And when I gave a class of gymnastics I had to change in a hurry in whatever corner they set aside for me.⁴²

Despite the difficulties Juan Carlos Manrique Arribas (who interviewed former SF physical education instructors in Segovia) concluded that one of the reasons which led them to choose this profession was their love of sports and the ability to go on freely practicing physical activities. Furthermore, in a society where the majority of women had no access to higher education becoming a PE instructor provided meant that they could go on with their studies. According to Manrique Arribas doing so within the ranks of a political entity such as the SF was looked upon more positively than simply becoming a teacher or bank employee⁴³. From the 1950s the difficulties encountered by the instructors were also rewarded by relatively high salaries. The statistics provided by María Luisa Zagalas Sánchez for the city of Jaen show that at the end of the 1950s a high school PE teacher earned an average salary of 3,000 pesetas, while that of an entry-level temporary teacher was 2,000 pesetas.⁴⁴ For the sake of comparison, one should keep in mind that the salary of the SF's National Delegate at the time was 3,180 pesetas.

During their training the instructors also benefited from the presence of qualified foreign professors and from excursions all across Europe. M.J. (who completed her studies at the *Ruiz de Alda* School) recorded the time she had spent in *McColine's*, a physical education school in Switzerland. There she benefited from the company of young women arriving from all over Western Europe with their different customs and fashions. One of her most vivid memories was of the French students:

The French girls wore bikinis during swimming classes. During training, when the professor herself was in the pool, they changed to a one-piece bathing suit but as soon as she came out — not when the class was over but when the professor stepped out of the pool — they put their bikinis on again.⁴⁵

It is not surprising, perhaps, that wearing bikinis during class while in Spain the debate still raged whether women should even wear bathing suits in public, imprinted itself indelibly on M. J.'s memory.

⁴² M. de León Llorante 2000: 74-75.

⁴³ J. C. Manrique Arribas 2012: 91.

⁴⁴ M^a Zagalas Sánchez 1997: 355.

⁴⁵ An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).

PE instructors also held a special place in the hearts of many of their students. According to Andresa López this was partially due to the nature of an instructor's job:

Physical education teachers gave classes since kindergarten [...] helping children take down their pants in order to go to the toilet. [...] With the physical education teacher, you usually had a good relationship, because when you were little she was the one shouting at you, or giving you a candy or wiping your nose.⁴⁶

During the final decade of the dictatorship the internal contradictions generated by the SF's physical education policy became more explicit. PE instructors taught girls and young women how to care for their bodies and exercise muscles no one even dared to speak about. As a result a space was created where short and relatively attractive uniforms, collective undressing and showering were considered legitimate. The organization's leadership had to face the fact that such patterns of behavior, in combination with natural youthful curiosity, might lead to more liberal conduct than intended. As a result, one can find many documents from this period demanding that girls not be photographed standing too close together, holding hands, and so forth. Certain documents, such as this one written by SF's General Secretary Syera Manteola, insisted:

In the dressing rooms one must take extra care when dressing and undressing together. The fact that we are all women does not mean we should forget our moral obligations ... Under no conditions must men be allowed into the dressing rooms, even when all players are fully dressed.⁴⁷

The SF's PE instructors provided their students with a model for a more open and healthy way of life, while at the same time monitoring their moral and aesthetic preferences. The instructors taught several generations of Spanish girls and women born after the Civil War how to nurture and even publicly expose their bodies. Such teachings, anchored as they were in a more open and progressive perceptions of the human body, were not always compatible with the existing moral code. In the words of Consuelo Valcarcel (head the SF's department

⁴⁶ An interview with the author (Madrid, 15.12.2004).

⁴⁷ ANA, Serie Azul, Carp. 83, Doc. 19.

of Professional Training for Women and Youth and the SF's Students' Syndicate from the 1960s):

The 'right', those groups that viewed women as creatures that must stay at home and take care of their families, considered us revolutionary women. What can I tell you? I had a problem with that. Those of the 'left', on the other hand, viewed us a right — wing women for caring for home and family [...].⁴⁸

Conclusions

The model of Falangist femininity promoted by the SF was based on numerous contradictory messages. The SF stressed the importance of maternity, and consequently the need for women to retire from certain spheres of action. At the same time women were encouraged and often forced to take part in an array of projects aimed at national regeneration (including re-education and political indoctrination initiatives, demographic campaigns and the equivalent of an obligatory military service for women). The physical wellbeing of women was tied to the physical and moral wellbeing of the nation itself. During brief periods in the dictatorship's history women's physical strength was highlighted, but even then their reproductive capacities were never forgotten. During other, less radicalized periods, demographic and moral dictates carried the day. Such dictates did not negate all together the benefits of moderate physical exercise for women and girls, but clearly limited the "appropriate" fields of sport in which women could engage.

The SF emphasized a middle-class sporting ethos based on notions of refinement, self-control and modesty. In Spain young women and girls participated in several mass demonstrations throughout 1939 and 1940 but this type of public exposure was not sustained in later years. As we have seen, the SF strongly opposed the commercialization of all sporting fields that were deemed appropriate for women. In order to compensate for the lack of funding the organization created a nationwide network of classes and of sporting teams that operated under the most rudimentary conditions. The SF provided urban factory workers, girls and young middle class women, who participated in sporting activities within its institutions with free uniforms, equipment, coaches and travel expenses, all at a considerable cost and at times even at the expense of more "ideologically" oriented activities.

⁴⁸ An interview with the author, Madrid, 23.05.2003.

At the same time it is important to keep in mind that the promotion of women's physical education was also viewed by the SF as a tool of indoctrination and as essential component in the formation of what historian Victoria de Grazia termed as "culture of consent."⁴⁹ While the SF enjoyed almost full control over organized women's activities during the early years of the regime, its core ideology was never hegemonic within Francoist society. Under these conditions the more open and innovative physical culture promoted by the SF served to differentiate it from other more conservative elements within the regime.

In conclusion, much work is still needed in order to assess the impact of physical education policies during the Franco regime on different target populations such as urban and rural school students, workers, university students etc. Two facts are clear however: Despite great moral and financial limitation the SF managed to instituted physical education as a permanent field within school curriculum in Spain. Furthermore, for the hundreds of women who trained as PE instructors the conscious promotion of women's physical education provided new and exciting opportunities in terms of study and of work. While not all of the women who would go on to become PE instructors were necessarily adherents of the regime they willingly became its agents within schools and youth movements. In doing so they taught several generations of girls and young women how to nurture, take pride and even publicly expose their bodies in the only manner considered acceptable in a conservative and a highly chauvinistic society.

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⁴⁹ V. de Grazia 2002.

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