

Bolivian women as professional footballers: the voice and the feminism of the karimachus

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Introduction

As in any other Latin countries, football is part of Bolivians' society. Rinke (2006) said that football is practically part of the Latino identity. Even though football did not originate in South America, it became popular very fast. As Galeano (1995) mentions and Rinke (2006) confirms, Latin American footballers allowed the world to rediscover Latin America, see it beyond the conquest, see it with different eyes. Whether latino people like football or not, it is part of being Latin American. In Bolivia, people enjoy and support footballers although Bolivia has the worst position in FIFA's ranking in South America. It is supposed that playing over 3.600 meters above sea level could be an advantage (López 2006) but Bolivia football players just went once to the world cup by their own merit and not as a guest team. Taking into account that, when people talk about football there is an automatic association with masculine football, by the force of the order that dispenses with justification (Bourdieu, 1998). Masculine practice in most sports became neutral and normal, so it is necessary to add the feminine adjective to refer to women's sports practice.

Football is one of those sports that needs to add the feminine adjective to refer to women, because, unfortunately football reflects a macho society. It is evident that women do not have the same opportunities as men, there is a gender issue. Football does not discriminate, those who manage do it. The presence of women in the field breaks the binary construction of practicing sports, where women have been prohibited from entering due to "being a woman", breaking heteronormative expectations.

All these circumstances were what led me to be interested and start a research in women's football in my country, for my final research of my master's degree in gender studies. I wonder if any of the Bolivian football supporter know that Maitte Zamorano was the best scorer in the 2013 and 2017 Libertadores Cup or that Zdenscka Bacarreza, the current couch of Bolivian football women's team, had to pretend to be a boy to play football as a child. When I started searching about Bolivian women footballers, the story looks like it's starting now, but it started many years ago, with a lot of difficulties because society has various myths related to women's football and for Bolivians the traditional role of women is still important. That is why Betty Friedan's theory was used along with this research as a principal theory. Her book: "Feminine mystique" data from 1963, and she describes the role of a good wife, mother, and housewife, created as the feminine

mystique. She questioned, at the same time, women's position in society. Her theory fits very well in Bolivian's women context for that time, because Bolivia was still a conservative country when women's football began to shine. Being a woman within the public sphere of football, either as spectators or players, it is considered as unfeminine in social narratives, that's why people used to call them as karimachus (Tomboy adapted in the Quechua language). One of the players interviewed, Ana Huanca, said that constantly people used to yell to her: "Playing football is for men, ¡The Karimacho is playing!".

It is interesting how this word was used to pigeonhole and discredit women who were passionate about football, instead of calling them for what they really were: footballers. Although there are 36 other native languages in Bolivia, the word Karimachu was used throughout the country regardless of a player's cultural background, popularizing the word around the country. Nowadays, it is heard less, but it still persists the word Karimachu to associate women who do not do something typical of "a woman". The word Karimachu was suffering changes, like many other words in Quechua, due to internal migration in the country and the imposition of the Spanish language (Zuna, 2017), that's why nowadays could be written as karimacho.

This is how, this research through different video calls and face-to-face interviews with eleven footballers, who were part of the generation who opened the doors, so now women can practice football without so much prejudice of Bolivian society, tries to understand how have these women built and negotiated their femininity when they achieved professionalism in Bolivian football? At the same time, the experience of these footballers from different cities of the country, gives the opportunity to understand which barriers or impediments they encountered along their way and gives voice to those who have been relegated to the margins of football.

Method section

Taking into account that to reach the goal of this research; describe and give voice to those Bolivian women who play football although society did not allow, qualitative research was the best method to collect voices of women footballers, but that wasn't enough to fulfill this research. As Marta Luxán and Jokin Azpiazú in their text, *Feminist research methodologies* (2016), mention that subaltern experiences allow us to have a more complex look than that of social privilege, and that they have been questions set aside by science for being considered not very objective. At the same time, as Sandra Harding (1996) mentioned, feminist epistemology is not to as simple as add women in research, it goes deeper. That is why this is a qualitative research with a feminist approach. Because thanks to feminist research, it is possible to have more realistic description of the world, cross hierarchies, question social constructions, and revolutionize the patriarchal system.

This research ended up interviewing eleven players from different cities from Bolivia. Their experience, subordinate knowledge and subaltern voices are a way of confronting the androcentric ideal of science and cross hegemonic in football. Five of them, Zdenscka Bacarreza, Janeth Morrón, Ana Huanca, Maitte Zamorano and Luzdana Rivera, have been part of the Bolivian football team in several calls, and currently all work as physical education teachers or technical directors. Three players are cholitas, (Chola paceña or cholita are mestizo women from the Bolivian highlands, they are characterized by using the traditional costume of the city, especially by wearing a long skirt that they do not take off even to play) Marta Poma, Nieves Condori and Irene Tolin, they play in departmental and neighborhood championships, almost always crowning themselves as winners. Finally, the other three women used to play football, but for different reasons, they had to stop playing football and currently play football just for fun, they are: Viviana Rojas, Amancaya Barrera and Katherine Gallardo.

These footballers were interviewed with a semi structured interview, in Spanish. Most of the interviews were face to face, but others were online because of the pandemic situation. Always respecting the idea that they are the ones who have the knowledge, the notion of experience and the embodied experience. All the information shared by the players was emotional narrative discourses that formed memories at the individual level, about events that occurred at the social and collective level. And, despite the fact that they are memories that may have undergone transformations at the time that each one signifies and re-signifies when storing the memory and when it is told, the original information may be distorted in some way, Van Dijk (1999) maintains that it evokes what is known. Likewise, we believe it is important to value and give space to this subordinate knowledge, to better describe the reality that they live within Bolivian women footballers.

Results and discussion

In this section we will refer to some of the research results. Firstly, how women occupied a space from which they were systematically excluded and in which, by occupying it, they were seeing as masculine. Secondly, we are interested in showing how they resisted and persisted in the field and which strategies they use to continue playing football. Finally, an approach about professionalization, problematizing this term and connecting it with the situations that these women had to face.

One of the main problems in Bolivian women's footballers is that the only body allowed to play football is the idealized image of a virile men body. So, being any other body that does not fulfill the established parameters will be a transgressor, that is how women got the nickname of Karimachus, as a way to state that men are the only ones who can play. Hortensia Moreno (in Hernández, 2014) argues that the different insults that have arisen within football against women are for being feminine and masculine, at the same

time. For many years these players had to live and normalized to hear people saying Karimachu to refer to them, but that didn't stop them doing what they wanted: play football. Luzdana Rivera states:

"When I started playing I was the only girl around boys, I thought I was the only footballer woman in the world. There was no internet, no social networks to connect with other women like now, I was happy when I saw more women a few years later" (All of the quotations are authors' translations from Spanish to English).

It is important to highlight that the practice of football adds another meaning to the female body, adopting new ways of feeling and a new way of being on the field. This new social representation of the women's body helps to change in the collective imagination, subverting the macho structures of football.

Even the t-shirt in football is an important issue to discuss. All Bolivian women must submit to wearing men's shirts. One of footballers maintains that "it is directed" to maintain male hegemony within football and keep the association of football with the male body in the social collective. Likewise, this is an issue that came to light years ago in different feminist discussions, because of the declaration of Joseph Blatter, the ex-president of FIFA, that insisted that women footballers' shirts should be different from men, but it should accentuate their figure to draw more the attention of men (Hidalgo, 2017). The belief that women's bodies belong to someone else is part of the sexualization of women's bodies within football has always been present. In the 90s, the hypersexualization of women bodies has been the most accepted way for women to enter as amateurs within this public space, adorning the game, as was done in the Olympic Games in the ancient Greece, in order to satisfy and please the male criteria (Macias, 1999).

It is worth clarifying that the masculine image, as the only idealized and permitted body in football, leans on the discourse of biological disadvantage and enters the collective imagination of society from childhood. The biological difference is constructed the moment in which, from the children's games, the physical development of the girls in the "feminine" games is limited, with almost nobody movements, due to the delicacy that "being a woman", while boys have the possibility to use their bodies to play and have more body capacity that in the future will help to play sports. It is in that way that if women try to follow the feminine mystique, they will not have freedom of choice. Many of the interviewees reported that their families promoted sports in their childhood, so they had more opportunities than those girls subjected to the mystique of feminine: "It was a luck that my family loves sports... the motivation to play was my father, he was with me all time, all my matches and always took me to the field" Maitte Zamorano said.

Likewise, the disadvantages that women could present when playing football were compensated by their discipline and constant work. They all admit they worked very hard to achieve their football goals, adding to this point Ana Huanca states:

"I work all mornings in a school as a physical education teacher, three afternoons a week, I work as a football professor and the other two afternoons I train myself. If I have a call for the national team, I train at night, but it is very tiring"

Other stereotypes present in Bolivian's society, states that women should acquire masculine postures or gestures, therefore those women who play football should have different sexual preferences from what is established by the norm. That is very far from reality, although there are lesbians, it does not imply that all are, and this can happen in any area of life, not only in sports. Viviana Rojas said: "My friends used to ask me: are you lesbian?" and Amankaya complemented: "A lot of people thought that I had a lot of lesbian friends just because I played football". The problem arises from the conditioning and the habit of the images to which we are constantly exposed, where the male figure is the predominant one, to demonstrate male hegemony.

Considering how they resisted and persisted in the field although society considered them as unfeminine, the construction of their feminine were not affected by sports practice. Feminine has been a construct supported by different experts (most of them were men describing other reality than their own) that has not been questioned until feminism appeared and interrogated the nature of "Being a woman". The players interviewed affirm and reject the idea that playing football could affect their feminine or even lose it, as many collective androcentric narratives maintain. "About my femininity, I don't feel nothing out of the ordinary, the fact that I play and love football doesn't change anything, only the clothing changes" Janeth Morrón. At the same time, the footballers affirmed that at some point they have received insults that questioned their feminine, by men and women, even calling them *karimachus* was a way of questioning their femininity. Betty Friedan (1963) mentions that when women go out of the feminine mystique trying to search a new and more liberating life, usually women will pay for it with different types of violence and difficulties of society macho structures. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) adds that many women continue to be trapped in conventional values because change implies discomfort, fear, habit, or loss of a privileged situation, being a painful way to go through.

Likewise, the players interviewed consider that they manage to consolidate and strengthen their feminine through sports practice, taking into account and respecting the way in which each one conceives the concept of feminine and not abiding by what the social norm says about "Being a woman". Although people have been led to believe that there is a feminine that is conceived within the parameters of the feminine mystique, the reality is that when a woman gets out of this heteronormative idea, she can understand that the construction of femininity is personal. It will depend on the different narratives and bodily experiences that each woman experiences daily. Feminine is not unique, in Judith Butler's (1990) words women are performing it every day, where playing football is introducing one more possibility of "Being a woman". The interviewed players live their feminine as they feel it, the sport does not take away feminine, nor does wearing pink shirts

give them more femininity. Colors have no gender; society is the ones who assign or associate genders with colors.

As it appears in some of the interviews, some players could exaggerate traits that they consider feminine, this could be in order to eliminate the prejudices that society maintains about feminine and football. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) mentioned that leaving the role of traditional woman could deprive her of her attractiveness, losing her power, if she ever had it, because traditional beauty has a submission component.

Nowadays there are more women in the field, but equality within football is far from being achieved. Some authors maintain that one way to find equality in football would be equal wages, other authors defend the idea of mixed football to break paradigms. Fernanda Aguilar (in Hernández, 2014) states that equality in football between women and men will not be easy to reach. The reality is that there are many impediments and barriers that make it impossible for women to become professional, between the macho thinking inside the Football institution and the fact that society still calls them karimachos, doesn't help to find equality. Although in 2018, FIFA presented a Strategy for women's football, to increase women's participation in the sport, their agenda does not cover the basic needs of women, not even talk about the gender pay gaps and motherhood, "I told myself: You can't play anymore! You have a daughter! Although I did want to, I thought I didn't have time..."
Zdesncka Bacarreza

One characteristic of football is that it must be played in collaboration with others, fostering teamwork, fraternity, and brotherhood between men. Understanding that fraternity has a masculine connotation since French Revolution, caring for the freedom and equality only of men. Throughout the interviews, many Bolivian women players expressed that women's football is different from men's, Viviana states: "Men are impulsive and react fast, we do not..." and Zdenscha "Men take it very seriously... and transmit that feeling to the supporters ". That is why this research dares to say that women's football, more than being and having that brotherly bond that men's football presents, has a different nuance, they present sorority. Maybe as a strategy to continue playing football in such a hostile environment.

Finally, taking into consideration the last point in this section, an approach about professionalization, it is interesting how no one of the Bolivian footballers who were interviewed do not call themselves as professionals and the title of this research can be questioned for any football fan, for not considering, discussing, negotiating and re-define the structure of the term professionalization. Janeth Morrón says: "No, we are not professionals here! Nobody look us like that, we do not earn a salary, they do not even give us for a ticket flight, it is strange the person who helps you, that is why a lot of women had to leave..."

Professionalism is a relevant term, since it legalizes payments to players. Galeano (1996) mentions that it is the conversion of the player into a worker, tied as industrial workers to the entrepreneurs who manage them. Although it brings advantages, such as the protection of rights and the salary of a player, allowing the player to make a living from sport, it allows to reveal the hegemonic structure of football, since it dichotomizes who has the right to be seen as a player and who doesn't. At the same time, football becomes a business, a spectacle that has been globalized and falls within the logic of the capitalist system - consumerist. For Servera (2017), this situation can corrupt the players by pursuing a monetary purpose, distorting the main idea of football, existing a hierarchy of players, reducing them to objects to be marketed.

FIFA has two important characteristics for professionalization, which implies: having a written contract with a club and receiving an economic amount in return, otherwise it is referred to as an amateur player. But the economic difficulties in the country and the little support for women's football shouldn't be a cause to not call professionals to women who play for the country. An example of the economic difficulties in Latin America happens in Argentina. Within their current 2019/2020 regulations, they force each team to have at least 8 players with a registered contract, being those who could fit in the professional term by FIFA, but what happens with the other 3 players? Are they no longer professionals for not receiving salary? (AFA, 2019). In the case of Bolivia, there were some cities leagues in the 90's nothing official at all, but since 2019, forced by FIFA, the Bolivian football federation (FBF) set up an official women's football league, but the players do not receive a salary not even when they play for the national team or get any injury, "I saw some players who have been injured playing for a team and the team do not take any responsibility, they had to pay for their own rehabilitation", said Janeth Morrón. So, because of this situation, shouldn't the players be considered professionals?

Whether we do it or not, the use of the term professional along this research is a strategy to make visible Bolivian women footballers and a way to recognize them. As Haraway (1992, p. 321) mentions: "we have to demand a better description of the world" and stop making people invisible. In this particular case, stop making women who are playing football invisible.

Football is a business and since professionalization was achieved, football has changed and has lost its essence. When football started in England, English workers thought that with professionalization, hierarchies and social differences would end, but that never happens. History is repeating itself with women's football, it is believed that while women are on the field playing we will achieve equality with men, but as long as there are owners in charge of elites it will be very difficult to change the structures and discourses because we continue in a subordinate position. With this, this research doesn't want to mean that women should stop playing football, quite the contrary, women presence in a football stadium is an act of resistance against the oppressive system that wants to keep us

out of this game. Amplifying Sandra Harding's (1986) words is not as simple as adding women in research or in this case in football, to say that football allows women. Football needs more women in the field, as players, supporters and as presidents of different teams of football, but women with an eye on women's needs and not on the classic patriarchal system of football.

Conclusions

The patience and strength of Bolivian footballers help to go against stereotypes of the feminine mystique. They built a new way of being in the football field although they have had to endure being called *karimachus*, and in some cases other kinds of insults. That's why now it is possible for women to play football, even it is possible to find football schools for them, normalizing that women can play football in the country and re-signifying new concepts in the collective imagination, built by male hegemony, leaving the position of subordination to change the relational logic with which have lived until today, expanding the possibilities of the construction of feminine. The footballers, with their presence in the public sphere of football, are not submitting to the feminine mystique, they have found in football the liberating and emancipatory path that Betty Friedan spoke of in her book, a new way to personal fulfillment, well-being, and happiness. They are breaking the norm, creating a new way of living feminine in football, a way to eliminate the existing gender bias, using sorority as a fundamental value.

Footballer's experience let us analyze the football agenda presented by FIFA in 2018, and understand how far it is to find equality in football. The agenda should be focus in taking in account women's real needs, as gender pay gaps, same opportunities in training, equal rights, violence, sexual harassment, take in to consideration motherhood instead of fired or prohibited to in their contracts, and hypersexualization of women's bodies, making them dress up in suits just to satisfy the onlookers man and increases their income. That is why women's football needs to go against the extractivism system, where women and men could work together to reach equality, for that it will be necessary to have a feminist perspective to fight for equal rights in football.

Along this work was important re-defining the FIFA's definition of who is a professional in football, in order to visibilize the contribution of Bolivian footballers to the country and highlight those voices, they are the ones who know the reality, the ones who went through difficulties. They are the alternate voices that have been on the Bolivian football field for the last 15 years or more. These women have opened the doors for new generations, but, for football hierarchies and structures, they have not been considered professionals and were called: *Karimachus*, as a way to apart them from the field, making their voices invisible and silent, when they are the ones who can best describe the reality of Bolivian football because they have lived through. Amplifying Simone de Beauvoir words to the field of football: "One is not born a football player, but rather becomes one". Although

not all the interviewees have played for the national team, each one has faced the same macho structure, no matter in which city or town of the country they were. Each footballer has contributed from their place to make Bolivian women football visible around the country. Despite they were called karimachos, their experiences, their resistance and their perseverance allow that today Bolivian women who are interested in football do not have to suffer what they experienced. They, by their example, have changed life for many women.

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