

Women, Football and Mediated Spanishness Narratives. A Comparative of the Men's 2021 and Women's 2022 Euro Coverage

By Fernando Gutiérrez–Chico, Manuel E. González Ramallal, José Luis Castilla Vallejo & Gema Lobillo Mora

Abstract

The Spanish women's national football team won, for the first time ever, the World Cup in 2023. The subsequent extra-sporting events moved the national media debates: from some initial messages of patriotic glory to the reports and feminist claims of the women footballers, which prompted the disorientation of some male sports journalists. In this context, the present research focuses on the previous period to the 'Rubiales affair'. Through the comparative between the two Spanish senior national football teams (men and women), it studies the media attention received by the teams and their members as well as analyzes the media construction of narratives of Spanishness in terms of gender. Two specific objectives are set: 1) to compare the coverage of both senior national teams in their respective participations in international competitions; and 2) to describe and analyze how the information corresponding to each team was presented. It combines content and discourse analysis on the front-pages of the four main Spanish sports newspapers during the senior men's (2021) and women's (2022) Euro. The conclusions point out a prevailing hegemonic masculine narrative sports press despite the growing tendency that women's football has been experiencing in Spain for the last decade.

Keywords: football, identity narrative, media, Spain, women.

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Football as a total social phenomenon has a high capacity of identity adscription due to its broad cultural, emotional and media nature.¹ At a cultural level, it covers a wide range of symbolic elements addressed towards a double process of integrating people within the same group while separating them from a socially constructed 'Other'. At an emotional level, football is defined by the passion through which the sense of belonging to one's team is lived. Thus, these two elements combined with the power of mass media to spread symbolic markers have made this sport a space for countless attempts of defining and articulating discourses of the nation. This has been the case of Spain.

Scholarship has worked on this football-media-nation interaction to analyse the construction of Spanishness narratives from territorial,² historical,³

- 1 Eric Dunning, *Sport matters: Sociological studies of sport, violence, and civilization* (London 1999); Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "Prensa deportiva e identidad nacional: España en el Mundial de fútbol de Sudáfrica 2010", *Política y Sociedad*, 2014: 2 (vol. 51), pp. 337–366.
- 2 Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "La identidad contada: La información deportiva en torno a la selección española de fútbol", *Universitas Humanística*, 2008 (vol. 66), pp. 219–238; Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "Prensa deportiva e identidad nacional"; Ramón Llopis-Goig, "Identity, nation-state and football in Spain: The evolution of nationalist feelings in Spanish football", *Soccer & Society*, 2008: 1 (vol. 9), pp. 56–63.
- 3 Alejandro Quiroga, *Goles y banderas. Fútbol e identidades nacionales en España* (Madrid 2014); Alejandro Quiroga, "Spanish Fury: Football and National Identities under Franco", *European History Quarterly*, 2015: 3 (vol. 45), pp. 506–529; Duncan Shaw, *Fútbol y franquismo* (Madrid 1987).

or 'race'/ethnicity⁴ perspectives. However, research with a gender approach in this sense is lacking. Therefore, it is worth asking what role the women's senior national team and its members have had in the discursive elaboration of Spanishness identity narratives. For the particular case of Spain, apart from covering an existing gap, a gender-oriented focus from a historical perspective may shed light on contemporary issues concerning women's football throughout the country. Exploring the precedents of the Spanish sports media attention to the women's senior national team would help understand their treatment of the aftermath in the so-called 'Rubiales affair' when the by-then President of the RFEF, Luis Rubiales, grabbed the player Jennifer Hermoso and non-consensually kissed her on the lips while she was receiving her gold medal.

In this context, the present research focuses on the period previous to this affair. It studies the media attention received by the two Spanish senior national football teams (men and women) and their members as well as analyzes the media construction of narratives of Spanishness in terms of gender. Two specific objectives are set: 1) to compare the coverage of both senior national teams in their respective participations in international competitions; and 2) to describe and analyze how the information corresponding to each team is presented.

The text starts with a socio-historical context where a brief background on Spanish football history in gender terms is provided. Following this, the theoretical framework explains the socio-sportive construction of the national 'Us' through the media-gender relation. In the methodological section, the content and discourse analysis carried out on the front-pages of the four main Spanish sports newspapers (As, Marca, MundoDeportivo and Sport) during the senior men's (2021 – Across Europe) and women's (2022 – England) Euro is detailed. Next, the results are presented using the Foucauldian notion of *dispositif* as a conceptual framework. Eight explanatory narrative dispositives are identified, although they do not exhaust the totality of potential analyses. The article concludes by providing new approaches to the football-gender-nation relation. It points out the prevailing hegemonic masculine narratives in sports press despite the growing tendency that women's football has been experiencing in Spain for the last decade.

4 Carmen Longas Luque & Jacco Van Sterkenburg, "Constructing 'race/ethnicity' and nationality in Spanish media: a content analysis of international football coverage", *Media, Culture and Society*, 2022a: 46, (vol. 44), pp. 1182–1198; Carmen Longas Luque & Jacco Van Sterkenburg, "Exploring discourses about race/ethnicity in a Spanish TV football program", *Communication & Sport*, 2022b: 6 (vol. 10), pp. 1113–1133.

Socio-historical framework

Historically, news coverage of the Spanish national football team has focused solely and exclusively on the men's team, with women's football being completely overshadowed. Until very recently, when globalisation has transformed the international football panorama,⁵ the narrative around football has been significantly linked to the creation of a stereotypical and homogenous narrative around national identity, something which has been common in all nations since football has been configured as a mass spectacle.⁶ In the Spanish case, before and especially during Franco's regime, the idea of the myth of *la furia* (fury) associated with the Spanish national style was consolidated as an expression of bravery, courage and patriotic indoctrination, despite the meagre successes achieved by the men's national team.⁷

Women's football in Spain began to be fairly visible during the late Francoist period in the 1970s. Women footballers in Spain have had to overcome an implicit climate of disapproval, sexist and derogatory comments, obstacles some of which have been overcome and some of which are still present.⁸ While women's football in other places was taking shape, especially in national teams, in Spain during this period there was still a position of total neglect and lack of recognition by the institutions, with the consequent invisibility of women's football in the media sphere.⁹

With the country immersed in a fully consolidated democratic period and progressively allying with European patterns, every men's international tournament reactivated the importance of the media narratives around the national football team. They questioned and directed the traditional identity constructions based on *la furia* towards a more heterogeneous discourse in accordance with a plural and decentralised Spain.¹⁰ However, these attempts fell into contradictions and move between opposing poles depending on the performance of the team. The coverage of the 1996 Euro (England) and the 1998 World Cup (France) illustrate these contradictory narratives. As Crolley and Hand report for both events, this autotypification revolves around self-belief when

5 Roland Robertson & Richard Giulianotti, "Fútbol, Globalización y Glocalización", *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 2006:45 (vol. 64), pp. 9–35.

6 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge 1992).

7 Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "La identidad contada"; Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "Prensa deportiva e identidad nacional"; Ramón Llopis-Goig, "Identity, nation-state and football in Spain"; Alejandro Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*; Alejandro Quiroga, "Spanish Fury"; Duncan Shaw, *Fútbol y franquismo*.

8 Danae Boronat, *No las llames chicas, llámalas futbolistas: Del maltrato al reconocimiento; la lucha por la igualdad en el fútbol* (Barcelona 2021).

9 David Menayo, *El fútbol femenino en 20 toques* (Pontevedra 2015), p. 53.

10 Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "Prensa deportiva e identidad nacional".

things look up against self-doubt and pessimism when performances and results are poor.¹¹ Success on the field pushes the press to foster an 'inclusive discourse' whereby readers are encouraged to feel part of the team, the nation; whereas losses and failures prompt an 'exclusive discourse' in which journalists distance themselves from the context around the squad.¹² Accompanied by familiar stereotypes of the country (cheerful, warm...) and folkloric images and discourses (bullfighting, Catholicism, militaristic terms...), the overexcited triumphalism of the beginning derives into fatalism and 'a certain inferiority complex'; the initial desire for a combination of *furia* and skill resorts to praising only *furia* as the solution.¹³ The following successes between 2008 and 2012 (one World Cup and two Euro) seemed to reverse these contradictions as articulated by the exaltation and celebration of a successful and precious style of play: *tiki-taka*.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Spanish women's national team, created in 1983, had to wait until 1997 before they took part in their first World Cup in Canada.

The first participation in the women's World Cup marks a turning point in the socio-cultural and sporting transformation that women's football in Spain has undergone in recent years. The number of federation licenses went from barely 2,000, registered by RFEF in the early 1980s, to over 67,000 in 2021.¹⁵ Coinciding with the professionalisation of women's club football in Spain in 2021, the senior national team has become an international benchmark that has allowed it to reach the first place in the FIFA ranking.¹⁶ This success goes hand in hand with the achievements obtained by the national team at youth level: since the 21st century started, they have won world (two U-17 and one U-20) and continental (five U-17 and six U-19) trophies. Moreover, FC Barcelona (four-time winner of the Women's Champions League) has been successful at club level, and both Alexia Putellas and Aitana Bonmatí have been awarded the Ballon d'Or and The Best FIFA awards. All these sporting achievements contributed to generate a prominent space for women's football in the media in Spain. At the international level the media discourses that underestimate, marginalise or overshadow women's football have less and less presence and tend, even if there are still biases in favour of men's football, towards narratives that demand equality and recognition.¹⁷

11 Liz Crolley & David Hand, *Football, Europe and the Press* (London 2002).

12 Liz Crolley & David Hand, *Football, Europe and the Press*, p. 107.

13 Liz Crolley & David Hand, *Football, Europe and the Press*, pp. 113–115.

14 Carlos García Martí, "De la furia española al buen juego: Los orígenes del 'tiquitaca'", *Política y Sociedad*, 2018:2 (vol. 55), pp. 513–532.

15 CSD – Consejo Superior de Deportes, "Licencias. Licencias por sexo 2007–2021". CSD, <https://www.csd.gob.es/es/federaciones-y-asociaciones/federaciones-deportivas-espanolas/licencias>, 2023-08-10.

16 FIFA, "FIFA World Ranking Women". FIFA, <https://inside.fifa.com/es/fifa-world-ranking/women>, 2024-07-11.

17 Raúl Martínez-Corcuera, Xavier Ginesta & Joan Frigola-Reig, "Towards Normalization of Women's Football in Spanish Sports Journalism: Analysis of 2021 UEFA Women's

This favouring context contrasts, nonetheless, with the structural inequalities that keep defining the footballing careers of women in Spain. The gender wage gap, as calculated considering the collective bargaining agreement, is 12.5 times higher in favour of men (200,000 euro for men; 16,000 euro for women).¹⁸ Likewise, the special bonuses for winning international championships show a gap of 65 times higher in favour of the men footballers as recorded for the 2023–2024 editions of the UEFA Nations League (10.5 million euro for men; 160,000 euro for women).¹⁹

Theoretical framework

National identity narratives are not isolated, but embedded in the dominant structural social complex oriented to the reproduction of hegemonic relations of inequality.²⁰ In the processes of nation-building, forms of rationality founded on cultural complexity appear and become intersectional discourses of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, etc. The result is the conformation of efficient landscapes of imagined semantics. Hegemonic male narratives of national representation have been impacted by new political identities.

The social construction of the nation through sport has been settled on two pillars: representation and narratives.²¹ Their combination leads to an interdependent summation of symbolisms and practices through which a sense of reality is woven. All this is traversed by power relations that mark the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion.²² Sports journalism is one of the fields where this reality is verified. Here, the male cultural hegemony is manifested in the limited media visibility of female athletes.²³ Regarding Spain, the

Champions League Final Broadcasts”, *Communication & Sport*, 2023:0 (vol. 0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795231190369>; Roxane Coche, “A new era? How the European ESPN covered the 2019 Women’s World Cup online” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 2022:1 (vol. 57), pp. 73–91.

- 18 David Moscoso & María Martín Rodríguez, “Desigualdades de las deportistas de alta competición en España y medidas para la igualdad efectiva”. *Spanish Ministry of Equality*, https://www.inmujeres.gob.es/areasTematicas/AreaDeporte/docs/Estudios/Desigualdad_en_el_deporte.pdf. 2024-07-10.
- 19 Natalia Torrente, “Las primas de las jugadoras de la selección femenina: más de 500.000 euros a repartir entre todas”, *Relevo*, 27/2-2024.
- 20 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London 1995).
- 21 Mariel Aquino, “A Panther Among Lions: Iñaki Williams, Race and Basque Identity at Athletic Club de Bilbao”, *Studia Iberica et Americana*, 2017 (vol. 4), pp. 119–136; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*.
- 22 Silvana Goellner, Paula Silva & Paula Botelho-Gomes, “A sub-representação do futebol praticado por mulheres no jornalismo esportivo de Portugal: um estudo sobre a Algarve women’s football cup”, *Movimento*, 2013:3 (vol. 19), pp. 171–189.
- 23 Elena Calvo & Begoña Gutiérrez, “La mujer deportista y periodista en los informativos deportivos de televisión. Un análisis comparativo con respecto a su homólogo masculino”, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 2016 (vol. 71), pp. 1230–1242; Silvana Goellner, Paula Silva & Paula Botelho-Gomes, “A sub-representação do futebol praticado por mulheres”; Clara Sainz de Baranda, “Las mujeres en la prensa deportiva: dos perfiles”, *Cuadernos de Psicología del Deporte*, 2014:1, (vol. 14), pp. 91–102.

presence of female athletes as a news subject is 1–6%, well below 90% of their male peers.²⁴ These statistics have also been extrapolated to digital formats.²⁵

All this takes its own discursive form through the construction of markedly androcentric football narratives.²⁶ At the football-gender-nation intersection, scholarship has considered that this causality constitutes one of the ways in which individual subjectivities and national identities are constructed in terms of hegemonic masculinities.²⁷ In other words, the shaping of national identity is associated with men in its most normative sense. Consequently, feminine discourses have a potential value concerning ‘the decolonization of such issues’.²⁸

The editorial policies of media groups are another cause of this relationality. Martínez Abajo et al. report that men are presented, first and foremost, in the context of sporting successes, while extra-sporting matters are presented in a supplementary order.²⁹ For women, on the contrary, the logic is opposite, with a greater presence of stereotyped comments and a lower value of achievements. Sainz de Baranda points out that achieving a title does not imply greater visibility for women, subordinated, at times, to greater attention derived from issues unrelated to sport. Moreover, she adds that, even in cases where sporting triumphs are reported, their location in the texts is complex because ‘the hierarchy of information that determines which information is more important than others shows that female triumphs are not relevant’.³⁰

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed quantitative-qualitative model. A combination of content and discourse analysis³¹ on the front-pages of the four main sports newspapers edited in Spain has been applied: *As*, *Marca*, *MundoDeportivo* and *Sport*. Using front-pages as a unit of content and discourse analysis allows

24 Elena Calvo & Begoña Gutiérrez, “La mujer deportista y periodista en los informativos deportivos de televisión”; Clara Sainz de Baranda, “Las mujeres en la prensa deportiva”.

25 Clara Sainz de Baranda, Alba Adá-Lameiras & Marian Blanco-Ruiz, “Gender Differences in Sports News Coverage on Twitter”, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2020:14, (vol. 17), p. 5199.

26 Jennifer Hargreaves, “Promesa y problemas en el ocio y los deportes femeninos”, in Barbero José Ignacio (Comp.), *Materiales de sociología del deporte* (Madrid 1993).

27 Verónica Moreira & Martín Álvarez-Litke, “Un análisis de las representaciones mediáticas y las desigualdades estructurales en el fútbol de mujeres en Argentina”, *FuLiA/UFGM*, 2019:1 (vol. 4), pp. 98–116; Verónica Moreira & Gabriela Garton, “Football, Nation and Women in Argentina: Redefining the Field of Power”, *Movimento*, 2021 (vol. 27), pp. 1–14.; David Wood, “The Beautiful Game? Hegemonic Masculinity, Women and Football in Brazil and Argentina”, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 2018:5 (vol. 37), pp. 567–581.

28 David Wood, “The Beautiful Game?”, pp. 579.

29 Judit Martínez Abajo, Gema Lasarte, Rakel Gamito & María Teresa Vizcarra, “La programación deportiva. ¿Qué lugar ocupan las mujeres?”, *Revista Estudos Feministas*, 2020:2, (vol. 28), pp. 1–15.

30 Clara Sainz de Baranda, “Las mujeres en la prensa deportiva”, p. 100.

31 Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 3rd edition (Thousand Oaks 2012).

us to find the information contained inside the newspapers in a synthesized way.³² These covers define the editorial policies of each daily by summarizing the criteria to select/omit and the relevance of the topics of the day.³³ Likewise, the media manifest their power to define who belongs and who is excluded from the corresponding narratives by dictating which athletes, tournaments or teams are newsworthy and how they are shown.³⁴

Regarding the newspapers used for the analysis, *As* has been edited in Madrid since 1967. It belongs to the media group Prisa and counted on 362,000 (2021) and 402,000 (2022) single readers by the period considered in this analysis.³⁵ *Marca* was founded in 1938 and is also published in Madrid. It belongs to the media group Unidad Editorial and counted on 824,000 (2021) and 891,000 (2022) single readers, thus being the most read newspaper throughout the country, including generalistic press.³⁶ *MundoDeportivo* has been edited in Barcelona since 1906. It belongs to the media group Godó and counted on 255,000 (2021) and 203,000 (2022) single readers.³⁷ *Sport* is also published in Barcelona since 1978. It belongs to the media group Prensa Ibérica and counted on 167,000 (2021) and 182,000 (2022) single readers.³⁸ These dailies and their media groups cover most of the audience in the country, thus ensuring a wide analytical representation given the different editorial and territorial orientations.³⁹

From a historical perspective, the text focuses on the European championships played by both teams in the period before the ‘Rubiales affair’ happened: June 10–July 12, 2021 (men) and July 5–August 1, 2022 (women). In both cases, the first day corresponds to the date immediately prior to the start of the tournaments, while the last day corresponds to the date immediately after their end. The choice of these particular editions responds to two main aspects. On the one hand, it offers the closest performance of both national teams before the ‘Rubiales affair’, thus showing the state of the art preceding the scandal. Knowing the previously existing context of the media treatment

32 Manuel E. González-Ramallal, “Prensa deportiva a identidad nacional”.

33 Pablo López-Rabadán & Andreu Casero-Ripollés, “La evolución de la agenda mediática española (1980–2010). Un análisis longitudinal de la portada de la prensa de referencia”, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 2012 (vol. 67), pp. 470–493.

34 Silvana Goellner, Paula Silva & Paula Botelho-Gomes, “A sub-representação do futebol praticado por mulheres”.

35 AIMC – Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, “Estudio General de Medios, 2022, 3ª ola”. AIMC, <https://reporting.aimc.es/index.html#/main/diarios, 2024-07-10>.

36 AIMC – Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, “Estudio General de Medios, 2022, 3ª ola”. AIMC, <https://reporting.aimc.es/index.html#/main/diarios, 2024-07-10>.

37 AIMC – Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, “Estudio General de Medios, 2022, 3ª ola”. AIMC, <https://reporting.aimc.es/index.html#/main/diarios, 2024-07-10>.

38 AIMC – Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, “Estudio General de Medios, 2022, 3ª ola”. AIMC, <https://reporting.aimc.es/index.html#/main/diarios, 2024-07-10>.

39 Antonia Isabel Nogales Bocio & Rosalba Mancinas-Chávez, “Los diarios de referencia en el mercado de la prensa española: Propiedad, grupos mediáticos y conexiones estructurales”, *Correspondencia y Análisis*, 2014 (vol. 4), pp. 307–333.

of the women's national side may help understand the subsequent coverage of the footballers' demands as stated in the introduction. On the other hand, both teams were positioned high in the international ranking when reaching these final rounds, hence growing optimism for a potential triumph.

The contents and narratives of an overall 244 front-pages were systematically collected and analyzed. The collected information was recorded in a matrix-table composed of 16 indicators. General parameters included the date of the front-page and the tempo of the event (pre-Euro, pre-match day of the team, match day of the team, post-match day of the team, inter-matches of the team, post-Euro). This is followed by a preliminary quantitative segment where general indicators were considered: total number of news, photos and illustrations in each front-page as well as the main characters in each news (club/athlete – sport). The next block focuses on the particulars of the Spanish national teams under study. Thus, the first segment looks at quantitative aspects which include the total number of news, photos and illustrations in each front-page regarding the national squad as well as their size (less than half-page, half-page or more than half-page). The second segment pays attention to qualitative aspects which take into account the headlines and other headlining elements, quotes by members of the national teams as well as the lexicon used to define the team, the staff, the members of the Spanish football association, the fans and the specific matches played by both teams. After completing the corresponding analyzing sheets, the study proceeds with the comparative study of the two teams and their respective tournaments.

Findings

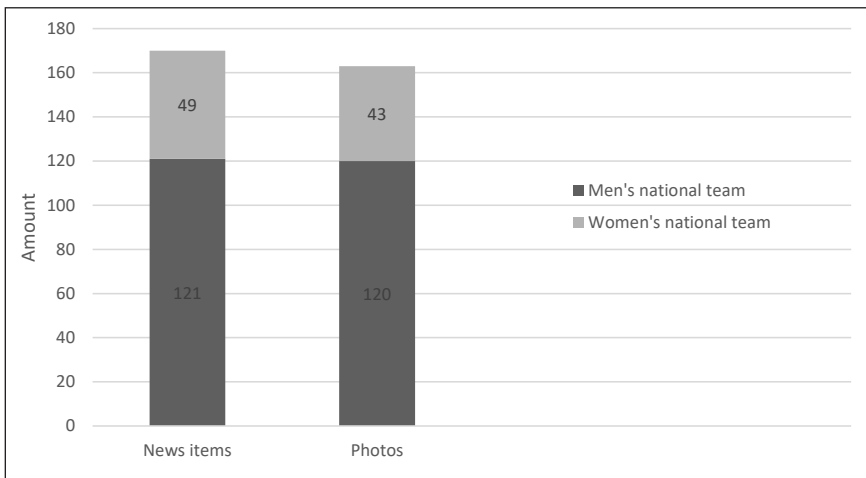
The following results are introduced using the Foucauldian notion of 'dispositif' as a conceptual framework. It explains political senses around discursive elements, among others. In the context of our research, it is defined by a sum of delimitations: it acts as a relational nexus between heterogeneous elements; it marks the nature of such a network; it possesses a strategic function; it is established by its genesis; and it remains after having been constituted as long as a process of functional over-determination occurs.⁴⁰ Eight interrelational narrative dispositives are identified. These do not exhaust the analytical possibilities, but give an idea of the complexity of the elements in transformation:

1) Dispositif of limited visibility. In the 244 front-pages analyzed, 170 entries about the Spanish national teams were recorded. Their distribution shows quantitative imbalances between the men's and women's teams (Graph 1). While 121 dealt with the former (71%), only 49 focused on the latter (29%). In representative terms, 163 photos related to the Spanish national teams were

40 Edgardo Castro, *El vocabulario de Michel Foucault: Un recorrido alfabético por sus temas, conceptos y autores* (Buenos Aires 2004).

recorded, distributed as follows: 120 corresponding to the men's team (74%) to 43 regarding the women's one (26%). Despite this apparent disproportionality of the data, there are several readings in this regard. The information on the women's squad was certainly represented. On average, a photo appeared in 87% of the entries (43 photos/49 news). Moreover, this presence tended to be fairly balanced. All but three publications contained at least one picture. For its part, information on the men's team was highly represented. On average, a photo appeared in 99% of the news items (120 photos/121 news). However, there are certain imbalances in these figures. There were several occasions in which some entries did not include any photo at all. On the other hand, on days 27 and 29, at least one entry included more than one photo.

Graph 1 – News/photos per team



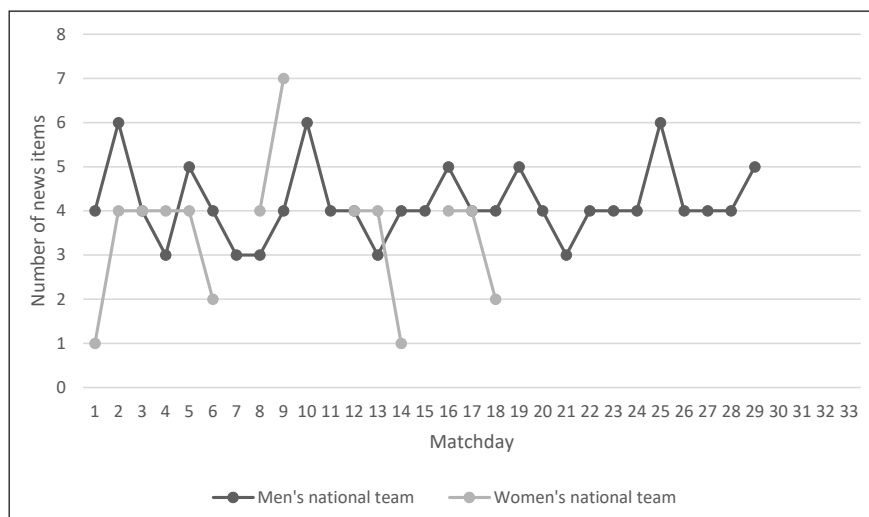
Source: Own elaboration.

2) Dispositif of unequal informative treatment. News referring to the women's team were recorded in 14 out of the 28 covered days (Graph 2). That means there was no information in half of the days concerning the women's squad. The starting point was consistent. There was always some publication during the first six days. The imminent start of the championship generated news. This information, focused on the analysis of the team and the tournament, was intertwined, and even overshadowed the first days, by the serious injury of its captain Alexia Putellas. From then on, the coverage was inconsistent. The first informative silence came on match-day 7, after the opening game. This lack of news was repeated on match-days 10 and 11, after losing against Germany. A new silence came on match-day 15, after qualifying to the next round. On match-day 19, after losing versus England in the quarterfinals, the information stopped. From that day on, there were no more publications. As observed, the coverage moved around the successive matches played by the

team. The match/post-match temporality was applied, in which both the notes immediately before and after the match in question were limited to this. The time span between matches had no news.

News about the men's team were reported on 29 out of the 33 covered days. That means there was no news on only four days (from match-day 30 to 33), coinciding with the knock-out of the team in the semifinals. From the tournament preview to the end of Spain's participation, the information was always present. It did not matter whether there was a match or not. The match/post-match timing only implied a wider coverage. The interval between matches was covered with more information about the national team, which, in many cases, was personalized through analysis or interviews. Falling in the semifinals meant that almost the entire analyzed period contained news about the national team. The big difference, compared to its women's counterpart, was the greater extension of the pre- and post-matches in the men's case. This narrative continuity allowed for a greater depth of content and a higher level of detail.

Graph 2 – Evolution of news per team and day



Source: Own elaboration.

3) Dispositif of the same and the other. The coverage of the women's squad showed an inconsistency when elaborating a narrative of belonging to the national 'Us'. Taking as a reference the lexicon of the news, as well as its approaches, a couple of interrelated factors are observed. Alterity is appreciated when presenting the women footballers in relation to the elaboration of a discourse of belonging. This is exemplified in the entry published by *Sport* on match-day 5: 'They started by conceding a goal in the first minute, but they

were able to turn the game around with skill'.⁴¹ The verb conjugation denoted otherness, an allusion to 'Them' that occurs to the detriment of 'Us'. This situation acquires greater significance when compared to the exceptional displays of belonging in the wording of the texts. On match-day 9, after losing and risking the qualification, *Marca's* front-page read: 'It is enough for us to draw to pass as second'. Through the pronominalization of the verb and its corresponding conjugation, the women's team was given inclusivity in this football-nation assembly. An editorial masculinization was also detected in this same construction of 'Us'.

The coverage of the men's team presented greater consistency in this football-nation symbiosis. A discourse of belonging was elaborated in which the 'Us' was present. There was no space for narratives of otherness. The appeals to being part of a community were constant and repeated throughout the championship. On match-day 14, with Spain's qualification at risk, *Marca* headlined 'We trust you', followed by the drop-heads 'Victory qualifies us' and 'Draw forces us to pray that the Poles do not win'. Both the conjugations and the pronominalizations of the verbs deepened the idea of a common belonging, of a fraternity in the face of an 'Other', in this case, a foreigner. Other examples could be found in match-days 23 and 24, where the quarter-final match against Switzerland led *Marca* to headline the preview as 'We dream' and, in the post-match, to point out that 'Two great saves by Unai in the shootout take us to the semifinals'.

4) Dispositif of identification: symbiosis versus neutrality. The information about men and women coincided in certain thematic axes. However, there was one aspect regarding the men that was omitted and non-existent in the women's news. The notes included details related to the fans and their involvement with the team, which served as a method to link the men's team with the population. On match-day 6, after a starting goalless draw against Sweden, *Marca* reported that 'part of the crowd dismissed Morata with whistles'. On match-day 10, prior to the game against Poland and in a context of doubts, *Marca* headlined 'Morata and 13,000 more'. As it can be seen, the fans as a whole were appealed to as a key subject in the performance of the task.

One of the formulas used to build this feeling of belonging involved linking the national team with the country, so that a symbiosis was projected between the team and the nation. An example of this could be found in *Marca* during match-day 20. After beating Croatia in the round of 16, the newspaper subtitled 'We went through all the moods [...] and now this country is excited again'. Both the level of connection with the population and the fact of being part of a common cause were emphasized. Another demonstration appeared three days later, prior to the match against Switzerland. *Marca* headlined 'Spain is hooked

⁴¹ Original headlines are in Spanish. They have been translated into English for a better understanding of the messages.

on *La Roja* in search of the semifinals'. Consequently, the establishment of a link between the men's team and the Spanish nation was perceived.

5) Dispositif of identifying richness. In this research, the data from both teams show lexical differences. To begin with, 457 appellatives referring to either of the two squads or their members have been recorded. For our descriptive analysis, they have been organized into 15 categories. While the entries referring to the men fill each and every category, in the case of the women, only material for nine categories has been found. This reflects a greater profusion of detail when constructing a narrative around the men's team.

Following Gutiérrez-Chico and González-Fuente, this imbalance deepens the idea of a narrative displacement of women towards the periphery, while at the same time it strengthens men at a core position.⁴² The reading of the contents on both teams shows the different formulas by which the national team and its members were known. This is the first major difference. In the case of the men's team, the level of depth was bigger as there was a greater diversity of referred subjects. Sometimes, even the nicknames by which they are known as were included. The latter denoted a level of familiarity. The relational aspect can also be included when referring to the collective. However, this deserves a separate singularization. In the men's squad, such relationality was more linked to a dispute over the Catalonia–Madrid significance.⁴³ In the case of the women's team, a gender logic can be appreciated as it is oriented around the figure of a male coach ('Vilda's'). This implied a certain masculinization of leadership: a strategy of gathering a collectivized overrepresentation of the group around the women's coach.

The construction of this identity narrative was supplemented with information referring to certain achievements, roles of members, hierarchies within the team or a certain appeal to the sense of belonging between the national team and the nation. However, the scarcity of appellatives in the female case made these variables a conjunctural complementarity. On the contrary, the greater number of denominations in the masculine case gave it greater structurality. Besides, a series of categories that were only observed in the coverage of the men's team must be added, such as the status of the members of the national team, the professional trajectory of the players at the club level, age aspects, and appellatives motivated by physical condition or geographic origin.

6) Dispositif of personalization and collectivization. The analysis has recorded 75 quotes related to the Spanish national team out of an overall of 170 entries. The information on the women's team was not very declarative.

42 Fernando Gutiérrez-Chico & Iñigo González-Fuente, "Androcentric Club Narratives around Spanish Football: A History of Men and Some Female Stories", *Movimento*, 2023 (vol. 29), pp. 1–17.

43 Manuel E. González-Ramallal, "Prensa deportiva a identidad nacional"

There are barely eight quotes for 49 entries. However, it is striking that half of the quotes corresponded to the national coach. In this sense, there is a concentration of information on the male coach, supplemented by isolated appearances of four women players. The information on the men's side was partially declarative. There were 67 quotes for 121 entries. A greater profusion of protagonists was observed. Up to 19 different spokespersons were recorded. It is noteworthy that quotes from the rivals (e.g. Augustinsson before the match against Sweden) and even from the president of the RFEF were collected in the informative construction of the Spanish men's team.

An overall of 172 proper names (including nicknames in the case of men) have been counted. On the one hand, 130 references were linked to the men's side and included 21 members; while the remaining 42 references were connected to the women's squad and included 12 members. The narrative constructed around the men's team was more varied and nominative richer. It was a more personified narrative, in which the reader was familiarized with the representatives of the national team. The narrative built around the women's team was more concise. Although it presented a certain nominative richness, the comparison with its male counterpart reflected a greater generalization. The audience was only half-familiarized. The figure of Alexia Putellas (17 mentions) was the most frequently used.

7) Dispositif of selective appropriation of the imagined heritage. Media used essentialist rhetoric as one of the strategies to make common cause around the men's national team and link it to the country. It appealed to some presumed Spanish virtues. Historical narratives were followed, revived with greater or lesser frequency depending on the sporting performance of the moment. They appealed to a supposed Spanish DNA, in which certain physical and playing characteristics converge, defining some thought-to-be self-particularities. On match-day 19, prior to the round of 16 against Croatia, *MundoDeportivo* subtitled 'After recovering the DNA, *La Roja* seeks the quarterfinals in Copenhagen against the World Cup finalist'. Highlighting the recovery of a particular way of understanding football was motivated by the way in which the team got through the initial round. Consequently, a defense of the return to that supposed essence as a basis for securing sporting success could be deduced. This practice was combined with the exaltation of two models that have defined the men's team throughout its history: the pass-and-go style known as *tiki-taka*, more recent and associated with the latest footballing successes; and the physical, courageous and manly display, typical of past decades, known as the 'Spanish Fury'. Thus, on match-day 20, after beating the Croatians, *As* headlined 'Tiqui-Casta!'. At the same time that the two styles of play merged, a historical past was recalled when complications showed up in the competition. Certain forms of mythification were used as a form of pro-

tection, but above all, they weaved a historical continuity of the nation with its male heroes. On match-day 24, after beating Switzerland on penalties and qualifying for the semifinals, *As* headlined 'Hands of Saint'. This appealed to goalkeeper Unai Simón, who saved several penalties, through a sacralization that brought it back to past times and heroics. It served as a reminder and comparison with another mythologized goalkeeper, Iker Casillas, whom the media called the Saint of Spain because of his saves. Such mechanisms contributed to the construction of a Spanishness discourse that was not only limited to the present, but also traced a historical narrative.

8) Dispositif of territorial narrative. In the case of the men's side, there was a differential factor in the Catalan press, which analyzed the tournament and the team from a FC Barcelona perspective. The informative construction, both in *MundoDeportivo* and *Sport*, sometimes opted for an interpretative framework where the performances of *Barça* players were highlighted. On match-day 7 *Sport* headlined 'Pedri demands the title'. The aspirations of the Spanish team were channeled through the figure of the young midfielder. This practice was also applied to players who did not belong to the Spanish squad. On match-day 3, *Sport* headlined 'Euro began with nine *Barça* representatives'. Therefore, the framing did not have the national team as the central core, but FC Barcelona.

In line with the above, another interpretative framework used by the two Catalan newspapers was the vindication of the figure of the coach, Luis Enrique. Although he has a past with both Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, the coach excelled as a manager with the latter. The aforementioned newspapers elaborated a narrative that, at times, pretended to dispute the significance of the national team in order to assimilate it to the figure of the coach. On match-day 15, *MundoDeportivo* headlined 'Lucho's hand', while *Sport* subtitled 'Luis Enrique's end up second in the group'. Likewise, on match-day 23, *MundoDeportivo* highlighted that 'Luis Enrique's *La Roja* looks to go through today against a growing Switzerland'. By emphasizing Luis Enrique's influence on the team's future or highlighting a certain relationality, the construction of the Spanish 'Us' was reconfigured to make it more Barcelona-like.

In the case of the women's team, this re-reading was found in the figure of Alexia Putellas. Her injury, days before the start of the championship, was the subject of several entries from the run-up to the tournament until the team's debut. While the first information focused on a physical level, the presence in the texts was stretched to the point of approaching the participation of the team under Alexia's frame. The injury of the player was treated indistinctly by Madrid and Catalan media in terms such as 'We all are Alexia [...] The national team conjures up for the Euro after the injury of its star' (*As* – match-day 2), 'Drama Alexia! [...] Spain loses the best player in the world and its chances in the tournament are diminished' (*Sport* – match-day 2), 'Debut without Alexia

but with illusion' (*MundoDeportivo* – match-day 4) or 'Four different players scored 'to become Alexia'' (*Marca* – match-day 5).

Discussion

The coverage of both teams was clearly unequal. The number of front-pages with information and images referring to the men's team was proportionally higher. There was an underrepresentation of women in the media construction of the national team in relation to their male counterparts. The media treatment was also different between one national team and the other. There was a constant presence of the men's team and an inconsistent presence of the women's team. Intermittency was the sign of the informative treatment of women's football. This implied an unequal application of the cumulative effect of the media in the transmission of national identities.⁴⁴ It was partial through women and complete through men. This female underrepresentation reveals hierarchies and hierarchizing effects.

The discourse was played between expository exclusion and national appropriation. The pre-supposed Spanish virtues appeared as elements of the masculine national character. There was no correspondence with a feminine character. Despite being dismantled by the Social Sciences, essentialist rhetoric around men was still resorted to. This shows the media's editorial conservatism while reinforcing a circular and limiting discourse of critical thinking.⁴⁵ This not only occurred at the national-identity level, but especially in terms of gender. The discourse on the men's team was one of belonging. The place of enunciation remained masculine. The style in use identified the masculine with the national. The 'Us', in masculine, appeared as part of the traditional hegemonic language. The discourse of the women's team, on the contrary, fluctuated between 'Us' and 'Them', between the same and the other. A process of segregating identification was also attested. It could be seen in the nature of the link that was formed between the national team and the fans. It was a very powerful connection in the case of men, but fragile in the case of women. An undisputed common cause of the country was established with the men's national team. There was an ambiguity between symbiosis and neutrality with the women's team.

What is said and how it is said allows the analysis of the narrative construction that media make of Spanishness via the national football teams. According to López Díaz, it is through language that meaning is given to the reality that is told.⁴⁶ In the field of sports, studies show that this reality is woven in different gradations. The media coverage of both national teams shows a disparate iden-

44 Alejandro Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*.

45 Alejandro Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*.

46 Pilar López Díaz, *Deporte y mujeres en los medios de comunicación* (Madrid 2011).

tifying richness. With men, there was a greater complexity of the protagonists both nominative and categorizing. With women, this information was much poorer. Although succinctly, it is also worth looking at what was not said and how certain descriptive formulas were omitted. Following Alfaro et al., ‘when a distinction is made between ‘sport’ and ‘women’s sport’, an androcentric perspective is being applied by taking the sport practiced by men as the norm and subordinating that practiced by women, considering it an exception to the norm’.⁴⁷ Thus, it is noteworthy the absence of references to the women’s team with appellatives accompanied by the adjective ‘feminine’ or similar. Nor did it occur in relation to the men’s team. Both squads were referred to in a similar way without highlighting the gender issue. This is relevant because it assumes a presumed normalization of both teams as representatives of the national team.

These media narratives moved within a continuum between personalization and collectivization. The men’s statements appeared largely than that of the women, which was translated into differential forms of importance. However, a paradox occurred. Despite the greater individualization present in the coverage of men, the message transmitted was that of the group, that of the Spanish ‘Us’. In this context, such practice executed Hobsbawm’s idea that ‘the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people’.⁴⁸ In contrast, the apparently communal coding with which the women were reported about ended up partially eclipsed by the captain, Alexia Putellas. So much so that, in terms of parallel identity narratives, the women’s team motivated, through her, a re-reading from the individual-collective axis. She was framed more as a flag in the wind of her international aura than as a national claim. The Catalan and Madrid media claimed different narratives around Putellas (the Catalans her belonging to FC Barcelona, the Madrilenians to Spain) that could suppose one more scenario of the identity contradictions built around the Madrid–Catalonia axis.⁴⁹ However, this discursive alternative became more notorious in the case of the men’s national team. Spanish tensions around clubs (Real Madrid–FC Barcelona) and territory seemed to be a men’s issue.

Conclusions

After studying the press coverage of the women’s senior national team and the media construction of Spanishness in terms of gender before this institutional turmoil, our research highlights that a hegemonic masculine narrative prevailed in the Spanish sports press. The inconsistencies of patriotic repre-

47 Elida Alfaro Gandarillas, Mercedes Bengoechea Bartolomé & Benilde Vázquez Gómez, *Hablamos de Deporte* (Madrid 2010), p. 23.

48 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, pp. 152–153.

49 Manuel E. González-Ramallal, “Prensa deportiva a identidad nacional”.

sentations fluctuated between an old masculinizing *mise-en-scène*, an uncomfortable narrative incongruity of otherness and an affirmation of the explicit differential fact. Through the unfolding of a series of expository dispositives, the women's national team and its members played a supplementary and peripheral role in the media elaboration of Spanishness narratives. They moved between the same and the other, a continuum between the contributions to the national 'Us' and the subaltern otherness. They represented one more handle on which to build a narrative that, nevertheless, took its basis from structures historically specific to the men's team.

The coverage of the women's national team presented an informative inconsistency that contributed to its limited visibility. If, in comparative terms, the presence of the men's squad was already more notorious, the lack of more daring editorial policies limited the empowerment of the women footballers as referents and subjects from which to build Spanishness. Added to this was a narrative that was neither so declarative nor so profusely nominative. Consequently, it hardly altered the androcentric ground on which the narrative of belonging to the national 'Us' was based.

Finally, considering the analytical limitations of this cross-sectional research, more longitudinal studies are required to observe the dynamism of these identity narratives in terms of gender. Likewise, this is a self-representation of Spanishness, which invites for hetero-represented comparative projects in order to gain perspective and interpretation. This study can contribute to frame and understand similar phenomena at the club level, where women's teams are being inserted into historical male structures.