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Women Writing on Physical Culture in Pre-Civil War Catalonia

by

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Abstract

Anna Maria MartínezSagi is a largely forgotten but immensely evocative voice in the liberal-progressive press of nineteen-thirties' Spain. In particular, she is remarkable for being one of very few female writers of the time who were also active sportswomen, as well as being fiercely Catalanist and pro-women, in an inclusive sense. This article looks at her contribution to the debate on physical culture in Catalonia at the time, with reference to other writers concerned with the subject, and aims to capture in some small way the energy and humour which characterized her columns and reports.

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Women Writing on Physical Culture in Pre-Civil War Catalonia

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This article arises out of preliminary research into the engagement of intellectuals with physical culture and sport in nineteen thirties' Spain. It focuses specifically on a number of women writers whose contributions to the liberal-progressive press in Catalonia during the first years of the Second Republic, help us to a clearer understanding of female sports and social activism and the pressures which variously shaped these women's voices. In so doing, it acknowledges the valuable work carried out by Neus Real on the contribution of Enriqueta Sèculi, Anna Murià and Maria Teresa Vernet to Barcelona's Club Femení i d'Esports, from the time of its foundation in 1928 onwards,¹ and to Juan Manuel de Prada's immensely evocative if frustrating hybrid work, *Las esquinas del aire: en busca de Ana María Martínez Sagi*.² The publication of the latter in 2000 came some three or four years after my own 'discovery' of the enigmatic figure of Sagi, a writer whose importance to nineteen thirties' feminist culture has nowhere been recognized in scholarship. It is only recently that I have been able to return to the subject. The intention of this paper is to begin to redress the lack of attention merited by Sagi to date, and to examine her small but significant role in the renegotiation of modes of female existence at a volatile historical moment.³

The concept of negotiation in writing of the time is an important one: it relates to the notion of sport as a key facet of modernity and to the dismissal of sport as mere fashion;⁴ to the gulf between cerebral exercise and physical exercise, mind and body; to writers' engagement with male and female resistance to sporting endeavour; to politics and sport; to issues of femininity and sport; to tensions between Madrid and

¹ Neus Real Mercadal, *El Club Femení i d'Esports de Barcelona, plataforma d'acció cultural*, Biblioteca Serra d'Or, 205 (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1998).

² Juan Manuel de Prada, *Las esquinas del aire: en busca de Ana María Martínez Sagi* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2000). Prada's work is a generic blend, part novel, part biography, and partly 'reconstructed' from recorded conversations with Sagi. Sagi is known to have exaggerated certain events in her life (she was, for example, told about, but not directly involved in Jeanette MacDonald's 'escape' from her paparazzi-besieged hotel).

³ Sagi featured in an exhibition entitled 'Set dones periodistes dels anys 30' in 2001, but has otherwise received little publicity. See <<<http://graciaweb.com/vilaweb/arxiu/marc01.htm>>> [Accessed 24 February 2004].

⁴ See for example Persona 'A' in Carles Soldevila, 'Inter Nos', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 129 (4 July 1932), p.5.

Catalonia, to the relationship that women have or might have with their own bodies; and indirectly, to the casual intimacy which develops between sports players, seen from the perspective of Sagi herself, writer, poet, champion javelin thrower and all-round sportswoman.

I choose to focus here on articles by Sagi, Anna Murià, and others which were published in a weekly newspaper whose explicit agenda showcased precisely the concerns mentioned above: *La Rambla*, subtitled ‘*esport i ciutadania*’. In preparation for its first anniversary in February 1931, *La Rambla* clarified the terms of its agenda as follows:

Quan diem ESPORT, volem dir raça, entusiasme, optimisme, lluita noble de joventut.
Quan diem CIUTADANIA, volem dir civilitat, catalanitat, liberalisme, democràcia, generositat, amples afanys espirituals.⁵

La Rambla was also supportive of the Club Femení i d’Esports, in its reporting of cultural events and listing the results of the Club Femení’s own competitions. Sagi and Murià were both members, and Sagi refers for personal reasons to the Club as ‘el cálido asilo de mi soledad’,⁶ though she is not ultimately bound by this context in her writing. Sagi and Murià’s articles will allow us to formulate an idea of the meanings both women assign to the female ‘sporting citizen’. In addition reference will be made to Sagi and Eva Tay’s writing in the Mallorcan magazine *Brisas*, and to selected pieces by Sagi in the Madrid weekly, *Crónica*. These accounts of lived experience allow us to get closer to gender as individual identity, even as, in the case of Sagi, these same accounts may be a diversion from an aspect of identity which she will not at this juncture disclose.

Before addressing what Sagi and her colleagues have to say on questions which have far more than a social or political importance, we need to understand what is understood at the time by ‘sport’. A summary is provided by Anna Murià in 1933. Writing under the pseudonym ‘Romaní’, Murià poses the question ‘What is sport?’ to a range of female types, and the responses she suggests constitute a summary, and to some extent a caricature, of social attitudes prevalent at the time.⁷ The immediate semantic context of ‘esport’ should be understood here as sport which is played or practised, rather than as a mass or consumer spectacle:

La damisel?la elegant: – Una moda molt *chic*; un costum molt modern...
La dona de sa casa: – Una manera de perdre el temps.

⁵ *La Rambla de Catalunya (esport i ciutadania)*, 46 (9 February 1931), p.1.

⁶ In Juan Manuel de Prada (2000), p.470. ‘Soledad’ is a reference to Sagi’s emotional state following the break-up of her relationship with poet and novelist Elisabeth Mulder.

⁷ Romaní [Anna Murià], ‘Una pregunta i moltes respostes – Què és l’esport?’, *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 228 (30 April 1934), p.7. The pseudonym is adopted in 1933.

La noia que treballa: – L’alegria de moure’s!
 La beata: – una indecència.
 La feminista: – La cultura física indispensable per a l’emancipació de la dona.
 Reprobo, però, la passió esportiva i la pràctica exagerada dels esports sense el control de la intel·ligència i en detriment de l’actitud intel·lectual.
 La senyora de vuitanta quilos: – L’esport [...]er als homes.⁸
 L’esportiva: – L’esport és... l’esport; ja està tot dit. Entrenament, esforç i rècord; i, al darrera, dutxa. Copes i medalles!
 L’aficionada a la política: – És un instrument per a formar ciutadanes fortes, sanes útils a la pàtria i a la societat. Ciutadanes perfectes avui, coneixedores dels seus drets i els seus deures; mares perfectes demà, forjadores de les futures generacions que han de redimir la humanitat.
 La ‘Miss Barriada 1934’: – És molt bo per a conservar la línia...
 La velleta: – Aneu... aneu... Si són igual que xicotots, aques tes noies d’avui dia!
 L’Homo sapiens: – L’esport... femení? Psé! No val la pena de parlar -ne.⁹

It would not have been lost on Murià that for all its indulgence of female sporting activities, *La Rambla* was quick to drop from its pages all but a passing mention of women and sport when the political situation demanded column inches. But social and political instability could also work to the advantage of increased exposure. When the Catalan Statute of Autonomy was suspended in October 1934, for example, sport and the arts took on a renewed prominence in the press as censorship reduced dramatically what could be said under the heading of ‘ciudadania’.

Sport in its different forms had risen to cultural prominence from the nineteen twenties onwards. In Catalonia as in the rest of Europe, modern sport might best be considered as separate from the public sphere, and from the state apparatus, and linked instead to the realm of private initiative, patronized and promoted by the bourgeoisie, at least in its origins.¹⁰ In the interwar period access to facilities for the working classes improved considerably,¹¹ and the call for the construction of public swimming pools, for example, became something of a *cause célèbre* for important sections of the press during the 1930s, as I have shown elsewhere.¹² As Real makes clear, the Club Femení projected themselves as a popular association for women of all backgrounds, and did in fact succeed in attracting a wider social cross-section of members.¹³ In literary culture and the arts, however, the sporting experience was

⁸ The text is damaged at this point. The visible text reads ‘L’esport [...]er als homes’.

⁹ Romaní, ‘Una pregunta i moltes respostes – Què és l’esport?’, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Carles Santacana and Xavier Pujadas, *L’altra olímpada Barcelona ’36: esport, societat i política a Catalunya (1900–1936)*, Descoberta 1 (Barcelona: Llibres de l’Índex, 1990), p.19.

¹¹ Santacana and Pujadas (1990), p.21.

¹² P. Louise Johnson, ‘Almost a Revolution: The Cultural Centring of the Swimming Pool’, *Romance Studies*, 22:1 (March 2004), 41–50.

¹³ Real (1998), p.18.

recounted almost exclusively by male authors, and its modernity was a torch carried by men. Joaquim Molas has written that

per als poetes i pintors que participaren en l'experiència del Noucents, la pràctica esportiva fou, com per als grecs, un component més de la formació harmònica de l'individu [...] Altrament, per a la tropa artística del tombant de segle i, sobretot, per a la que milità en les Avantguardes, l'esport, com la màquina o el cinema, fou un signe de modernitat, un signe alhora industrial, viril, jove, provocador...¹⁴

It is a short step from modern to modish in the eyes of commentators who in the 1930s witness the 'antipàtica intromissió de la dona en les coses dels homes', and conclude that girls being girls, their interest in sport can only be a fashion in the most banal sense of the word.¹⁵ If, as Anna Murià complains, the majority of women pay no attention to sport – either through ignorance or because they are standard-bearers of a misplaced erudition rooted in the primeval sludge – then the numbers of women who write about sport from anything approaching a sympathetic angle are likely to be small indeed. Within an already small group of women journalists, the contributions of Sagi and Murià are an at once rare and authoritative source.

Murià's allusion to a misplaced 'erudition' which is antagonistic to (female) sporting endeavour implies that erudition need not in fact be so positioned, and brings into picture the eternally awkward meeting of intellectuals and physical culture which frames this talk. By 'intellectuals', I refer both to men and women who think and write, contrary to the terminology in common use which often sees 'intelectuales' as a closed, male category.¹⁶ In the 1920s and early 30s the discussion surrounding the need for an approximation of literary culture and sport was directed by prominent figures and entities such as Carles Soldevila, Domènec Guansé, Carles Sindreu, J.V Foix and the Federació Catalana de Futbol. Few practised what they preached. Anna Maria Martínez-Sagi did, however. The Club Femení i d'Esports by its very existence also demonstrated female commitment to bridging the mind-body dichotomy.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Passió i mite de l'esport: un viatge i artístic i literari per la Catalunya contemporània* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1986), n.p.

¹⁵ Anna Murià, 'L'esport femení considerat seriosament', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 117 (11 April 1932), p.7.

¹⁶ Cf. for example, the sub-heading 'Los intelectuales y la mujer' given by Mercedes Roig in *La mujer en la historia a través de la prensa*, Serie estudios 3 (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales, 1989).

¹⁷ See also in this regard Real (1998), p.33, footnote 51. It is significant that the 'Manifest groc' published in 1928 by Salvador Dalí, Lluís Montanyà and Sebastià Gasch elevates athletes in the cultural and intellectual hierarchy whilst damning intellectuals out of sight:

'Afirmem que els sportmen estan més aprop de l'esperit de Grècia que els nostres intel·lectuals
Afegirem que un sportman verge de nocions artístiques i de tota erudició està més a la vora i és més apte per a sentir l'art d'avui i la poesia d'avui, que no els intel·lectuals, miops i carregats d'una preparació negativa.'

In an interview published in *La Rambla* in 1931, shortly after an athletics competition in Madrid and a successful poetry recital at the Madrid Lyceum Club. Sagi – journalist, member of the Club Femení and ‘woman of letters’ – is designated ‘una dona d’un dinamisme excepcional a les nostres latituds’.¹⁸ Poetry is her weakness, she admits, and her greatest love:

No us estranyeu? Sembla que a molta gent els fa certa gràcia això que corri darrera una pilota, i llenci el javalot, i després escrigui sonets. ¡Què hi farem! Jo crec que l’Esport i la Poesia són perfectament compatibles.¹⁹

‘Dynamism’ is a noun which tends to attach itself to the figure of Sagi during this period. On her being named to the Board of Directors of FC Barcelona in 1934,²⁰ Lluís Aymamí comments that she possesses a vast culture and lives sport intensely. Her dynamism is evident ‘teclejant a màquina d’escriure a l’oficina, com bogant al port, donant conferències, jugant al bàsquet o escrivint reportatges’.²¹ A piece from *Crònica* some weeks later speaks of her in similar terms.²² The inauguration of the Club Femení’s swimming pool at their base in the Plaça Espanya in July 1932 allows Anna Murià the opportunity to exalt this idyll of intellectual and physical complementarity – exemplified by Sagi – with no trace of the cynicism or resignation that is sometimes to be found, for example, in Carles Soldevila’s writing (Soldevila had remarked that it would be as well to throw oneself wholeheartedly at sport, just as one might wish for a hefty dose of the measles, in order to get it over with).²³ Murià observes that

hi ha una unió estreta, com de marit i muller, entre les parets blanques de la biblioteca i el verd i el níquel de la piscina, entre l’aigua i els llibres acaritats per les mateixes mans, que humides fullegen els llibres i amb aroma de paper i d’idees es llencen a l’aigua...

Piscina i biblioteca: els dos plats de la balança de la modernitat femenina. I damunt de cada plat, una gran quantitat de gràcia i una gran quantitat de seny.²⁴

¹⁸ Lewis, ‘Anna Maria Martínez-Sagi, ens parla del “Club Femení i d’Esports” i de les seves activitats literàries’, *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 99 (7 December 1931), p.5.

¹⁹ Lewis, ‘Anna Maria Martínez-Sagi, ens parla del “Club Femení i d’Esports” i de les seves activitats literàries’, *ibid.*

²⁰ ‘En menos de un año ya había dimitido. La asamblea de socios no aprobaba sus propuestas y se tuvo que largar, asqueada de tanta virilidad cejijunta.’ See Prada (2000), p.209.

²¹ L. Aymamí i Baudina, ‘Comentari de la setmana. Dones dinàmiques. Anna Maria Martínez Sagi’, *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 262 (30 July 1934), p.5.

²² Braulio Solsona, ‘Anna Maria Martínez-Sagi, directiva del Barcelona F.C.’, *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 266 (27 August 1934), p.8. Reprinted from *Crònica*.

²³ Carles Soldevila, ‘Tres posats de la literatura davant l’esport,’ *Butlletí del F.C. Barcelona*, 7 (February 1929), pp.1–2, p.2.

²⁴ Anna Murià, ‘Piscina i biblioteca. Una família esportiva’, *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 132 (25 July 1932), p.5.

In alluding to the bond between husband and wife Murià legitimizes the union of physical culture and intellect, and marks it as entirely conventional (and heterosexual), and therefore non-threatening. Sagi's cheerful dismissal of what others might see as her own contradictions – a love of poetry and sport – is, by contrast, and even allowing for the difference between spoken and written discourse, a far less serene proposition. It is also far less rhetorically anxious about its situation within the bounds of 'acceptable' behaviour.

Whilst it may certainly have been true, as Pujadas and Santacana maintain, that sport was largely confined to the private sphere, the visibility of women athletes in publications such as *La Rambla* pushed female activity much closer to the public realm. At the same time, the baring of flesh which had become familiar from Hollywood movies added grist to the mill of those who sought to defend traditional gender categories. Resistance to sporting endeavour came in many forms and from many directions, as Murià's fictional survey suggests. It came from the athletes too, since in order to be taken seriously there had necessarily to be limitations governing not just what they did, but where they did it, what they looked like while they were doing it and who they did it with. However, as we see from Sagi's articles in particular, there is often a gap between the theory and practice of recommended behaviour, a celebration of youthful excess and the questioning of stereotypes. Real is right to point out that when we talk of modernity and progress in relation to women of the time, these concepts have to be understood in their historical context; yet, as we will see at the end of this paper, there is greater affinity, not to say complicity, in Sagi's writing with those who stretch these concepts. In policing both sides of the sport debate, and in defending modern woman, Sagi does not pull her punches. Her famous 'Open letter to Pere Mialet' contains the most unambiguous and sarcastic condemnation of criticism directed at women writing in the press, and as she imagines, at the Club Femení i d'Esports: she calls Mialet 'un anti-feminista furibund, un antiesportiu, un antiquat'.²⁵ Addressing him directly, she writes: 'De totes maneres, hem d'agraïr-vos, si més no, la sinceritat en exposar-nos amb to moietas com són ridícules les dones ocupant-se i interessant-se d'altres coses fora de sorgir, cuinar, i obeir en tot al marit, amo i senyor.' Then she turns to the reader:

²⁵ 'Carta oberta a Pere Mialet', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 95 (9 November 1931), p.10. Sagi is responding to a letter Mialet had published in *La Publicitat*.

Jo no conec el susdit senyor, però me l'imagino gras, pesat, amb panxa; home de poques preocupacions i cabòries, conservador, ànima somorta, sorda per tota vibració. Possiblement, aquesta fòbia contra els esportius no és res més que el reconeixement de la pròpia ineptitud per practicar cap mena d'esports i l'enveja i l'exasperació de l'individu que no ha gaudit d'una joventut sana, forta i alegre sota la llum del sol dels estadis i les platges. És quasi bé segur que els esbufecs i el rebentament de cada matí per empaitar el tramvia en tenen una bona culpa de tot el vostre antideportivisme, senyor Mialet.²⁶

Sagi's reasoning is likely as not spurious, but that is not the point. When she defended the compatibility of sport and poetry, she did so on existential grounds, not by invoking, nor less practising, an aesthetic alliance such as Carles Sindreu sought in his tennis and football caligrammes. Juan Manuel de Prada recalls that the novelist and poet Elisabeth Mulder, sometime lover of Sagi, had rejected precisely this brand of modernity in a review of *Inquietud*, poems published by Sagi in 1932; her description of the poetry emphasizes the physicality and vigour of Sagi's compositions, qualities which 'compensate' for the fact they are 'esencialmente subjetivos' (2000: 197). Instead, Sagi playfully underlines the essential aesthetic attraction of the athletic act in her rebuttal of Mialet:

Quant al que no hi ha gens d'estètica en un llançament de disc, o una cursa, o un salt d'alçària, veiam, senyor Mialet, en confiança, amb la seguretat que no he de repetir-lo a ningú, de vós a mi: ¿ja sabeu ben bé el significat de la paraula Estètica?²⁷

Mialet's objections seem to have been founded on a dislike of exhibitionism and a disapproval of the number of photographs of female athletes appearing in the press. In her refutation, Sagi falls back on a conventional defence, referring to herself and fellow members of the Club Femení as 'femenines i feministes': just as there is a 'right' way of being a feminist for many of these female journalists, which is usually defined in contrast to the Suffragettes,²⁸ so there is a 'right' way of being a female 'esportista'. Both models seek accommodation rather than confrontation (in spite of Sagi's feistiness), and central to this is the negotiation of femininity. In general terms, cycling is unfeminine even though it is good for strengthening and slimming the legs; wrestling and boxing are anathema, rugby and soccer are to be avoided, although Sagi regularly played the game as a young girl, and even actresses of the day confessed to

²⁶ Anna Maria Martínez-Sagi, 'Carta oberta a Pere Mialet', *ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See for example Lewis, 'Anna Maria Martínez-Sagi, ens parla del "Club Femení i d'Esports" i de les seves activitats literàries' (1930); Rosa M. Arquimbau, 'Nosaltres', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 82 (erroneously numbered 81) (3 August 1931), p.7; Anna Murià, 'Els deures de la dona', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 104 (11 January 1932), p.7; Rosa Maria Arquimbau, 'Feminisme, feminitat i confidències', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 106 (25 January 1932), p.5.

secretly wanting to try it out.²⁹ Soccer is fundamentally anti-aesthetic in the dominant female discourse; as Sagi says,

[I]a dona, al camps de joc, en plena lluita, procurarà sempre no oblidar, ni en l'exterior, la seva condició de dona. I una que porti unes sabates que pesen tres quilos, i dóna puntades de peu a una pilota, i comet "fautes", farà pensar tant, en aquells moments, en una dona, com jo en una guàrdia urbà quan em risso els cabells i em poso pòlvors.³⁰

Few writers – Soldevila is an exception – demonstrate so assured a recourse to humour in their articles. This comment derives from a piece in which the 'lead' shown by the United States in promoting women's sports (she refers to the US as 'el país de les grans excentricitats') is cited as an unwelcome influence in Catalonia, where Sagi has recently read reports of a Barcelona – Valencia women's match. The match has been immensely harmful to the public acceptance of women's sport in general, as well as exposing the players themselves to ridicule (legs in the air, crunching tackles, faces in the dirt...³¹).

The counter side of unacceptable sport is occupied by tennis, but as Anna Murià insists, its evident aesthetic attractiveness is too often abused: with limited exceptions, female tennis players are not interested in sport. 'Als Clubs de tenis [sic] s'hi va a ballar, a flirtejar, a pescar marit, a lluir vestits, a veure modes... Per a tot això, l'esport és una bona excusa.'³² The showers in the changing rooms are dry... Why does tennis seem to engender such disrespect for the sporting ideal? Murià says simply that it is an expensive sport, and therefore a 'class' sport, characterized by the vanity of its players. And vanity, she declares, is incompatible with pure sport. Indirectly Murià also implies that the wealthy are not serious about sport at all. Being serious about sport, and serious about the aesthetics of sport is a continuous and

²⁹ 'Jugaria a tennis, probablement, perquè trobo que és l'esport més estètic i més indicat per una dona, però en el fons del fons, jo li tinc de confessar que m'agradaria jugar a futbol. No faria gaire bonic una dona jugant a futbol ja ho sé, però és l'esport que m'agradaria més. [...] Ah: sí sí! M'agrada amb deliri el futbol, ja ho pot dir.' Rosa Maria Arquimbau, 'Maria Vila: Primeríssima actriu del nostre teatre', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 118 (18 April 1932), p.7 (?).

³⁰ Anna M. Martínez-Sagi, 'Consideracions entorn de l'esport femení', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 104 (11 January 1932), p.6.

³¹ See also Anna M. Martínez-Sagi, 'La pràctica dels esports', *La Rambla (ciutadania)*, 253 (2 July 1934), p.8. 'A Nord-Amèrica sembla que el futbol femení agrada moltíssim. Està bé. També allà troben un plaer exquisit a presenciar com dues locomotores llançades a tota velocitat per una mateixa via, topen amb una violència que esgarrifa, i es fan un tip de riure veient com un senyor s'enfila de peus damunt el ventre d'un altre, i l'estaborneix a cops de peu contra terra. Per a ells, certa mena de novetats salvatges tenen l'èxit assegurat. Però ací, que no tenim ni l'activitat, ni els gratacels, ni els milions, ni les ciutats populosos que ells tenen, podem demostrar que tenim més bon gust i una sensibilitat de veritables esportius.'

³² Romaní, 'Tennis', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 209 (18 December 1933), p.7.

complex exchange. An athlete who focuses exclusively on a single discipline risks muscular imbalance, but an overambitious athlete who spreads herself too widely between different sports and attendant competition will not perform to the best of her ability.³³ In addition, as Murià comments, the matrimonial tendencies of girls have always been the great enemies of sport:³⁴ women marry before they realize their full athletic potential.

Sagi's affirmation of the place of woman in sport is closely allied to the increasing awareness amongst progressive women of the need to take their responsibilities seriously, starting with their own bodies. Much of what Sagi writes, particularly around the mid-nineteen thirties, is directed to this end, and she finds a fellow traveller in Eva Tay, a dancer of Belgian–German descent residing in Mallorca from 1932 onwards. Tay's articles in *Brisas* detail programmes of daily exercises together with illustrations, condemnations of Spanish women as possessing the worst bodies of all European women, and a dismissal of commonly employed slimming methods.³⁵ Such criticisms of domestic culture are repeated by other foreigners working in Spain, notably Elsy Longoni, a Swiss dance instructor who holds classes at the Club Femení, and whom Sagi interviews for her column in *Crónica*:

[C]uidado con la cocina española. Demasiadas grasas, demasiadas féculas, demasiada comida. Y cuidado con especializarse en un solo deporte. Conviene practicar varios ejercicios, y de entre ellos elegir con preferencia la natación y el esquí. ¡Y mucha agua fría, y aire, y sol! Y menos alcohol, y menos estimulantes, y menos régimen de hambre.³⁶

For her part, Sagi estimates that ninety-five per cent of Barcelona women are 'missha pen', including many who play sport, concerned to make their faces beautiful but caring nothing for the beauty of their bodies.³⁷ The terms of her discourse are characteristically brusque. By the summer of 1935, the shock jock tactics have further intensified as Sagi enacts a quite brutal deconstruction of society women whose perception of the physical benefits and leisure possibilities afforded by the countryside seems not to extend beyond 'una prolongación del vivir artificioso y

³³ Romaní, 'Llançaments. Els errors de les nostres atletes', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 206 (27 November 1933), p.9.

³⁴ Romaní, 'Ecos', *La Rambla (ciutadania)*, 218 (19 February 1934), p.9.

³⁵ See, for example, Taia [Eva Tay], 'Eva 1935', *Brisas*, 15 (1935), n.p.; Anon. (illustrations by Tay), 'Cultura física', *Brisas*, 17 (1935), n.p.

³⁶ Ana María Martínez Sagi, 'Elsy Longoni, o el espíritu de la nueva danza', *Crónica*, 213 (10 December 1933), p.2.

³⁷ Anna M^a Martínez-Sagi, 'L'esport i la bellesa estètica', *La Rambla (ciutadania)*, 246 (25 June 1934), p.10.

complicado de la ciudad’: ‘Yo sigo pensando que es V. una mujer sin sentido común ni inteligencia, prisionera de convencionalismos y prejuicios. Una mujer, cuya vida pertenece exclusivamente a los demás: una vida sin objeto, sin profundidad, y sin belleza. [...] Usted es un caso perdido’.³⁸ In the event any female readers had decided to remedy their neglect of physical culture, Sagi publishes a series of ten commented photographs of Longoni’s students exercising; these are exercises ‘que no presentan dificultades insuperables y que practicados diariamente, iniciarán con éxito, la reforma de vuestro cuerpo en ruinas.’³⁹

This task of national reconstruction concerns intellectual and moral development of women, in addition to the shoring up of their flesh. This is where the mutuality and integrity of sport and citizenship, ‘esport i ciutadania’, come into their own. We recall Sagi’s argument in the letter to Pere Mialet that it is no longer legitimate nor desirable that women should merely be vassals of their husbands. The gradual process of emancipation encouraged by sport leads to greater independence of judgement, and during years when the major objection to female suffrage was woman’s inability to think for herself, this is no small contribution to the formation of women who are able to make good use of the vote. In one of the dialogues published under the generic heading ‘Inter Nos’ in *La Rambla*, Carles Soldevila has a character wistfully accept that modern woman knows she can disregard male opinion, is quite capable of doing things for her own pleasure in an act of free will, and plays sport because she wishes to, not to please anyone else.⁴⁰ Maria Teresa Vernet, officer of the Club Femení and novelist, juxtaposes discipline of the body in the form of sport, and discipline of the intellect; each is necessary to the other.⁴¹ Josep Maria Massip, editor of *La Rambla*, cites courage and discipline as the essential constitutive elements of sport, and encourages the young, who have become more interested in politics, to return to sporting endeavour for what it represents in the democratic nation, namely, a means of strengthening the body and nervous system so that it may withstand the

³⁸ Ana María Martínez Sagi, ‘Vacaciones en el mar y en la montaña’, *Brisas*, 16 (1935), pp.12–13, 52 (p.12).

³⁹ Ana M^a Martínez Sagi, ‘Para las mujeres que desesperan de obtener un cuerpo bello’, *Brisas*, 17 (1935), n.p.

⁴⁰ Carles Soldevila, ‘Inter Nos’, *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 129 (4 July 1932), p.5.

⁴¹ Anna Murià, ‘Maria Teresa Vernet presidenta del Departament d’Actuació Social del C.F. i d’E. La seva joventut, la seva lluita i el seu art,’ *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 155 (24 December 1932), p.13.

rigours of modern life.⁴² Sagi adopts Victoria Kent's line on suffrage, but sees the vote as merely one small step in a far longer journey towards emancipation. As a war correspondent she throws her lot in with Durruti, believing that only revolution will bring about a society freed of the constraints which had led to the ending of her relationship with Elisabeth Mulder.⁴³

As indicated earlier in this article, what makes Sagi's writing distinctive is her readiness to celebrate transgressions of gender codes, even as she expounds on femininity. I would like to conclude with two examples of this sisterly complicity. The first of these appears in *Crónica*, entitled 'Cómo, entre lances divertidos y pequeñas tragedias, forman las muchachas catalanas la tripulación de una yola'.⁴⁴ The account of a novice rower taking up her oar and cracking her fellow crew members over the head as she struggles with the unfamiliar implement, is related with an irrepressible *joie de vivre*. Once in the boat,

con los pies atados y el carrito del asiento que se empeña en ir hacia adelante, cuando el cuerpo se inclina hacia atrás, la primera sorpresa que se lleva una es con el remo. Con el remo, que ha tomado proporciones exageradas y no se sabe qué hacer con él. Sirve para dar porrazos a la espalda de la compañera, para calarlo hasta la mitad, con peligro de volcar la embarcación; sirve para sacar sendas cucharadas de agua y remojar a todos los tripulantes; sirve para todo, menos para remar.

Over the course of a few months, the crew improves, and in a final flourish, Sagi elevates herself and her crew members to the status of sporting pioneers:

Un gran transatlántico, conduciendo turistas, entraba en el puerto. Nuestra yola lo seguía a corta distancia. Desde la barandilla de la cubierta, centenares de ojos curiosos seguían la marcha de nuestra embarcación. De repente se oyó un grito unánime:

—*Ce sont des femmes! Des femmes! Spanish girls!*

Todas las miradas y cuantos cristales de aumento había en el barco –impertinentes, binóculos, anteojos– convergieron en nosotros. ¡Mujeres españolas remando! *Pas possible!* Quedaba destruída la leyenda, la estúpida y bochornosa leyenda. Las españolas no estaban encerradas en las casas, tras la cárcel de sus rejas. Ni llevaban moño. Y es posible que no usaran tampoco mantilla. Les habíamos decepcionado. *Les femmes espagnoles, en train de ramer! ¿Dónde quedaba le typisme?*

Una compañera, a la que molestaban las frases de estupefacción y la curiosidad de los turistas, agotada ya la paciencia, se levantó de la embarcación con riesgo de echarnos al agua, y dirigiéndose a los viajeros, les espetó en una jerga original:

⁴² 'Una conferència de Josep M. Massip', *La Rambla (esport i ciutadania)*, 170 (10 April 1933), p.4. This was a lecture given by the Editor of *La Rambla* on 6 April 1933 to the Argenton Atheneum on the subject of 'Esport i ciutadania'.

⁴³ Prada, *ibid.*, 488–489.

⁴⁴ *Crónica*, 205 (15 October 1933), pp.3–4.

—*Yes, místers. Oui, mesdames. Somos femmes. Spanish. Españolas. Sabemos ramer, very wuell [sic]. Y nadamos. Y llevamos los cabellos coupés. Y sabemos leer y escribir. Y hablar en English.*

Después de esta perorata quedóse muy satisfecha.

—Supongo—inquirió—que se habrán dado por enterados, ¿no?

—Claro, mujer, claro. Con este dominio tan absoluto que tienes de los idiomas, ni los franceses habrán comprendido una palabra, ni los ingleses una letra. Pero consuélate: en cambio, la mímica te ha salido muy bien...

A gently self-deprecating humour marks Sagi's best writing on sport, and betrays, I think, those moments when she is in her existential element. Her almost childlike, affectionate admiration of her fellow athletes is similarly striking. Montserrat Guasch, known as Monti, is a member of the Club Femení whom Murià criticizes for being over-ambitious in the number of sports she practises and who under-performs as a result. Sagi interviews her for *Brisas* in 1935. In an era of mass production, Monti resists definition.⁴⁵ She is photographed on a motorbike, and sitting in a clinker-built single scull; 'es el ser más caótico, más flemático, y más deliciosamente absurdo del Orbe'. Monti confesses to not being at all interested in Rhetoric, Poetry or literature. 'En cambio, descubrí la poesía que encierran los números. Las ecuaciones, los logaritmos y las raíces cuadradas, me entusiasmaban. De haber nacido poeta, hubiera dedicado una oda muy sentida al Teorema de Pitágoras y al binomio [sic] de Newton'. Numbers are truth, art conventional, politics a fraud, literature the most damaging of all, and poets are a disaster. Monti is half-teasing, it seems: she gets her kick, her buzz inventing floating shoes which will allow her to walk on water; from sledging, roller coasters, sky diving, racing her motorbike. 'Quieres más sensaciones? Con "las otras", con las de tipo moral, se pierde el humor y la dorada juventud. Créeme: la vida es redonda como un balón: tiene uno que jugar y divertirse con ella. Tomarla a lo trágico, es feo y cursi. Tan feo y tan cursi como una sufraguista inglesa.' Monti qualifies herself as 'sencillamente un ser superior [...] Una mujer 'rara avis'. Un temperamento original e incomprensido'. The article turns into an encomium to 'la amiga más perfecta'.

Sagi's dedication to the pursuit of sport, and to publicizing women's involvement in sport and physical culture is, as far as I am able to tell, almost unique in Spain at the time, and would be unusual even today. Her enthusiasm and wit betray, perhaps, a writer desperately displacing personal sorrows and lending her loyalty to women in the widest sense (although this is speculation). This loyalty transcends

⁴⁵ Ana María Martínez-Sagi, 'Una muchacha coleccionadora de "records"', *Brisas*, 15 (1935), n.p.

Sagi's commitment to Catalan nationalism to embrace female athletes in Madrid (magnanimity is easy in victory), and members of the Madrid Lyceum Club: the Catalans can learn from Madrid women, and although she does not articulate the reverse, it is implicit in her discourse. In recovering the youth of women, and in her adherence to what we might loosely term the living poetry of sport, Sagi comes startlingly close to the model of the sportsman *laureate* of Dalí, Muntanyà and Gasch's 1928 *Manifest groc*. If Catalan championing of sport at the time is to some extent a pose (this might be said, arguably, of the review *D'Ací i D'Allà*), Sagi at least is not pretending, and her contribution to nineteen-thirties female culture deserves to be re-examined.