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Sport and social movements: Lili Álvarez in Franco's Spain

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Abstract

Leaders and activists of social movements at times have a background of world-class achievements in sport. How does this high-profile sport background affect their activism? This article argues that in both democracies and dictatorships, a personal past of elite sport accomplishments frequently influences activist athletes' consciousness and subsequently the selection of goals to be reached through collective action and also the very definition of those goals. Such a background often provides their holders with publicity, public stature and social and political connections, which are factors conducive to movement success.

To investigate the above propositions, this article presents a case study based on published documents, archival records, interviews and secondary sources: that of Lili Álvarez (1905-1998) in Spain during the right-wing dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. Álvarez was a self-proclaimed feminist who individually and together with other women tirelessly advocated for women's rights. However, she was better known for her national and international multi-sport achievement, most notably reaching the Wimbledon singles finals in three consecutive years in the late 1920s. Her sporting background inspired Álvarez to demand that girls and women practice sport. Her athletic experience influenced her social consciousness in unexpected ways and on issues other than sport, such as religion and feminism. She defended a type of Catholicism comprising a positive conception of the body (derived from her sporting past) at a time when negative conceptions of the body (especially of women's bodies) prevailed. This type of thinking led her to ask for respect and autonomy

for women within the Church and in society. Álvarez's sport record gave her and the causes she fought for visibility and respectability.

Keywords

sport, social movements, Lili Álvarez, gender, Spain

Introduction

Elite sport participation or accomplishment does not lead directly to social activism, as the majority of elite athletes do not engage in such activity. But some social movement members have a personal history of world-class sport records. How does this outstanding sport performance affect their activism, that is, the objectives pursued and the outcomes obtained in collective action? This article defends that a background of elite sport achievements inspires some activists in the selection of their goals and the specific definition of these goals. This sport background provides their holders with public stature and connections. Thus, this biographical past can contribute to social movement success. Furthermore, a personal record of high-profile sport achievements functions as a driver of (and key resource for) social protest, not only in current times characterized by mega-sport events, commercialization and globalization of sport contests, sport celebrities and mass new technologies of information and communication (Boykoff, 2014; Hayes and Karamichas, 2012; Harvey, Horney and Safai, 2009; Wilson, 2007), but also in historical times when these characteristics of the sports world were only incipient or did not exist (Dart and Wagg, 2016). World-class achievements in sport affect athlete (and former athlete) activists not only in the liberal democratic contexts usually covered in research on athletic activism, but also in dictatorships.

The above question on the relationship between sport and social movements is investigated in this article using a case study elaborated with primary and secondary sources: that of Lili Álvarez during the right-wing authoritarian regime that ruled Spain between the mid-1930s and 1975. Álvarez was known for her multi-sport elite performance, principally reaching the Wimbledon singles finals in three consecutive years in the late 1920s. These achievements were all the more remarkable given the historically minimal sports tradition of Spain (Ofer, 2009: 106). Álvarez belonged to the aristocracy and was the author of articles and books on sport, religion, and women's status. She often gave public lectures and talks on these topics. In this sense, she was a public intellectual (Jarvie, 2007).

Álvarez's experience as a multi-sport elite champion inspired her selection of aims for mobilization, particularly her claim that girls and women practice sport. Álvarez and other women's sports advocates encountered immense opposition mainly (but not exclusively) from the Catholic hierarchy. Álvarez's sporting background had an important impact on her social consciousness, because she defended a version of Catholicism containing positive images of human bodies. Through an intricate process, this social consciousness led her to demand the improvement of women's position within the Catholic Church. Seen from another perspective, Álvarez's positive conception of the body, derived from her athletic background, was central to her feminist ideas and organizing. Álvarez (and other Catholic women) believed that within the Catholic Church women formed a group in a disadvantaged position, that this situation was unfair, and could (and should) be changed through collective efforts. This is why in this article, she is termed a "Catholic feminist". Again, the Catholic hierarchy fiercely opposed Catholic feminism in general and Álvarez's demands in particular. Álvarez's elite sports background (and also her aristocratic status and wealth) allowed her to maintain public activity and links with numerous key political and social figures. Her world-

class sport record enabled her to publicize and legitimate her chosen causes. Besides her individual feminist advocacy, Álvarez was a founding member of one of the groups that formed the second-wave of the women's movement: the Seminar for the Sociological Study of Women (*Seminario de Estudios Sociológicos sobre la Mujer*, SESM). With other SESM members, Álvarez vigorously demanded the end of women's subordination in society.

This article is organized in four parts. In the first part, I review the literature and theoretical considerations with which to understand the relationship between sport and social movements. In the second part, I explain the selection of the empirical case and specify the sources used in this research. In the third part, I analyze the empirical case, that is, the impact of Álvarez's high-profile sport achievements on her activism to improve women's rights in Franco's Spain. In the last section, I discuss the findings of the empirical case and present concluding remarks. This article does not describe Álvarez's biography in and of itself but rather focuses only on the link between sport and collective action in this case.

Literature review and theoretical considerations

The relationship between sport and social movements is not one of the main topics covered by the literature on collective action (Harvey et al, 2009: 392; Wilson and White, 2002: 120). However, this scholarship documents that sport and mega-sport events are for a used by activists to protest against social injustices (Cornelissen, 2012). For instance, during the 1913 Epsom derby, British suffragette Emily Davison rushed onto the track and into the path of a king George V's horse, and was killed while attempting to draw attention to the campaign for women's suffrage (Kay, 2008: 1338-39). In current times characterized by globalization and the pervasive use of new technologies of information and communication, sport-related protests can reach audiences around the world in seconds (Wilson, 2007).

Other times, the celebration of mega-sport events in specific sites produces protests in these very sites, among other reasons because of the detrimental consequences for the environment from the construction of sport facilities, the forced eviction of sectors of the population to build mega-sport facilities, or the high costs which the host country incurs (Boykoff, 2014; Hayes and Karamichas, 2012). In this sense, mega-sport events are not different from other sport-related phenomena that also cause protest (Carrington, 2010; Dart and Wagg, 2016). These include (among others) the use of Native American mascots as symbols by sport teams (Davis-Delano, 2007; Davis-Delano and Crosset, 2008), the building and/or demolition of sport facilities (Davis-Delano and Crosset, 2008; Schwirian, Curry and Woldoff, 2001; Wilson and White, 2002), the end of the presence in a specific locality of a professional sport team (Wilson and White, 2002), the combination of US university education and competitive sport (Benford, 2007) or exploitative working conditions in the sport manufacturing industry (Harvey, Horne, Safai, Darnell and Courchesne-O'Neill, 2014: 37-40; Sage, 1999).

Sport can be a means utilized by activists to pursue social change. Three examples serve to illustrate this point. In the second decade of the twentieth century, US suffragists undertook long-distance hikes that lasted several days with the explicit purpose of raising support for women's vote while simultaneously challenging prevailing ideas about women's physical frailty (Schultz, 2010). Through "development (and peace) through sport" organizations, such as Right to Play, athletes, former athletes, coaches, sport administrators and volunteers visit developing countries and use sport, physical activity and play as tools to improve people's lives in these countries and build a culture of peace (Coalter, 2013; Darnell, 2007; 2010; 2012; Harvey et al., 2014: chapter 5; Wilson, 2012). At a more macro-level, South African sport federations and national teams were boycotted in protest against

apartheid (Kidd and Donnelly, 2000: 137-38).

Sometimes, sport practitioners and athletes are themselves activists since they participate in collective action. Some sport activists direct their claims to problems specific to their sport. For instance, in past and current times, female sport activists have fought for girls' and women's access to sport, fair treatment of female athletes and the improvement of female athletes' status (Hargreaves, 1994). Other times, sport activists advance demands beyond their sport. This was the case of Surfers Against Sewage, an organization founded in England in 1990 by surfers to fight against sea pollution and other environmental hazards (Wheaton, 2007).

Renowned cases exist of elite athletes who are or were activists. In the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games on the award podium, African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos made a famous gesture denouncing race inequality in the United States (Bass, 2002; Hartmann, 2003). Also on the medal podium of the same Olympic Games, gymnast Vera Čáslavská protested against the 1968 Soviet-invasion of Czechoslovakia (Harvey et al., 2014: 52). When in 1966, US champion boxer Muhammad Ali refused to be drafted to the Vietnam war, he inspired others at the onset of the anti-war movement (Harvey et al., 2014: 104).

World class athletes are few, and elite athletes who are also activists are considerably fewer. Social movement activity is non-normative behavior for them. That athletes participate in charity work in a seemingly apolitical manner is often seen as laudable. In contrast (and paradoxically), when athletes use sport platforms to engage in political and social activism attempting to denounce and contribute to solve entrenched problems such as sweatshop labor, lack of democracy, racism, human rights violations or war, they are reminded that politics has no place in the playing field. Athlete activism is a high-cost type of activism because those

who participate in it very often suffer dramatic and irreversible consequences in their sport careers and personal lives, as proved by the cases of Tommy Smith, John Carlos, Muhammad Ali and numerous others (Carrington, 2010; Cooper, Macaulay and Rodriguez, 2017; Kaufman 2008; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010).

Scholarship suggests at least two specific ways in which participation in elite sport influences athletes' activism. First, being a high-profile athlete helps some individuals to develop a "social consciousness", or a realization "of the structural reality that positively and negatively affects their lives and the lives of others" (Kaufman and Wolff, 2010: 159). This process may take place through various mechanisms. Traveling to compete in distant places is common to international athletes. Through this travel, athletes come into contact with a world beyond their local lives, and may come to be aware of problems beyond their own reality (Kaufmann and Wolff, 2010). Additionally, going abroad and knowing about other societies may help elite athletes imagine solutions to local problems. Studying elite runners in run-for-peace events in post-conflict Kenya in 2008, Wilson, Van Lwijk and Boit (2015) argued that by having traveled abroad to places where ethnic conflict was rare, these athletes managed to imagine a country without grave ethnic conflict.

Second, international success in sport provides elite athletes with prestige and public stature. High-profile athletes are valued and respected by many in their communities, and this respect often cut across ethnic lines, social classes, political allegiances and other dimensions of social stratification (Wilson et al., 2015). In a mobilization, this high stature could be transformed into strong leadership and capacity to attract support from a varied and wide social spectrum, which are two ingredients enhancing success of sport-related social movements (Davis-Delano and Crosset, 2008: 120-21).

Elite athletes' activism may be more efficient for some kinds of initiatives than others,

and in some circumstances more than others. Examining high-profile athletes in sport for development and peace (SDP) initiatives, Darnell (2012) showed that these athletes can be particularly successful at drawing attention to development, raising funds for SDP programs, and acting as role-models especially for young people (but see below).

High-profile athletes' activism is probably more efficacious in some circumstances than others. Analyzing elite runners who engaged in run-for-peace events in post-conflict Kenya in 2008, Wilson et al. (2015) proposed that elite sport activism is more influential when athletes and former athletes contribute with their own labor to the mobilization, and live and train (at least part of the year) in the society where collective action occurs. In these circumstances, activism by elite athletes is often perceived by the population as legitimate, because these athletes are (or may be) themselves affected negatively by the very problems the mobilization is trying to tackle (such as ethnic violence). Moreover, these activist athletes have first-hand knowledge of the local context, subsequently understand what could and should not be demanded, and frequently have access to political and social elites who can solve (or contribute to solve) the problems that collective action addresses. It should be stressed that the very organization of a violence-free initiative (and elite athletes' participation in it) in circumstances of past or present widespread violence is itself a major accomplishment.

High-profile athletes' activism is not without challenges and limitations. Studies on SDP initiatives recognized the benefits that these programs provide to beneficiaries living in low-income and/or conflict-ridden societies. However, this research also showed that activist athletes tend to pursue narrow (but attainable) charitable objectives rather than broad (but less easily attainable or even non-attainable) aims that directly challenge the roots of structural injustices. Other times, and perhaps unintentionally, activist athletes may project racist, sexist

or elitist attitudes when trying to help groups situated in an underprivileged situation.

Additionally, sport activism may be more beneficial for the activist (in terms of improving his/her image as a good person) than for those who are supposed to be helped, because their lives are not going to improve significantly thanks to the modest (although welcome) help received (Coalter, 2013; Darnell, 2007; 2010; 2012).

In sum, the literature on sport and social movements offers some propositions to study the link between the two phenomena. It is to the task of analyzing some of these propositions with the help of an empirical case study that I now turn.

Selection of the empirical case and sources used

A study based on a single case has no statistical generalizability (the enumeration of frequencies within populations or universes) (Yin, 1989: 21). However, a single case study offers empirical richness to understand complex phenomena not previously widely researched. As shown above, this is the case of the linkages between sport and social movements. In this article, I study the empirical case of Spanish Catholic feminist Lili Álvarez in Franco's Spain. The theories presented above are used to illustrate the case itself. To a lesser extent, the empirical case is deployed to elaborate, and complicate, existing theories. But one has to be cautious when generalizing from one single case to that of other sports activists and activism.

Álvarez was born in Rome in 1905 and died in Madrid in 1998. Álvarez was an onlychild and during her childhood and youth, she lived mainly in hotels and spa resorts in various European countries (chiefly in Switzerland, France and Germany) due to her mother's poor health. Enjoying an upper-class life style, she did not attend school regularly but learned several foreign languages and practiced several sports including tennis, ice-skating, skiing,

fencing, motor racing and mountaineering. Some of these sports were the ones practiced by a minority of aristocratic and affluent women in the European countries where Álvarez lived (and considerably less so in Spain).

Álvarez's multi-sport achievements were remarkable. Álvarez reached the Wimbledon singles finals in three consecutive years in 1926, 1927 and 1928, and held the number two rank in the world women's tennis in those years. Although these Wimbledon years were the peak of her tennis career, she later continued to win championships. In 1929, she won the women's doubles at the French Open. In 1930, 1931 and 1936 she reached singles semi-finals at Roland Garros (and in 1927, she reached mixed doubles finals there). In 1930, she was singles champion at the Italian Open, and the individual and mixed doubles champion in Argentina in that year. In Spain, she was the individual champion in 1929 and 1940, and doubles champion in 1941 and 1942 (Bellver, 2010: 18). Also in Spain, she was also champion in ski in 1941. Together with another female athlete, she was the first woman to represent Spain in the Olympic Games (in Paris in 1924 in tennis). Thirty-six additional years were necessary for the next women to represent Spain in the Olympics (in 1960 in Rome).

In 1934, Álvarez married French aristocrat Count of Valdene and consequently became herself Countess of Valdene. She had a miscarriage and separated from her husband soon afterwards (Gómez-Santos, 1961). After the Spanish civil war (1936-1939), Álvarez settled permanently in Madrid. She became a public intellectual and writer on topics of sport, religion and women's status.

In 1960, Álvarez helped her friend María Campo Alange to establish a group that formed part of the women's movement: the SESM. Álvarez and Campo Alange were aristocrats and founded the SESM recruiting middle- and upper-class women who had a

university degree and a career. The SESM was a small group of nine women. SESM members including Álvarez named themselves “feminist”, although the word was (and still is) used in a pejorative way by most Spaniards (Álvarez, 1959: 13; 1964a: 168; Campo Alange, 1983: 226). The SESM endlessly demanded women’s access to education and training, women’s right to participate in the labor market (with the proviso that women also fulfill their family duties), women’s participation in civil society, respect for single women, and a more active role for women within the Catholic Church. A first step for the improvement of women’s status would be the study of women’s position in society.

The social activism displayed by Álvarez provides an excellent example for analyzing the relationship between elite sport and activism. As Wilson (2012: 100) stated, it is important to examine historical cases. Only after the passage of time, one can see what types of protest made a difference. Carrington (2010) showed how a diachronic analysis covering more than a century helps understand the links among sport, race and resistance. In the conclusion of their research on African American sport activism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Cooper et al. recommended research on athletic activism in “different social, historical, and political contexts” (Cooper et al, 2017: 27). On the other hand, many (but not all) theoretical insights reviewed in the previous section come from studies on democratic countries (however imperfect some of these democracies were or are). Thus, it is fruitful to examine the links between high-status sport and social movements in other political contexts. Franco’s Spain is such a context because the country was governed by a right-wing authoritarian regime. Unquestionably, in Franco’s Spain, the political climate was extremely unfavorable to social movements. Freedom of expression, association and demonstration was banned and a severe censorship was imposed on mass media. The only political organizations permitted were the single party *Falange* and its auxiliary organizations, such as the Feminine

Section of the *Falange*, which managed most women's issues. The dictatorship ferociously repressed any manifestation of political dissent or contestation of core structures of the political regime (Linz, 1970; Maravall, 1978).

Franco's dictatorship intensively pursued women's subordination. Civil law considered married women as minors. Motherhood was defined as women's main obligation toward the state and society. The role of mothering was perceived as incompatible with other activities, such as waged work. The state took measures to prevent women's labor outside the home. An example of this was the requirement that a married woman obtain her husband's permission before signing a labor contract and engaging in trade (Valiente, 2015b).

The Catholic Church played a paramount role in society and politics. Spain was a nearly homogeneous Catholic country after the expulsion of Jews in 1492 and of Muslims in 1609. The Catholic Church significantly contributed to the anti-feminist imprint of Francoist policies for women by endlessly predicating women's subordination to men, women's confinement to home and family, and the restriction of women's sexuality to reproduction within marriage. In the area of reproductive rights and sexuality, public policies conformed to the restrictive Catholic doctrine, for example, by criminalizing abortion in all circumstances and prohibiting the selling and advertising of contraceptives (Morcillo, 2010).

Sources of this case study include academic bibliography; publications by Álvarez, the SESM and relevant political and social actors of the time; press clippings from main newspapers (chiefly but not exclusively *ABC* and *La Vanguardia*);[1] and files from the Archive of the Feminine Section housed in the Royal Academy of History, Madrid (Archive of the *Asociación Nueva Andadura*). In addition, in 2015, I conducted six interviews. More concretely, I interviewed two SESM members and four of Álvarez's acquaintances. Face-to-face interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. All interviews

were conducted in Spanish, which is my native language.[2]

In the four types of sources (bibliography, published primary sources, archival records, and interviews), I looked for information on the links between sport and activism. The search for this information in the sources was deduced from the literature on sport and social movements, and did not require the use of a qualitative research software program. I made every attempt to use information that was verified by two or more unrelated sources.

In spite of the frailty of memory, interviews were particularly helpful and unique sources because they can reveal what could not be made public in the dictatorship under mass media censorship. Additionally, I could ask my interviewees questions that were not satisfactorily answered by studying the bibliography, published primary sources and archival records, for instance, about Álvarez's stature and how people perceived it.

Analysis of the Empirical Case: Lili Álvarez's sport and activism in Franco's Spain

The battle in favor of and against women's access to sport

Before analyzing Álvarez's advocacy for women in sport, let me describe in some detail the ferocious opposition to women's physical activity that existed in Franco's Spain. Afterwards, I will show how Álvarez, a former world-class athlete, urged girls and women to exercise. Álvarez helped political authorities in the management of women's sport.

The vehement opposition against women's sport

During the Francoist dictatorship, critics of women's physical exercise abounded in society and politics. Detractors of women's sport argued that it diminished women's reproductive capacity, fostered moral corruption and in some cases masculinized women. The Catholic Church hierarchy had been (and continued to be) among the most outspoken and

relentless opponents to women's sport. In the early 1920s, Father Ramón Ruiz condemned women's sports because these activities implied that women ventured beyond their homes, where they belonged. In lieu of women's physical education and sport, he recommended that:

[Women should] work cleaning the house and tidying up rooms, making beds, mending clothes and cooking. Taking care of children offers a never-ending and beneficial labor...women (you should) work, work, work in duties appropriate to your sex, that God created as an auxiliary to men's lives in all ages and conditions (Ruiz, 1922: 48).[3]

In Franco's Spain, the bishop of the northwestern region of Galicia requested that in gymnastic classes girls be taught only to exercise their arms arguing that exercising their abdominal muscles and buttock was immoral (Ofer, 2009: 14). Father Esteban Orriols supported exercise among girls and young women, but only alone or within the family, in a light manner, and always strictly following the rules of the separation of the sexes and avoidance of public sport exhibitions (Orriols, 1951: 253, 261). Surprisingly enough, as a sports role models for girls and young women, he identified a nun who spent more than fifty years of her life paralyzed, lying in bed but nonetheless always happy. He categorized this nun as a "sportswoman of suffering" (*deportista del sufrimiento*). He also mentioned a former actress from Paris who, after a licentious life, became a very religious woman and declared that her favorite sport was "genuflexion" in order to pray (Orriols, 1951: 267-68).

In its frontal opposition to women's physical exercise, the Spanish Catholic hierarchy followed the "intransigent hostility" by the Vatican towards women's sport (Gori, 2004: 89). In the interwar years, the Vatican had not condemned boys' and men's sports but cautioned

against what it considered excesses. In his 1929 Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, Pius XI saw “physical culture” (of boys and men) as a means which could help Catholic education, upon which families and the Church were sovereign and the state, subsidiary. But sports should not usurp “unreasonably on Sunday, the time which should be devoted to religious duties and to family life at home”. Conversely, Pius XI stated that the physical training of girls was “contrary to the very instincts of human nature” (Pius XI, 1929). A year earlier (1928), regarding the first national gymnastic and athletic competition of girls and young women aged 13-18 years belonging to the Fascist Party to be held in Rome in May, Pius XI sent a letter to the Rome Vicarious Cardinal “deploring” the aforementioned sport contest (and women’s physical education and sport in general). Pius XI clarified that “if a woman’s hand had to be risen at all, this must only and always happen in order to pray or engage in charity” (Pius XI, 1928: 369). In Franco’s Spain, the aforementioned Encyclical and letter to the Vicarious General were often quoted by the Catholic hierarchy (for example, Orriols, 1951).

Advocating women’s access to sport

In Franco’s Spain, the women’s branch of the single party, the so-called Feminine Section (*Sección Femenina*) was in charge of girls and women’s physical education and sport (and the training of female physical education instructors). Also in Fascist Italy, women’s auxiliary organizations of the single party were principal actors in the management of female sport (Gori, 2004; Ofer, 2009: 106). In Spain, the Feminine Section decidedly supported exercise for girls and young women. Physical exercise was seen by Feminine Section leaders in various ways: as a vehicle to produce healthy mothers, a recruitment tool to foster adherence to the authoritarian regime, and a mean to cultivate self- and group discipline. The Feminine Section tried to see that most girls and young women were exposed to at least a

minimum of exercise by establishing compulsory classes in schools, universities, the youth movement and factories (Ofer, 2009: chapter 4). Spain was not unique in this regard. For example, female physical exercise was also fostered in Nazi Germany (Stephenson, 1975: 118-20, 142, 191). But in contrast to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, in Spain most funds and efforts were directed to non-competitive women's sports (Ofer, 2009: 106; Pfister, 1997: 98).

Immediately after the Spanish civil war, the Feminine Section partly relied on women athletes and former women athletes to set up the management of women's physical education. Álvarez was the most outstanding of these women athletes and in 1940, she was appointed sport adviser to the Feminine Section. In the 1940s, Álvarez taught training courses to would-be skiing and tennis instructors (Carbajosa, 1999: 95-96; Riaño, 2004: 97). At the Fifth National Congress of the Feminine Section held in Barcelona and Gerona (11-19 January 1941), she gave a talk on the status of sport in various countries (*ABC* 15 January 1941: 6; *La Vanguardia* 15 January 1941:1).

Álvarez delivered public lectures and talks on sport topics in activities organized by the Feminine Section and helped in the management of these events. At the 1951 Hispanic American Feminine Congress coordinated by the Feminine Section in Madrid, she chaired one of the five strands in which all sessions were streamed and presented two papers. One of them was titled "Culture and Physical Culture". In it, she defended that sport was a form of culture. If art is the culture of sensitivity and knowledge is the culture of intelligence, sport is the culture of the body. Álvarez thought that Spanish women had made some gains, for instance, regarding participation in the labor market. Conversely, Spanish women hardly exercised. She exhorted them to practice sport (Archives of the *Asociación Nueva Andadura*, file 56, document 9; the paper was published as Álvarez, 1951). Also in Fascist Italy, women

athletes and former women athletes collaborated with the regime in the administration of women's sport, acting as managers and coaches in sporting federations and/or teachers of the institution which trained future female instructors (the National Academy of Female Physical Education) (Gori, 2004: 203).

Álvarez advocated girls' and women's sport not only by collaborating with the Feminine Section but also by being active in civil society, working sporadically both as a journalist and by giving public talks. Regarding journalism, Álvarez started to publish articles some years before the Spanish civil war. In some of her sport articles, she defended exercise among girls and women and denounced Spain as laggard in this regard (Álvarez, 1951). She thought that some sports (for instance tennis) suit women while other sports do not (such as boxing or polo). Furthermore, she argued that women played tennis not worse than men but in a different manner. Female tennis had not reached the level of excellence because women were in a situation of subordination, thus linking female sport achievements and the general status of women in society. Álvarez argued that it is possible for women both to play tennis and yet be very feminine (Alcaraz, 1939: 17; Álvarez, 1930).

Finally, Álvarez exhorted Spanish girls and women to exercise by delivering public lectures and talks in various locations. At times she gave the same (or a similar) lecture or talk in activities organized by both the Feminine Section and actors of civil society. For example, in 1959, at the exhibition commemorating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Feminine Section, Álvarez delivered a lecture titled "The Spanish woman, sport and everything else". She criticized that most Spanish women were trapped in a state of mind characterized by passivity. While Spanish women had traditional and laudable feminine qualities such as generosity, abnegation, and sacrifice, they nonetheless lacked their own judgement and initiative. Thus, Spanish women were akin to girls. Sport could help them

reach a higher stage of maturity and personal development (*ABC* 27 November 1959: 62; *La Vanguardia* 28 November 1959: 36). In addition, she gave a talk with the same title on 7 December 1960 at the Turó Royal Club Tennis in Barcelona (*La Vanguardia* 8 December 1960: 35) and on 30 November 1961 at the Madrid headquarters of the Spanish Association of University Women (*ABC* 30 November 1961: 65). It was common at that time for public intellectuals to deliver public lectures and talks at various sites and publish the content in newspapers, magazines and books of general readership rather than in specialized academic journals. This reflects the important role played by intellectuals in the decades post-World War II, not only in Spain but in other Western countries, developing public opinion of broader sectors of the population than in current times. As SESM member Carmen Pérez-Seoane recalled in her interview, Álvarez “was herself highly respected as a public intellectual”, and was “the friend of all main public intellectuals of Spain”, and (C Pérez-Seoane, personal communication, 29 December 2015). Arguing in the same line, SESM member Purificación Salas stated in the interview:

[Lilí] was unique...How would I explain to you?...She had a brilliant mind. She was a very intellectual woman. Her personality was a mixture: she had excelled in sports but she was also a very intellectual person. And she was very modern too (P. Salas, personal communication, 29 December 2015).

Demanding women’s autonomy and status within the Catholic Church

Álvarez was not only a former world-class athlete but also a very religious woman. As I explain next, her sporting background enabled her to develop a specific form of Catholicism distanced from prevailing negative notions of the human body (and especially negative

notions regarding female bodies). This social consciousness gained partly from her athletic practice led her to continuously demand that women (and lay people in general) play a more influential and autonomous role within the Church. Álvarez defended these views in books (Álvarez, 1946; 1956; 1959; 1964a), newspaper and magazine articles, public lectures and talks.

Social consciousness: From sport to a body-friendly version of Catholicism

In contrast with numerous Catholics in Franco's Spain, Álvarez became a very religious person not in childhood but during her youth and afterwards. She recalled:

At the age of twelve, I did not even know how to pray. We [my parents and I] lived in Lausanne, and my parents realized that I had not taken my first communion. I had to take private intensive religious lessons. Fortunately, the priest who instructed me was a wonderful human being (Adrio, 1995: 48).

Particularly after the Spanish civil war, when she settled permanently in Spain, she got progressively involved in religion in a deep and active way. As SESM member Carmen Pérez-Seoane stated in her interview:

The interest in religion happened at a later stage [in Álvarez's life]. Before, [Álvarez] had a very different type of life...I believe that she started to abandon a type of outwardly-oriented and superficial life and little by little she was turning inwards and into religion (Pérez-Seoane, personal communication, 29 December 2015).

The six people interviewed for this article unanimously remembered her as a deeply spiritual woman and emphasized that religion was the center of her life. As SESM member Purificación Salas recalled in her interview:

[Lilí] was very religious...but she was not overpious...Overpious people have a type of religion...how would I explain it to you? A religion based on continuous attendance to Mass. [Overpious people are] narrow-minded people...their Catholicism is based on obeying precepts...Lilí was not at all overpious (P. Salas, personal communication, 29 December 2015).

The importance of Catholicism in Álvarez's life is also noted in memoirs written by Álvarez's close friends such as intellectual and lay leader of Catholic Action Enrique Miret (2000: 272, 309). When I asked Milagro Laín (daughter of Pedro Laín, Álvarez's acquaintance) in her interview in what sense Álvarez's Catholicism was different from the type of Catholicism professed by most Spaniards of that time, Laín answered: "[Álvarez's] Catholicism was more militant, more active...more progressive...more evident" (M. Laín, personal communication, 28 December 2015).

Like most Catholics of her time, Álvarez had a dual conception of the person because she believed that every individual is composed of body and soul. Traditionally, Catholics had considered the body negatively, as the site of worldly appetites and temptations and the vehicle for sin. Historically, some Catholics practiced punishments of their own bodies as a religious experience, such as the most known practice of the use of hair shirts (*cilicios*). The female body was particularly despised and seen as a magnet to attract men's lust. Thus, bodies had to be repressed and even mortified. More benign views of the female body were

restricted mainly to its functions of gestation, delivery and nursing. Negative conceptions of the body were not a monopoly of Catholic men; many Catholic women (and even Catholic feminists) embraced them (Morcillo, 2010).

In contrast to prevailing negative conceptions of the human body, Álvarez had a positive view of it. Rather than defending that the body had to be repressed, she claimed that the body should be respected and cared for because bodies (and not only souls) were created by God. Consequently, she criticized self-inflictment of corporal mortification such as the use of hair shirts (Álvarez, 1968: 122). Furthermore, Álvarez claimed that through physical exercise, the body acts as a vehicle for the person to become close to God. Thus, the body was the repository of mystical fervor. This type of spiritual experience happens mainly when sport and physical exercise are practiced in the middle of nature rather than in the city and subsequently the sport-person can contemplate nature (God's creation) while exercising (Álvarez, 1946). As she stated, "after a day of rough sport practiced outdoors, after having reached a difficult record hardly pursued, the self expands, joy is felt, and the soul opens" (Álvarez, 1956: 77). Álvarez recalled that when she permanently settled in Spain after the Spanish civil war, she practiced exercise in an attempt to meet God (Gómez-Santos, 1961). In her own words:

After returning to Spain, I became fully religious. Very few people are aware of the numerous excursions walking or biking I made across Spain, searching contact with God, searching for divinity. I walked days and days for many years in an experience that could be defined as a physical exercise pursuing mystical adventures (Adrio, 1995: 48).

As Álvarez herself stated, her positive conceptualization of the body derived from the intense practice of sport in her formative years and the continuation of sport practice afterwards. In her own words, “the magnificent role that I think sport has...is derived from years of my sport experience, from interpretation of this experience” (Álvarez, 1946: 18, 11).

Social consciousness: From sport to Catholic feminism

Álvarez’s positive conception of the body, derived from her sporting background, shaped her critique to women’s subordination within the Church. Traditionally, women’s bodies were conceived by the Church hierarchy as temptations that incline men to lascivious thinking and behavior. Álvarez denounced that in practice Catholic moral exigencies for women were mainly the repression of sexuality in order to fulfill the sixth commandment: “You shall not commit adultery”. In contrast, Catholic moral exigencies for men were much broader, included all commandments, and did not emphasize the sixth commandment. This double moral and sexual standard was based on the belief that in comparison to men, women’s capacity for moral development was inferior (Álvarez, 1959: 168-69). Álvarez bitterly criticized this double moral and sexual standard as un-Catholic in various fora, including the First Conference on the Spanish Family organized by the single party in Madrid in February 1959 (Álvarez, 1959: 175-77).

Álvarez firmly believed in the theory of the complementarity of the sexes. She thought that women and men were not identical human beings, but individuals with distinct and complementary characteristics. In her own words:

Genesis says that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”. Subsequently, nothing truly human can be

achieved without encounter and conversation between men and women. Needless to say, man and woman should preserve their particularities and complementary characteristics (Álvarez, 1959: 165).

Álvarez identified the following female distinctive features: "sweetness, exquisiteness... openness to the other", maternal inclination (Álvarez, 1964a: 157), sensitivity, "gentleness, humility, modesty, dedication...[and] purity" (Álvarez, 1964a: 160-61). Álvarez criticized the Catholic Church for treating nuns, and by extension all women, as eternal girls or minors. Since women could have religious experiences as fulfilling as men's, both should be considered of similar worth within the Church. Since historically women had been relegated to the home or the convent, the religious sphere had been deprived of the contributions that female believers could have made. Álvarez defended that feminism and Catholicism were perfectly compatible, and concluded that "a baptized woman who were not feminist would not be a good Catholic woman regarding her position towards the female sex and herself" (Álvarez, 1964a: 168).

The demands of Spanish Catholic feminists (Álvarez included) were in line with a (slight) change in Papal perspective on (some) women's issues. Already in the 1940s, Pope Pius XII declared that although historically women had served God in the confinement of their homes or cloisters, in contemporary times women should participate in spreading Catholicism beyond home and cloister. In his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII referred in a positive tone to women's access to public life, and women's equal duties and rights in both private and public life. The Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) rejected women's subordination. The Second Vatican Council supported an enhanced role of lay people within the Church. However, in subsequent years, the Papacy and the hierarchy firmly

and explicitly rejected the possibility of women's priesthood and women's access to decision-making positions within the Catholic Church (Rodríguez, 1995).

When advocating for an enhanced status for women within the Church, Álvarez and other Catholic feminists encountered a relentless opposition from the Catholic hierarchy (and mild support from a very small minority of priests, bishops and lay leaders of auxiliary organizations of the Catholic Church) (Valiente, 2017). For example, Álvarez's book *In a strange land* received a despising and reprimanding review by Father Álvaro Huerga (Huerga, 1957). Álvarez at times fought back with strong words against the Catholic hierarchy's opposition to the improvement of the status of lay people (women but also men) within the Church. Álvarez defended that "we are all the Church, not only priests, nuns and bishops, as it used to be believed by us all...We all have to build [the Church]" (Álvarez, 1962: 50). She criticized the Spanish Church hierarchy for "its dirigiste and bossy inclination to command others as if they were minors" (Álvarez, 1962: 58). Lay people who, like herself, reflected theologically, in essence invaded a domain, theology, that was monopolized by priests and the Catholic hierarchy. These lay people were "bullied without understanding, charity and at times even loyalty" by some members of the Church hierarchy, while other members looked the other way (Álvarez, 1962: 53). Acting in this way, the Church hierarchy showed "the buried survival of the old, priestly caste's mentality". It reflected a "dejà-vu classism", that is, "a self-aware spirit of the only class 'who counts'" (Álvarez, 1962: 55).

Defending the improvement of women's status in Spanish society

Álvarez not only wanted girls and women to practice sports and play a more active and autonomous role within the Church. Álvarez and other Catholic feminists asked for the improvement of women's status in society as a whole. As shown next, Álvarez demanded a

higher degree of autonomy and respect for women in certain events organized by the political authorities of the dictatorship. Other times, she advanced this type of demands in her own publications, or in the publications of the feminist group to which she belonged, the SESM. Álvarez used her status as a former world-class athlete (and her high-class privileged position and her stature as a public intellectual) to demand improvement of women's position in Spanish society.

Advocating women's rights in official events and civil society

In events managed by political authorities, Álvarez demanded the amelioration of women's position in Spanish society (and beyond). For instance, at the 1951 Hispanic American Feminine Congress organized by the Feminine Section in Madrid, one of the two papers presented by Álvarez was titled "Hispanic women and the battle for femininity". In it, Álvarez defended that women were different from men, and women had to fight for the improvement of their status without losing their religiosity and special features, that is, their femininity (Archive *Asociación Nueva Andadura*, file 56, document 9). The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs nominated Álvarez to be a member of the Spanish delegation to the International Conference on Human Rights held in Teheran (22 April-13 May 1968). In her contribution to this conference, Álvarez exhorted people to become aware of women's discrimination. Álvarez thought that in contrast to other injustices such as hunger, war and racial discrimination, women's inferior status was hardly perceived (Álvarez et al., 1970: 34; Riaño, 2004: 84).

In her own publications, Álvarez also (and incessantly) demanded the improvement of women's lives. For instance, she defended fertility control. She clarified that she was not writing about specific techniques to limit natality but was considering the issue in general

terms. This was probably a self-protecting discursive device, because in Franco's Spain the selling and advertising of contraceptives was criminalized. Recalling that documents of the Second Vatican Council contained a vision of marriage whose principal aim was not only reproduction but conjugal love, Álvarez defended that both spouses should decide the number of children they would like to have. Moreover, she affirmed that women's control of their own fertility was more important for their autonomy than the vote or gender equality before the law (Álvarez, 1964b).[4]

On the other hand, Álvarez requested valuing more highly the unpaid, unrecognized but nonetheless necessary work performed by housewives. However, she pointed out that adult women could (and should) also perform other tasks different from domestic and caring duties, including a paid job, intellectual activities and social activism. In her own words:

Women must continue to be what they have always been: the fairy that cares for the home, the “warm guardian of the nest”. But they should not be confined to this function either (Álvarez, 1965a [1970]: 29).

Álvarez also helped disseminate information on international feminist literature. In 1965, the Spanish translation of US feminist Betty Friedan's *The feminine mystique* was published in Spain and was preceded by a foreword written by Álvarez (Álvarez, 1965b). In May 1975, in Madrid, Friedan herself delivered a public lecture which was attended by hundreds of people. Álvarez introduced Friedan to the audience. Friedan was one of the most widely read and debated authors by women's activists in Franco's Spain (Escario, Alberdi and López-Accotto, 1996: 303). Consequently, thanks to Álvarez and other activists, after Franco's death in 1975, when the women's movement publicly re-emerged, it was not totally

disconnected to the debates prevalent in democratic countries (Valiente, 2015b).

Álvarez individually defended the improvement of women's status with her publications, talks and lectures. Individual activism was important in her case because she was an intellectual and intellectual elaboration is often an individual process. It is important to note that in dictatorships, women activists frequently pursue their demands alone instead of collectively, because the right to assemble, meet and demonstrate is banned. Nonetheless Álvarez also mobilized collectively by collaborating with the SESM, the feminist group to which she belonged. Time and again, the SESM denounced the situation of inferiority in which most women live and demanded women's inclusion in many social domains. For example, in 1967, the SESM published a collective work on single women aged 17-35 years living in Madrid. On the positive side, the SESM found that these young women described themselves as family-oriented, caring, generous, optimistic and religious people. On the negative side, the SESM found that the majority of these young women had educational and cultural deficits, lacked critical thinking and had limited ambition because their main aspiration was marriage and maternity (Campo Alange, 1967). In 1970, the SESM published *Women and historical acceleration*, which is a very well-documented report on women and education in Spain. Again, the SESM denounced the education deficit that most Spanish women had. Although legally speaking the education system was open to women, in practice education opportunities were considerably greater for boys than girls. The SESM bitterly criticized Spanish society, which conceived as natural that most girls and women were plainly ignorant. The SESM demanded that girls and women receive the same education as boys and men and claimed that co-education was beneficial to both (Álvarez et al., 1970).[5]

Prestige as a former world-class athlete: a valuable resource for activism

In her endless activism in favor of gender equality, Álvarez used her public stature as a former high-profile athlete to press for feminist claims. Throughout the Francoist dictatorship, Álvarez's sport records were widely noted in society and political circles, and often mentioned by the mass media. As SESM member Carmen Pérez-Seoane recalled in her interview:

Lilí was the most famous person among members of the Seminar [the SESM].

Because Lilí had had a brilliant life. Could you imagine what was it like to be a Spanish woman in Wimbledon in those years [the 1920s]? (Pérez-Seoane, personal communication, 29 December 2015).

In the same line, national ski champion Carolina Behamonte confessed in the interview: "I was dazzled [by Lilí]...I perceived her as a main character...as somebody from another world that had nothing to do with our own world" (Behamonte, personal communication, 11 December 2015). This interviewee was not alone in her admiration of Álvarez.

In a society characterized by acute class inequality, Álvarez's wealth and aristocratic status definitely opened doors. In fact, although she was already separated from her French husband when in 1939 she settled permanently in Spain, she continued to use the aristocratic title that she had acquired by marriage (Countess of Valdene). As Milagro Laín summarized in her interview, Álvarez "emanated social superiority...status of high social class" (M. Laín, personal communication, 28 December 2015).

In Franco's Spain, mainstream newspapers and magazines and main publishing houses were very rarely open to Catholic feminists' contributions. But thanks to Álvarez's

reputation, most of her articles were published in major newspapers and magazines. Similarly, Álvarez managed to publish most of her books in mainstream publishing houses (Álvarez, 1956; 1959; 1964a). Some of her books were reprinted several times and were reviewed in major newspapers and magazines. For instance, her book *In strange land* (Álvarez, 1956) underwent eight editions and was positively reviewed, among other places, in mainstream newspaper *ABC* (García, 1956; Laffon, 1956; V.D., 1957) and *Arriba* (Llanos, 1956), the newspaper of the single party and by extension Franco's regime. Publishing houses that published Álvarez's books usually advertised them in major newspapers and magazines. In the interview, SESM member Carmen Pérez-Seoane remembered the broad audiences who attended the launch of Álvarez's books:

There was something about Lili that was very impressive: when the launch of any of her books took place (I attended the launch of all her books), many people attended the event to listen to her and congratulate her. She knew a lot of people from very diverse milieux...She had lots of connections with people of high stature...The most important public intellectuals of Spain were delighted to attend the launch of Lili's books (Pérez-Seoane, personal communication, December 29, 2015).

As already mentioned, Álvarez delivered public talks and lectures speaking about topics covered in her publications. Main newspapers often announced Álvarez's talks and lectures in advance. Once Álvarez had delivered them, main newspapers usually reported that many people (women and men) attended these talks and lectures, and summarized the content of them.[6] In the absence of Álvarez, in Franco's Spain, mobilization on behalf of women would have reached fewer audiences.

Cooperation with a dictatorship or sport-related activism?

That Álvarez demanded women's access to sport and the improvement of women's status in official events of the political regime could be interpreted in various ways. Strictly speaking, Álvarez's collaboration with the Feminine Section and other political authorities in the management of women's issues should not be termed social movement activity but cooperation with a right-wing dictatorship which brutally repressed political dissent. Equating Álvarez's collaboration with Francoist authorities to social movement activism would imply an injury (or even an insult) to the people who belonged to the underground opposition to the dictatorship and suffered from prison, torture, internal or external exile, separation from state jobs and any other forms of political repression (including death sentences). It is true that especially during the last two decades of the Francoist dictatorship, activists of different social movements such as the labor movement decided to join the organizations established or permitted by the regime in order to advance claims from these legal spaces (Maravall, 1978, 74-75). But this tactic by part of the labor movement was only one of the tactics used by labor activists. The other tactics were underground and implied harsh political repression (or high risk of it). Thus, Álvarez's participation in activities organized by Francoist authorities cannot be equated automatically to labor movement penetration in the organizations of the regime.

Alternatively, Álvarez's claims in favor of women's sport and women's rights could be conceived as activism if several important qualifications are made. The struggle for gender equality is recently theorized by social movement literature as beyond the dichotomy society/state. Rather than equating activism with society and policy-making with state, recent analyses of women's movements argued that it may be time to substitute the conventional distinction between movements and states by the notion of a continuum of women's activism

in different locations (Banaszak, 2010). These recent analyses of gender equality activism have been made when studying democracies. I now argue that their conclusions could also apply to non-democracies (with provisos) in cases such as Álvarez's public activity.

In a dictatorship, there is no alternation in power of political parties which compete in elections. In this sense, public authorities have the constant monopoly of power to elaborate public policy. If activists want to influence these policies, they have a strong incentive to collaborate with policy makers. It should be stressed that Álvarez was not herself a policy maker. As this article has shown, she was a public intellectual who was very active in civil society. Her articles and books were published mainly by privately-owned publishing houses and media, not by official mass media. She had independent economic means not derived mainly from collaboration with the state. Her collaboration with political authorities was sporadic and not at all her main public activity.

As explained above, the Feminine Section was the regime organization in charge of women's sport. Since the Feminine Section promoted mass participation in women's sport rather than high-status competitive female sport, collaborating with the Feminine Section could mean reaching an important number of girls and women (of all social backgrounds) through public policy. The Francoist regime was basically an authoritarian (not a totalitarian) regime. Thus, some types of non-political voluntary organizations of civil society were permitted (Linz, 1970). Instead of collaborating with the Feminine Section, Álvarez could have chosen to promote women's sport by cooperating with female voluntary organizations, and at times she did. But these groups were very few, and upper-class women often abounded in their membership.

The collaboration of Álvarez with the Feminine Section in managing women's sports did not imply total submissiveness to sport authorities of the time. Rather, Álvarez exhibited

independent thinking and behavior. An episode illustrates this point. After settling permanently in Spain in 1939, Álvarez participated in national sport competitions, where she obtained gold medals in tennis and skiing for several years (Bellver, 2010: 18; Riaño, 2004: 42, 51). In the 1941 national skiing competition, in early morning, male and female athletes reached the summit by foot from where they had to descend skiing. Competition judges decided that men would descend first. This decision was very unusual in a traditional society such as that of Spain in the 1940s, where it was customary that men yield to women in all sorts of situations. After hours of waiting in cold weather, Álvarez decided on her own to descend the competition slope. When passing by competition judges, she shouted at them that these practices (of making women wait until men's competition ended) only happened in Spain and never abroad. Sport authorities sanctioned Álvarez for this behavior, and subsequently she had to stop participating in national competitions. In 1943, the sanction was lifted but she never again participated in an official sports competition (Adrio, 1995: 46; Bellver, 2010: 21; Gómez-Santos, 1961; Riaño, 2004: 60).

The same is true regarding the SESM, the feminist group to which Álvarez belonged. Demanding the improvement of women's status led the SESM at times to participate in events organized by structures of the dictatorship such as the Feminine Section. For example, the SESM defended its claims for women's education described above in a paper presented by the SESM at the First International Conference on Women organized by the Feminine Section and held in Madrid (7-14 June 1970) (Campo Alange et al., 1970). But other (less frequent) times, the SESM opposed publicly initiatives undertaken by the dictatorship. For instance, in 1968, Álvarez and the remaining SESM members published a letter in newspaper *ABC* arguing against Feminine Section's proposal to confer a salary to housewifery with the argument that such a salary would be an incentive for women to remain permanently at home

rather than attempting to find a paid job when their full-time presence at home was not necessary (Álvarez et al., 1968). SESM members other than Álvarez were not policy makers either but activists in civil society. Their economic position derived from wealth acquired through inheritance and/or marriage, and/or was regularly earned through paid employment (Valiente, 2015a).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has studied the case of a female elite athlete who later became a women's rights activist: that of Lili Álvarez in Franco's Spain. As scholarship on sport and social movements proposed, sport can be a driver of activism. Álvarez's continuous sport practice and world-class achievements during her childhood and youth, together with other factors, led her to publicly advocate that girls and women practice sport. In this regard, Álvarez was not different from other female sport activists in past and current times around the world asking for women's access to sport, and the improvement of female athletes' condition.

Research on sport-related activism has asserted that participation in elite sport provides some activist athletes with a social consciousness of the existence of problems related to their sport and beyond. This point is confirmed by the empirical case analyzed in this article. Álvarez's experience as a sport champion led her to conceive the human body in positive terms. This positive conception of the body colored her Catholicism to the point of affirming that the body could be a vehicle to become close to the divinity. This proposition was exactly the opposite of what was predicated by the Catholic hierarchy and was contrary to centuries-old tradition in Catholicism of contempt and scorn towards the body and the practice of corporal self-punishment. Moreover, Álvarez's celebration of the body (including the female body) and other factors led her to demand women's autonomy and respect within

the Catholic Church. In other words, Álvarez's positive view of the body, derived from her athletic background, was central to her feminism. In Franco's Spain, negative conceptions of the human body (and especially the female body) were espoused not only by the Catholic hierarchy but by many other people including other Catholic feminists. Admittedly, the difference between Álvarez's Catholic feminism and other types of feminism made public from the Spanish civil war onwards may seem small today. Nevertheless, this difference was important at that time because given the harsh censorship imposed by the dictatorship on mass media, the range of gender equality claims that could be publicized was very restricted. Álvarez' case shows that the social consciousness gained through high-status sport practice can have consequences for activist athletes' views and claims on issues apparently as distant from sport as religion. This article contributes to studies on sport-related activism by specifying how deep and far-reaching the impact of sporting experience on activist athletes' social consciousness could be.

As the literature on sport and activism has defended, a personal history of elite sport records is a key resource for mobilization. In the struggle for the improvement of women's status, Álvarez's reputation as a former multi-sport champion made her widely known. This stature helped her to cultivate connections in political and social circles. This high reputation permitted Álvarez to gain access to publishing houses and mainstream newspapers and magazines, which published her works and the works of the small feminist group to which she belonged (the SESM).

Without question, Álvarez's multi-sport achievements were only part of her reputation. She increasingly published on religious issues and became known as a public intellectual specialized on religion (among other topics), at a time when religious literature was a male milieu nearly monopolized by priests and the Catholic hierarchy. Her

collaboration with mainstream newspapers and magazines added another ingredient to her stature, that of a journalist, at a time when very few women worked as journalists in mainstream media apart from magazines specifically targeted to a female readership. Also, her aristocratic title and wealth opened doors. In fact, it was her high-class status that initially allowed her to practice the sports that led her to fame. Social class was not just a factor but was foundational to Álvarez's achievements. But her international sport achievements made Álvarez a unique case in a country like Spain with a minimal sports tradition. Her sports background was an essential (but not the unique) component in Álvarez's stature and made her different from other women who were the celebrities of the time, mainly famous actresses, singers and dancers. On the other hand, she was a member of a minority (women). The literature on sport and social movements has not studied in depth and systematically the combination of various types of privileges and disadvantages in the background of world-class sport activists, a topic which merits scholarly attention in the future.

Often present in the literature on sport-related activism (in explicit or implicit terms) is a dichotomy between activism in sport as opposed to activism through sport (for example, Boykoff, 2014: 44-46). Historical studies of the well-known 1968 Olympic protest stressed that Tommie Smith, Harry Edwards and their colleagues were careful to emphasize that they were not protesting mainly against sport but rather using their prominence to call attention to racial injustices in society as a whole (Hartmann, 2003: 22, 24; Bass, 2002). In fact, the elaboration of typologies of sport-related activism is a current task necessary for knowledge building (for instance, Boykoff, 2014: 44-47; Cooper, Macaulay, and Rodriguez, 2017). But in Álvarez's case, there was a deep imbrication of her mobilization in favor of women's access to sport and the improvement of women's status within the Catholic Church and society as a whole. Thus, the Álvarez case shows that the distinction between activism in

sport and activism through sport is difficult to make and maintain in theory or in practice because of the blurring between different aspects of consciousness raising and social activism all across one's life and activities.

This article has shown that Álvarez demanded women's participation in physical exercise among other ways by collaborating with political authorities of the dictatorship especially in the 1940s and 1950s. Álvarez and members of the SESM advocated for the improvement of women's status by sporadically participating in events organized by Francoist policy makers. For various reasons and with qualifications, this article defends that Álvarez and SESM's public activities should be conceived principally as activism rather than cooperation with a dictatorship. Álvarez's case is a useful reminder that in dictatorships the advancement of gender equality claims (or justice claims in general) takes different forms and happens at different locations than in democracies precisely because of the repressive nature of the political regime. Furthermore, the reputation of individual high-profile activist athletes is crucial especially for movements that do not have a mass membership. This is often (but not always) the case of dictatorships because of harsh political repression. The ways in which activism proceeds in dictatorships stand in contrast to many of our assumptions about activism (and cooptation) that are drawn from the liberal democratic contexts from which most of our usual theories come. The study of the differences (and similarities) between sport-related activism in democracies and non-democracies is a pending task that should be undertaken seriously by scholars, if only because increasingly some international mega-sport events are taking place in non-democratic states. Non-democratic regimes abound outside the contemporary post-industrial world and have constituted an important proportion of regimes worldwide in most of the last two centuries.

In her activism in favor of women's access to sport, and the improvement of women's

status within the Catholic Church and in society, Álvarez only sporadically faced backlash. In 1941, she was sanctioned and subsequently was not allowed to participate in official sport competition. However, the sanction was lifted in 1943. Occasionally, her publications were reviewed in newspapers and magazines in very negative terms. With the rest of people (nearly always men) who published on Catholic doctrine, she continuously faced the potential threat of ex-communication when deviating however minimally from orthodoxy. Therefore, regarding backlash, Álvarez's case cannot be compared to the many examples of activist athletes who underwent dramatic consequences in their sporting careers and personal lives because of their mobilization. After all, Álvarez never suffered traumatic changes in her life because of possible negative repercussions to her acts or speeches. She never stopped from enjoying a privileged life during Franco's dictatorship, even being a woman. She never faced ex-communication. This article has shown that activism is not always a high-risk activity for world-class athletes and former athletes. More research is needed in the future to understand the circumstances in which activist athletes manage to escape backlash when demanding full inclusion of subordinated groups in sport and other social domains.

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Notes

1. Newspapers *ABC* and *La Vanguardia* are digitalized. Using the key words “Lilí Álvarez”, I searched all issues of *ABC* between 1936 and 1975 and *La Vanguardia* between 1919 and 1950.
2. I tape-recorded and transcribed in full three interviews (M. Laín, C. Pérez-Seoane and P. Salas). Due to technical problems, I failed to obtain a high quality record of three interviews to C. Álvarez de Miranda, P. Álvarez de Miranda and C. Behamonte. The same days of the interviews, I realized that the transcription of the interviews was not possible and reconstructed them on paper.
3. In this article, all translations from Spanish (and Italian) to English are the author’s.
4. Four years after the publication of this Álvarez’s article, the 1968 *Humanae Vitae* Encyclical prohibited the use of contraceptive devices other than the Knaus-Ogino method.
5. In Spain, up to 1970, co-education was prohibited by law and sex segregation in schools was the norm with very few exceptions.
6. Space constraints impede me to include in this article references to newspapers of those days but they are available upon request.

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