

WOMEN AND FOOTBALL IN BRAZIL: DISCONTINUITIES, RESISTANCE, AND RESILIENCE

*MULHERES E FUTEBOL NO BRASIL: DESCONTINUIDADES,
RESISTÊNCIAS E RESILIÊNCIAS* 

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 **Silvana Vilodre Goellner*** <vilodre@gmail.com>

*Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

Abstract: This text introduces the thematic dossier analyzing the presence of women in football. To this end, it briefly contextualizes that sport in the Brazilian context, emphasizing the role of women, who developed strategies to experience football in different times and spaces. It also evidences that the practice is deeply crossed by gender issues, which can be identified in the other texts that are part of the dossier and that indelibly reveal that this crossing is transnational.

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The role of women in football is a topic that still deserves great investment in terms of research, production of sources, and visibility. More than looking for a supposed inaugural landmark of their presence or even sketching a possible history of the sport, it is important to emphasize how historically their involvement in different footballs (DAMO, 2019) has been ignored. Thus, the scarcity of records and the precariousness of research would be reasons for the little circularity of the topic.

Considering that writing and publishing is a political act, this dossier reveals *Revista Movimento's* commitment to the production and dissemination of knowledge on areas still to be discovered. Motivated and grateful for the invitation to coordinate it, I decided to highlight in this presentation text some aspects related to the history of women's football in Brazil. Its inclusion aims to bring to reflection a topic that I consider relevant to support the reading of the articles that make up this special issue: the finding that the presence of women in the most different occupations and manifestations of football results from their insistence on staying in a space that is not represented, encouraged, and recognized as theirs. In taking the struggle of Brazilian women as the guiding thread of my narrative, I emphasize that it is neither unique nor singular. Since football was created, women in different times and social contexts had to compete for powers to enter it, and in doing so they deconstructed representations that, based on the biology of the body and sex, justified the exotic, spectacular, and inappropriate character attributed to its practice.

Leite de Castro, Head of the Medical Department of the Football League of the city of Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of Brazil, in 1940, defended this representation when he said that football "practiced by women can only be applauded as a grotesque or theatrical display with flavor popular curiosity, eager for novelties or originalities"(CASTRO, 1940, p. 1). The fact of considering it "a ridiculous spectacle and worthy of attention from our authorities" (p.1) has favored the emergence of discourses and practices that considered it abject and harmful to women.

The protagonism of the players, especially after the 1930s, provoked reactions of this nature. The appropriation of public space, considered to be the domain of men, and the decision on the uses of their bodies, understood as a threat to the conduct of healthy motherhood, destabilized gender representations and, ultimately, power relations. According to Waldemar Berardinelli:

The modern woman looks for the masculine trend because biologically, morphologically, psychologically she is taking this orientation. Working like a man, intoxicating like a man (smoking, alcohol), having emotions similar to those of a man, practicing birth control, women atrophy their ovarian functions, modify the functioning of other glands and all their differential sexual physiognomy, tending to differ less (1940, p. 15).

Arguments like these fostered the restriction of freedom, culminating in the officialization of the ban on football and other sports for approximately four decades.¹The determinant for this interdiction was the letter that José Fuzeira addressed to President Getúlio Vargas, in which he warned about the dangers of

1 In 1941, the National Sports Council instituted Decree-Law No. 3199, the first document to guide the Brazilian sports organization. Its content expressed the institutional desire to discipline the sports field by making it official to ban women "from sports incompatible with the conditions of their nature" (BRASIL, 1941). The Decree was only revoked in April 1979.

football practice for the future of the nation. Titled *A sporting nonsense that should not go on*, the text treated football as a calamity for the girls who were at risk “of destroying their precious health, and also the health of their future children... and Brazil” (UM DISPARATE, 1940, p. 12).

Attentive to the prevailing conservatism, some footballers reacted to the publication of this letter, thus registering their resistance and insurgency. Margarida Pereira, also known as Adyragram, the defender, captain, and president of the S.C. Brasileiro, a team from Rio de Janeiro, went public to express her indignation:

Mr. José Fuzeira should watch women’s football practice to see how healthy this sport is and the benefits it provides to its players. It is true that football, like other sports, cannot be practiced by everyone, especially those who have an aversion to physical education and who only do gymnastics on the radio, afraid of performing in public thanks to the organic deficiencies with which nature made them (DEFENDEM-SE..., 1940, p. 6).

The mention of this episode reveals an intention: to point out that women did not succumb or remain silent in the face of the numerous obstacles they faced in being in football. Like Adyragram, many resisted and, in their time and manner, prevented its practice from disappearing, even in the long period in which it was banned. Between 1941 and 1979, almost four decades full of acts of insubordination passed (RIGO *et al.*, 2008; CUNHA, 2016; RAJÃO, 2018; BONFIM, 2019; ELSEY; NADEL, 2019). Even though women played football emphasizing its recreational dimension or that its practice took place in non-sports spaces to circumvent the law, the restriction on competitions halted its development, indelibly restricting its spread.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were marked by a certain optimism in the national context. The military dictatorship came to its last breaths, social movements were growing rapidly, and feminist agendas demanded women’s right to use their bodies and their sexuality. Football did not go unnoticed, becoming part of the agenda for an important event held in São Paulo in 1982.

Day-care centers, legalization of abortion, and equal opportunities were some of the demands of women from three continents for the 1st National Festival of Women in the Arts, organized by actress and theater businesswoman Ruth Escobar. Held in São Paulo and ABC in more than 40 different locations for 10 days, the female production invaded the streets of the city of São Paulo, being installed in cinemas and theaters and exhibited in galleries and museums. All this to remind opponents that the woman has definitely left the kitchen periphery and has already become recognized immortal by the academies of letters, imposed herself at political rallies, and even proved that they can shake the people of any football stadium (AMARANTE, 1982, p. 47).

The inclusion of a match between women representing teams from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro as a preliminary to the classic São Paulo and Corinthians in the festival’s program, which took place in September 1982, was a strategy to pressure institutions to regulate the sport. The attempt to prevent the event from taking place was circumvented by its organizing committee, which gave the game the character of a spectacle, even reducing its duration (PÚBLICO..., 1982, p. 12). Sócrates, a Corinthians player, spoke out in defense of women, and given the possibility of a ban on the match, he said: “[...] if they do not enter, we will not enter either!” (MUSEU DO FUTEBOL, 2016).

One of the articulators of this iconic game was the player and lawyer Rose do Rio, the protagonist of many actions in favor of the right of women to experience football. In her peregrination for public agencies, clubs, and competitions, she talked “with Giulite Coutinho (president of CBF), João Havelange (president of FIFA), and César Montanha (president of CND²), and all of them have expressed interest, but have also tried to pass on responsibility to other agencies” (ROSE DO RIO..., 1983, p. 43). According to Rose, the intention was

to promote women’s football, attract fans to the stadiums with a new type of spectacle that does not seem to hurt anyone, except for discriminatory legislation that prevents women from performing a reserved sports activity and, it seems, men. Any law (decree or decision) that clearly discriminates against any kind is contrary to the current Constitution. And that is why we will try, through Justice, to overturn the CND’s deliberation and expand women’s football (*apud* SILVA, 2017, p. 182).

The struggle of Rose and many other women was not inglorious. Persuaded by the example of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), which had already regulated football played by women, CND authorized the practice of the sport³ on March 25, 1983. Even so, it established that the standards recommended by FIFA were followed, among which we highlight a reduction in the game time, pitch size, and ball weight, besides the use of “protectors for breasts and boots will not have sharp cleats. Another difference from traditional football: ball controlled in the chest will be a foul, equivalent to the hand ball rule” (VÂNIA..., 1983, p. 33).

The 1980s proved to be promising for football players with the regulation of the sport. Competitions organized by football management institutions began to emerge in various regions in the country. The Football Federation of Rio Grande do Sul, which had sent a study to the CND arguing in favor of regulation (MENDES, 1983), promoted a women’s game as a preliminary to the game between Grêmio Foot-Ball Porto Alegrense and São Paulo Futebol Clube, which were playing the third phase of the Taça Ouro, the name of the Brazilian Championship of that year. Held in Porto Alegre on April 17, 1983, with the Grêmio stadium practically full (40,820 people for a maximum capacity of 51,081), the female players from Esportivo de Bento Gonçalves and Sport Clube Rio Grande entered the pitch to play the game that may have been the “first women’s football game officially authorized by a federation in Brazil” (VÂNIA..., 1983, p. 33).

However, it is unknown whether this was the first game after regulation. More than highlighting this supposed pioneering spirit, it is important to note that authorized competitions emerged in several regions of Brazil, demonstrating that, even in hiding, women continued to play football. In addition to Rio Grande do Sul (RAMOS; GOELLNER, 2018), championships were also held in 1983 in Paraná, Espírito Santo, Mato Grosso do Sul, Sergipe, Pernambuco, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro (SILVA, 2017), Ceará (NASCIMENTO, 2019), Minas Gerais (ANJOS; DANTAS, 2020), Bahia (MORAES, 2014), and Goiás (KETELBEY, 2018), among other states. The first

2 National Sports Council.

3 Published in Brazil’s Federal Register on April 11, 1983, Resolution 01/83 deals with the basic rules for the practice of women’s football. Available at: <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/3311099/pg-58-secao-1-diario-oficial-da-uniao-dou-de-11-04-1983>. Accessed on 19 Sept. 2020.

national competition arises that same year: The Brazil Women's Football Cup⁴, whose debut brought together four teams.

Although very distant from professionalization, the profusion of clubs and competitions pointed to a new, more optimistic, and hopeful scenario. It also indicated that football could be a way of working and livelihood. In an article published in *Revista Placar* in July 1984, Regina Echeverria describes the amounts paid in the form of salary, allowance, sponsorship, and support (food and transportation) by clubs in different states to affirm that "women's football is definitely a graceful reality in the country of football [...]" (p. 24). According to data from the Museu do Futebol (2019), "in 1987, approximately 2 thousand women's football teams and 40 thousand players were registered in the regional and state amateur entities that promoted women's football in the country."

FIFA's promise to organize the first world championship broadened the sport's horizons and envisioned dreams. João Havelange, then president of the entity, announced that he would promote it in 1986 (GABRIEL, 2015), which effectively did not happen. In addition, he "made several statements about his intention to incorporate women's football as an official FIFA modality" (SILVA, 2017, p. 198), as he had done with futsal. However, FIFA organized its first international tournament⁵ only in 1988, a preparatory event to host the 1st Women's Football World Cup, which took place in 1991 in China. Motivated by the creation of these competitions, CBF invited eighteen players who wore "for the first time the CBF shirt in an international competition: [...]" it will be a great chance to improve the precarious panorama of Women's Football in Brazil" (SILVA, 1988, p. 7). In this inaugural competition, the team won third place and its participation in the first world championship was guaranteed for having won the I South American Championship, disputed in Maringá between April 28 and May 5, 1991. The competition was organized by the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) and brought together, in addition to Brazil, teams from Chile and Venezuela.

The Brazilian campaign at the China World Cup was not considered satisfactory, ending the competition in ninth position among the twelve participating teams⁶. See the Folha de São Paulo record:

[...] the early elimination of Brazil caused a revolt at CBF's headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. The entity's president, Ricardo Teixeira, threatened to extinguish the holding of official women's football championships in Brazil. According to him, the low performance of the team in China discourages financial investment in the category (MUNDIAL..., 1991, p. 6).

In fact, this positioning reverberated in the football universe and the already difficult working conditions remained or worsened after this statement. In this sense, CBF did not organize the national championship in 1992 and 1995. Also, it practically ignored the team, only calling it up again in 1994 due to the imminence of three major

4 Annual competition that took place between 1983 and 2007, except in 1992, 1995, 2002, 2004, and 2005. The inaugural edition brought together the Radar, Goiás, Corinthians, and Cruzeiro teams.

5 The International Women's Football Tournament was held between June 1 and 12, 1988, in China with the participation of 12 teams: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Ivory Coast, United States, Netherlands, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Thailand, and Czechoslovakia (SILVA, 1988).

6 Final classification: United States, Norway, Sweden, Germany, China, Italy, Denmark, Chinese Taipei, Brazil, Nigeria, New Zealand, and Japan.

events: the II South American Championship in 1995, based in Uberlândia (MG); the 1995 Women's Football World Cup, which took place in Sweden; and the debut of women's football at the Atlanta Olympic Games in Atlanta (USA) in 1996. CBF organized the I João Havelange Cup in 1994 with 23 state teams in eight cities of different regions of the country to observe players aiming to compose the group of athletes that would represent Brazil in the competitions.

The conquest of the second South American title in 1995 guaranteed its place for the Sweden World Cup, where it again reached the ninth position. The participation in the World Cup qualified the team for the Olympic Games in Atlanta, finishing fourth. The end of the decade was crowned with a great feat for national sport: in addition to winning the bronze medal at the US World Cup in 1999, our number 10 shirt Sisleide Lima do Amor (Sissi), was the competition's top scorer (GOELLNER, 2019).

Although we cannot analyze women's football in Brazil only from the national team, its trajectory is an indicator that deserves attention, either because it guides incentives, or because it makes the sport visible, especially in the media that, to a large extent, guides the protagonism of footballers only in the period of large competitions.

In an interview with *Folha de São Paulo* at the end of the 1995 South American Championship, Delma Gonçalves (Pretinha), when asked about the importance of the achievement for structuring the sport, replied: "So far I have not seen any change in my career. But I am hopeful that women's football will gain space and players will be recognized with better salaries and facilities for women's football (BERTOLOTTI, 1995, p. 8). In 1996, after her debut at the Olympic Games, she mentioned: "You must have some other activity to avoid starving" (GABRIEL, 2015, p. 176). One of them started playing in both field and indoor football, whose diffusion was significant in the 1990s, as it required less investment in terms of maintenance, number of athletes, and space allocation (KESSLER, 2010; SILVA, 2017).

The decade ended, a new discontinuity. The regulation allowed invisible football to emerge from the shadows, but investments were not enough to guarantee systematicity and recognition of the sport.

The expectation was that the presence of women in football would be consolidated due to the good results in the South American championships, Olympic Games, and also the implementation of world championships by FIFA. These events indicated that there would be greater interest from the public, media, and sponsoring companies. However, this growth was not confirmed, as the increase in the number of practitioners did not lead to an increase in the interest of the media, indispensable for the growth and expansion of women's football (MOREL; SALLES, 2006, p. 8264).

The early 2000s were marked by a winning cycle in terms of the results of the Brazilian team. Gold medal at the Pan American Games in Santo Domingo (2003) and Rio de Janeiro (2007), champion at the South American Championship (2003), silver medal at the Olympic Games in Athens (2004) and Beijing (2008), and runner-up at the China Women's Football World Cup (2007). It seemed that we were living in a new era of women's football and that these achievements would propel its structuring and professionalization. However, little progress has been made in this direction and the dissatisfaction with the sport was publicly expressed by some players. Sissi was one

of them and her insurgency meant that she was not summoned to the 2003 World Cup, held in the USA “due to the boycott she suffered for expressing criticism of the way the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) conducted women’s football and claiming fair working conditions, such as the valorization of the daily allowance paid to athletes in the service of the national team” (SOARES, 2020). A similar situation was experienced by Daiane Rodrigues (Bagé), who wrote and held a banner on which was written “Brazil, we need support” (LAVINAS, 2007), shown at the award ceremony for winning the unprecedented runner-up in the World Cup in China in 2007. The complaints persisted and some players reported, after the team returned to Brazil (still at the airport), the neglect and lack of structure for the sport.

Inadequate food during the competition, lack of friendly matches, little transparency regarding the definition of the prize, delay in paying the prize for winning the gold medal at the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, and the future of the sport were some of the addressed topics (GOELLNER, 2020).

The athletes feared that CBF would not strive, “as it happened after the Athens Olympics in 2004 when the Brazilian women won the silver medal. At that time, the entity promised a series of improvements and the athletes said that the promises never came to pass” (LOUSADA, 2007, p. 29). The failure to keep promises and the continuous discontinuity was again denounced by Sissi, in 2015:

We have been harping on the same string regarding Brazil since when I played for the Brazil national team and I always said: “Changes are going to happen.” However, they never came to pass, it was a promise. Thus, I understand that it is difficult for girls who are in this new generation to believe because they are also experiencing this and the promises are almost the same as they were a few years ago (GOELLNER, 2019, p. 132).

Undoubtedly many other footballers raised their voices in protest at the precarious conditions of women’s football in Brazil. There is no way to mention them here, nor is this the purpose of this text. Even so, I consider it important to record an episode that significantly impacted the football universe: the publication of the document Brazilian legends calls for reform: an open letter from female football veterans addressing the current situation in Brazil. Outraged by the early dismissal of Emily Lima, the first woman to head the national team⁷, eight athletes and former athletes⁸ signed the document calling on CBF to expand women’s participation not only as athletes but also in technical and management positions. The concern with the structuring and development of the sport permeates this manifesto, which attested to how much women’s football in Brazil lives on promises and discontinuities. In their words: “The actions we are taking now are motivated by a desire that all women and girls who follow in our footsteps may be able to achieve more than us, on and off the pitch” (GOELLNER, 2020, online).

Immediately after the circulation of the Letter in the national and international press, dissatisfaction with the interference of the entity that supports Brazilian football

7 Emily Lima was at the head of the Brazilian national team for ten months between 2016 and 2017. In that period, she had 7 wins, 5 losses, and 1 tie. She did not participate in any official tournament nor did she lose to teams with a FIFA ranking lower than Brazil.

8 Sisleide Lima do Amor (Sissi), Márcia Tafarel, Miraildes Maciel Motta (Formiga), Cristiane Rozeira (Cris), Juliana Ribeiro Cabral, Francielle Manoel Alberto (Fran), Rosana dos Santos Augusto, and Andreia Rosa de Andrade.

triggered another unprecedented movement: five athletes⁹ publicly announced that they would no longer serve the national team.

Almost eighty years after the interdiction became official and more than forty years after the end of these determinations, women's football still needs to advance in terms of structuring, visibility, and recognition. The report published by FIFA in July 2019 records data that support this statement. Produced from a survey of all its member federations, the document indicates that Brazil has a total of 15,000 women competing in championships at some level. This number is small if we compare, for example, Argentina (27 thousand), Venezuela (24 thousand), and the United States (9.5 million). The data is even more alarming regarding grassroots categories: only 475 players under the age of 18 are registered in the clubs (MENDONÇA, 2019).

A determining factor in changing this scenario was the deliberation of the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) for the licensing of clubs, which requires that "as of 2019, clubs that do not have a women's team competing in national competitions will not be able to participate South American men's soccer championships" (BARREIRA *et al.*, 2020, p. 29). This measure had repercussions in the national context, forcing CBF, state federations, and clubs to direct investments, creating competitions and teams in the grassroots categories. A new start seems to be underway because of the actions that football management institutions have been implementing, especially after 2016, when FIFA defined women's football as one of its strategic pillars. The hiring of two former players (Aline Pellegrino and Eduarda Luizelli) in September 2020 to assume command positions at CBF strengthens the spirits of those who appreciate and live women's football. CBF President Rogério Caboclo announced the two new women's football coordinators and made public another important measure: "the equalization of payments made to female and male players of the Brazilian National Teams" (CBF, 2020).

These two decisions deserve celebration, especially because they meet the old demands of those who live the sport daily. In addition, they demonstrate that gender issues, which have been neglected in the football universe for so long, begin to reverberate more intensely in their practices, discourses, and representations.

Gender is a primary form of exercise of power (SCOTT, 1995) between men and women and is deeply linked to other social markers, such as race, sexuality, social class, physical appearance, nationality, and generation. As an analytical category, it allows scrutinizing the processes through which culture produces gendered practices, such as football.

Although the focus of this presentation text is situated in the Brazilian context, the locus of my research, I want to highlight that the articles gathered here make visible how deeply football is crossed by gender issues. Regardless of its thematic specificity and theoretical and methodological anchorage, the contemplated discussions indelibly emphasize that this crossing is transnational.

The organization of this dossier is also the result of a transnational action, more specifically the establishment of a research network on women's football in

9 Cristiane Rozeira (Cris), Francielle Manoel Alberto (Fran), Rosana dos Santos Augusto, Andreia Rosa de Andrade, and Maurine Dornelles Gonçalves.

Latin America, which I have coordinated with David Wood (University of Sheffield) and Verónica Moreira (University of Buenos Aires) since 2018. Aiming to gather academic and non-academic experiences and share them with different audiences, this network promoted four events in which research, intervention, and activism promoted fruitful dialogues to promote subsidies and practices with potency both to identify gender inequalities in football and to minimize them.

David Wood, Mark Biram, Peter Watson, Verónica Moreira, and Gabriela Garton are part of the group that formed the network, and their texts address some of the discussions contemplated in the meetings we held in Brazil, the United Kingdom, Colombia, and Argentina. André Luís dos Santos Silva, Raquel da Silveira, Jamile Klanovicz, Angelita Jaeger, Mariana Martins, Mariana Martins, Kerzia Silva, and Vitor Vasquez add knowledge when innovating new themes or still little addressed in studies on the presence of Brazilian women in football.

Finally, it is important to highlight that, in different times and spaces, women have developed strategies to live football and exercise in it (and for it) the right to speak on their behalf and on behalf of others who, for many reasons, have not done so.

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Resumo: Este texto tem como objetivo apresentar o dossiê temático que analisa a presença das mulheres no futebol. Para tanto, contempla uma breve contextualização sobre a modalidade no contexto brasileiro, conferindo ênfase ao protagonismo das mulheres que, em diferentes tempos e espaços, elaboraram estratégias para viver o futebol. Evidencia ainda que sua prática é profundamente atravessada pelas questões de gênero, o que pode ser identificado nos demais textos que integram o dossiê e que revelam, de modo indelével, que este atravessamento é transnacional.

Palavras chave: Mulheres. Futebol. História.

Resumen: Este texto tiene como objetivo presentar el dossier temático que analiza la presencia de las mujeres en el fútbol. Para ello, contempla una breve contextualización sobre la modalidad en el contexto brasileiro, con énfasis en el protagonismo de las mujeres que, en diferentes tiempos y espacios, elaboraron estrategias para vivir el fútbol. Además, pone en evidencia que su práctica está profundamente atravesada por las cuestiones de género, lo que se identifica en los demás textos que integran el dossier y que revelan, de manera indeleble, que esa transversalidad es transnacional.

Palabras clave: Mujeres. Fútbol. Historia.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have declared that this work involves no conflict of interest.

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