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# Gender Performances of Sports Organization Leaders: a Comparative (Re)examination of Alice Milliat's, Suzanne Lenglen's and Marie-Thérèse Eyquem's Trajectories – *Author's accepted manuscript*

**Florys Castan-Vicente**

## Introduction

As shown in the general introduction,<sup>1</sup> gender and feminist studies have an important epistemological perspective on biographies and challenge the traditional chronological narrative of life studies. They notably aim to focus on private lives, sexuality, gender performances of selves,<sup>2</sup> and political discourse,<sup>3</sup> more than chronological and factual description. This epistemology will be used to re-examine the biographies of three French personalities: Alice Milliat (1884–1957), Suzanne Lenglen (1899–1938), and Marie-Thérèse Eyquem (1913–1978). The first and the last are known for their involvement in national and international women's sport organizations, and the second is well known for her competitive career but was also the founder and director of a mixed tennis school in her late career (from 1936). This chapter aims to avoid a narrative biography, as the details and chronologies of these women's lives have already been written.<sup>4</sup> Instead, this chapter analyses their

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1 Florys Castan-Vicente, Claire Nicolas and Georgia Cervin, "Women in Sport Organisations: Historiographical and Epistemological Challenges," in this volume.

2 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-century France*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000).

3 Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009).

4 Florence Carpentier, "Alice Milliat: A Feminist Pioneer for Women's Sport," in Emmanuel Bayle and Patrick Clastres (eds), *Global Sport Leaders – A Biographical Analysis of International Sport Management*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Florys Castan-Vicente, *Marie-Thérèse Eyquem. Du sport à la politique. Parcours d'une féministe*. (Paris: OURS, 2009); Florys Castan-Vicente, "Suzanne Lenglen et la définition du professionnalisme dans tennis de le l'entre-deux-guerres," *Le Mouvement Social* 1, no. 254 (2016): 87–101; Florys Castan-Vicente, "International Intellectual Exchange, Women and Sports: the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women between 1949 and the 1970s," *Sport in History* 37, no. 3 (2017): 353–77; Philippe Tétard, "Champion androgyne, combattante et danseuse. Portrait flou de Suzanne Lenglen (1913–1923)," *International Review on Sport and Violence* 8 (2014): 63–82.

trajectories using new methods from feminist and gender studies epistemology, exploring the subjects' conception(s) of gender and the way they performed their own selves. Their private lives can help understanding of their commitment, when the sources allow it. They came from the same country but from different social classes and lived at different times. The three biographies give three very different examples of gender performances, all linked with their career trajectories, their convictions and conceptions of gender norms, evolving though time. Indeed, the subject of gender performances is linked with their careers in sport, and the contexts in which they evolved. Such exploration of gender performance has been used for example to study lives of feminists, and of political figures: as Christine Bard has shown, women in politics have struggled with gender norms, and adopted different strategies such as discretion, affirmation, or seduction. They can choose to affirm themselves as woman wearing bright pink dresses or hide it wearing business suits and requesting equal treatment.<sup>5</sup> This question of contesting gender norms in a patriarchal environment applies to women in sports organizations. As women living in patriarchal society, and even more, in patriarchal structures, how did they negotiate with gender norms? Did they have to build a "public self" to respond to the opposition to women's presence in traditionally masculine spaces?<sup>6</sup> Which strategies did they use, and what support did they receive?<sup>7</sup> How did they use the different options offered by the context?<sup>8</sup> Did they benefit from a special historical and geographical context, when and where the opportunities to make a change opened? The context could also lead them to perform different 'public selves' under the public eye or in private,<sup>9</sup> or to use performances that seem inconsistent with their discourses. These discourses can be more or

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5 Christine Bard, *Les Femmes et le pouvoir, Introduction: Pour une histoire des femmes d'État*, [www.histoire-politique.fr](http://www.histoire-politique.fr) (2007).

6 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography*, 2.

7 Barbara Caine, "Feminist Biography and Feminist History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 247–61.

8 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography*, 24.

9 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography*, 24.

less political. How did these women understand the role and place of women in society?<sup>10</sup> What were their motives for involvement? Why did they decide to stop developing, or never develop, competitive sport for themselves, and turn to organization for others? Were they moved by militant feminist motives? With an intersectional perspective, the answers to these questions take into consideration their social class, their sexualities, and the way that they appropriated, or rejected, gender norms. Can the analysis of their conception of gender norms – their own gender or the way they conceive gender norms in general – help us understand their trajectories? Did their perception of gender encourage them to get involved in sport and its organization? It is possible that their commitment to women’s sport could be linked to a will for “social resistance.”<sup>11</sup> The exceptionality of their trajectories can be an epistemological issue: feminist and gender historians are used to studying the lives of women with unusually successful careers, and relations with gender norms. As Jo Burr Margadant showed, feminist epistemology also encourages us to think about what is typical and exceptional about their individual experience, and not to forget to explore “exceptional” women through the framework of “ordinary” women’s experience.<sup>12</sup> This kind of biography, and the study of the relationship between public and private lives, requires many sources, which are not the most easy to find: personal sources, ideally private correspondences, diaries and autobiographies.<sup>13</sup> Very few women produce these kinds of documents, and when they do, they are often lost, as is the case for the three women in this chapter. Social class can play a part here too, and middle-class women like Milliat leave even fewer sources than wealthy bourgeoisie women like Lenglen. I analysed all types of documents concerning their careers,

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10 Cécile Formaglio, *‘Féministe d’abord’: Cécile Brunschvicg (1877–1946)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 14.

11 Nancy L. Struna, “Beyond Mapping Experience: the Need for Understanding in the History of American Sporting Women,” *Journal of Sport History* 11, no. 1 (1984): 130.

12 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography*; Sandra Stanley Holton, “The Suffragist and the ‘Average Woman’,” *Women’s History Review* 1, no. 1 (1992): 9-24.

13 Barbara Caine, “Feminist Biography,” 251.

but for this paper I particularly used partial autobiographical writing (mostly in interviews, but also a partially autobiographical novel of Eyquem),<sup>14</sup> photographs from online library collections,<sup>15</sup> Drevon's private collection<sup>16</sup> and close friends' testimonies (oral for Eyquem,<sup>17</sup> published for Lenglen).<sup>18</sup> Studying private lives can also raise an ethical issue: to what point can we reveal secrets that the subjects themselves tried very hard to hide? First, I will address primary socialization, sexuality and early sporting careers: from which social class did they originate? Were they encouraged to practice sports by their family? Their marital status or sexuality can also have an impact on their career choices. Two of them had very few competitive achievements, and decided early to commit mostly to organization, while one decided later to use her skills to train others. Second, I will question gender performances and social classes, as both are linked, and femininities can be performed quite differently by an eccentric wealthy bourgeoisie or by a middle-class woman seeking respectability. Third, I will argue that these precedents had consequences for these women's careers as organizers, on the way they conceived of their roles and wanted to shape the future of women's sports. When working with or within sporting institutions, all three appear to have wanted to hide the most transgressive parts of their work (building performance, competition, developing champions), and used different strategies in order to appear reassuring to the public eye.

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14 Catherine Lange (Marie-Thérèse Eyquem), *Les Impures*. (Paris, Denoël, 1951).

15 From the image library of the National Institute of Sport, Expertise and Performance known by its French acronym INSEP: [iconotheque.insep.fr](http://iconotheque.insep.fr); and the French National Library or BnF: [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)

16 Published in: André Drevon, *Alice Milliat. La passionaria du sport féminin*. (Paris: Vuibert, 2005).

17 Florys Castan-Vicente, *Marie-Thérèse Eyquem. Du sport à la politique. Parcours d'une féministe*. (Paris: OURS, 2009).

18 Gianni Clerici, *Suzanne Lenglen, la diva du tennis*. (Paris: Rochevignes, 1984); Henri Cochet et Pierre Albarran, *Histoire du tennis*. (Paris: A. Fayard, 1960); Antoine Gentien, *Aventures d'un joueur de tennis*. (Paris: La Palatine, 1953); Jacques Henri Lartigue, *Mémoires sans mémoire*. (Paris: R. Laffont, 1975).

## Primary socialization, sexuality, and early sporting career

### *Alice Milliat, a runaway in England*

Alice Milliat (1884–1957) came from a middle-class family. Her father was a business employee and her mother a seamstress.<sup>19</sup> She was born in Nantes, and some argue that she may have studied to become a primary school teacher but never really taught, and may have become a private tutor in England.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in her young days, she ran away to live in England. There she married a Frenchman from her hometown, a business employee who was the son of a hairdresser. They came back to France and he died in 1908. Alone, a widow, Milliat went to live in Paris. Here, the sources are cruelly lacking and the story is unclear: did she elope with her husband or meet him there? What were she or they running from (or to)? Why did young French women/couples migrate from their family villages to England? The reasons are unclear; they could have moved because their parents disapproved of their union, or because of a scandal.

Of course, travel to England can and has been analysed as a key explanation for her interest in sport. Moreover, at the beginning of the twentieth century, England was a leading country for feminism. The feminist movement was stronger and more visible than it was in France, especially in London, in comparison with Nantes, Milliat's provincial town of origin. She might have discovered the feminist movement there,<sup>21</sup> or been attracted by it in her choice to live in London. Such migration is not an unknown pattern in the biographies of both

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19 Thierry Terret, "From Alice Milliat to Marie-Thérèse Eyquem: Revisiting Women's Sport in France (1920s–1960s)," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 7 (2010): 1154–72.

20 Carpentier, "Alice Milliat."

21 Idem.

feminists<sup>22</sup> and sportsmen<sup>23</sup> of the time, but was much more common in wealthy families that could easily afford it. As they were not part of these circles, this suggests the hypothesis that Milliat and her husband were running from something. In any case, learning English definitely helped her build and lead the International Federation of Women's Sport (Fédération sportive féminine internationale, known by its French acronym FSFI).

After the death of her husband, she stayed a widow and is not known to have had any other romantic relationships. This widow status is well known in women's history to facilitate careers, but mostly amongst the upper bourgeoisie. It leaves the widow free from domestic life and with the money necessary to choose her activities, like the duchess of Uzès<sup>24</sup> or Camille du Gast,<sup>25</sup> both pioneers in automobile sport at the beginning of the twentieth century. It gave Milliat more freedom to choose her activities than a married woman and a mother, with no husband's orders to follow, nor authorization to ask. But Milliat did not have much money and had to work: this point is quite unclear too, and we do not really know how at this point she managed to finance her activities. The widow status, in interwar France, also gave her a form of social respectability: unmarried woman could be seen as frustrated old maids or lesbians, especially if they were involved in gender equality (for example, the feminists Arria Ly or Madeleine Pelletier were accused of being lesbians, harassed and insulted publicly<sup>26</sup> or marginalized for their work).<sup>27</sup> Milliat specialized in rowing, which she probably discovered in England, as it was not practiced much in France, with the exception of

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22 For example, Yvette Roudy (1929-....), feminist and French minister of Women's Rights (1981–6) also migrated to England with her husband in her youth. See Florys Castan-Vicente, *Marie-Thérèse Eyquem*. She became a translator after that.

23 The example of Pierre de Coubertin is well known.

24 Anne d'Uzès, *Souvenirs: 1847–1933*. (Paris: Plon, 1939).

25 Annie Metz, "Camille du Gast," in Christine Bard (ed.) *Dictionnaire des féministes. France XVIII<sup>e</sup>–XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2017), 624–6.

26 Correspondence between Arria Ly and Caroline Kauffmann, BHVP, Fonds Bouglé, sous-fonds Kauffmann.

27 Christine Bard, "Le lesbianisme comme construction politique," in Éliane Gubin, Catherine Jacques, Florence Rochefort, et al. (eds), *Le Siècle des féminismes*. (Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier /Éditions Ouvrières, 2004), 111–26.

the president of the French Women's Sports Federation (known by its French acronym FSFSF). To prove a point, Milliat trained with a group from the federation to be the first women to pass the "Audax long distance rowing certificate" (a 50 km race in less than 12 hours), considered by some impossible for women ("women will never last 50 km!").<sup>28</sup> The only referenced competition she took part in then was the occasion for her to ask for equality in sports, and as such can be considered as a political feminist demonstration.

From a middle-class family, she had quite an uncommon trajectory. Her mysterious move to England gave her skills, and maybe the will, to organize women's sports at an international level.

### ***Suzanne Lenglen, the missing boy***

The tennis champion (1899–1938) came from an upper bourgeoisie family that had a house in the south of France, where tennis was well developed.<sup>29</sup> As a celebrity, her private life is much better known even for her younger years, as she was an early champion, soon surrounded by other players,<sup>30</sup> photographers,<sup>31</sup> and journalists,<sup>32</sup> who knew her well and wrote about her childhood. She had a brother who died when she was five (in 1904). Her father trained her, and multiple testimonies attest that he deliberately wanted to train her like a boy, to have male coaches, and to play against men; to be better and more competitive. Thus she was the textbook case of the "garçon manquant" ("missing boy"),<sup>33</sup> meaning the lack, or here, the early loss of a son in a family, resulting in the daughter assuming the social

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28 "Six rameuses conquièrent leur brevet d'Audax, dont Mme Milliat, présidente de la FFF," *Sportives, éducation physique et sports féminins*, no. 2, September 9 1922.

29 Y. Gastaut and Stéphane Mourlane, "Les débuts du tennis sur la côte d'Azur (1880–1930): tourisme mondain et transfert culturel," in Patrick Clastres and Paul Dietschy (eds). *Paume et tennis en France: XV<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2009), 91–101.

30 Henri Cochet et Pierre Albarran; Antoine Gentien.

31 Jacques Henri Lartigue.

32 Gianni Clerici.

33 Emilie Sablik and Christine Mennesson, "Carrières sexuelles et pratiques sportives," *Sciences sociales et sport* 1, no. 1 (2008): 79–113.



role of the elder son. This socialization facilitates gender transgressions, and is used to explain atypical careers of women, in patriarchal structures like science studies or in masculine sports.<sup>34</sup> Suzanne Lenglen never married. Rumour has it she was bisexual but no source confirms it, despite all the details about her private life and her love affairs with different men, provided by her friends. As such, the rumour could only be a stereotype linked to her comparison with the “flapper” figure and to her free and festive lifestyle. She never had a child, though we do not know why (maybe not by choice). She went out a lot, and could be seen in society and sporting events, with other famous sportsmen (the boxer Georges Carpentier) or friends (the woman tennis player Didie Vlasto),<sup>35</sup> and lived surrounded by friends, men and women, mostly tennis players.<sup>36</sup> Her sporting career is well known, and was very successful. She became very famous very young, won her first world title at 15, and was called “baby Lenglen” by the press.<sup>37</sup> Growing up, her free way of life was not criticized by the press; she was called a “Diva”. In the early 1920s, she was the only French tennis champion (male or female) to win against players from England and the USA. In these very nationalistic years, she was France’s only hope, and provided great headlines to the press. This way, different elements of the context worked her way: the “flapper” fashion, the international context of tension, or the French context of nationalism, and the development of sport media. This particular context protected her from the scandal her life could have created if she had been a unknown middle-class woman. In 1926, she decided to become a professional, and after a few successes, she ran out of opponents. Despite the immediate calls from a journalist for her to become a teacher and form the new generation,<sup>38</sup>

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34 Isabelle Lasvergana, “Contexte de socialisation primaire et choix d’une carrière scientifique chez les femmes,” *Recherches féministes* 1, no. 1, (1988): 32–45; Christine Mennesson, “Les sportives professionnelles’: travail du corps et division sexuée du travail,” *Cahiers du Genre* 1, no. 42 (2007): 19–42.

35 French Tennis Federation Archives, AFFT, Album Féret-Dutard.

36 Gianni Clerici.

37 *Tennis et Golf*, June 15 1914.

38 Marcel Daninos, *Tennis et Golf*, November 15 1926.

she resisted for ten years, until, in 1936, she opened a co-educational tennis school.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, a catholic out of the closet***

Marie-Thérèse Eyquem (1913–1978) was born into a middle-class family of three daughters, though she wasn't raised as a 'missing boy', but learned sport in a catholic association. She is known as a catholic sports figure, but her older sister and herself were first involved in a secular sports association. When her young sister was born, her family abandoned their local business in south-west France to live in Paris. In fact, after a local historian interviewed her family in Aquitaine, a family secret was revealed: her younger sister was her niece, and they left the village because of the scandal.<sup>40</sup> Her older sister had been abducted at the age of thirteen, by her sports teacher. The family found her and pressed charges against the school teacher and Eyquem's niece was raised as her younger sister. These events could be considered as gossip, and an epiphenomenon, or a founding moment that could explain Eyquem's involvement in catholic sport, which might have been considered as a safer space for girls, and Eyquem's strong opposition to co-education in sports. After this episode, Eyquem continued sports but only in catholic associations, where she began her career as a girls' sports organizer, strongly fighting against co-education. She became a fervent catholic. During her studies, she continued to practice sports, which gave her 'the strength and distraction'<sup>41</sup> she needed to continue despite the fact she had to work to finance her studies. She practised dance, gymnastics, basket-ball and badminton, where she 'had a few

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39 Florys Castan-Vicente, "Suzanne Lenglen."

40 Oral testimony of Marie-Thérèse Eyquem's family in *La Teste-De-Buch*, interview by Jean-Claude Rielh. Confirmed by the local press, *L'Avenir d'Arcachon*, April (?) 1924. There is, for the time being, no other way to confirm that this family secret was real. But it is consistent with the timeline and seems credible. The local press quotes the judges and gives the process dates. The accused was both the primary school teacher and the gymnastics coach of the local secular sports club.

41 Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, *Irène Popard ou la danse du feu*. (Paris: Les Éditions du Temps, 1959).

successes'.<sup>42</sup> Not married and without children, oral testimonies of her feminist friends revealed that she was a lesbian, and in a long-term relationship (with a woman I was not able to identify because nobody seemed to remember her name).<sup>43</sup> Strangely, or maybe not that much,<sup>44</sup> she was openly lesbian during her life, but came back into the closet after her death. Her friends from her feminist and political organization, the socialist party,<sup>45</sup> knew her choice in sexual partners. Her homosexuality was known to her catholic federation too, because of a novel she wrote under a pseudonym. She kept it mostly secret, but the federation somehow learnt about it. The novel was then unknown to historians, despite all my interviews with her feminist friends, until Wendy Michalat of Sheffield University had the idea to look into the online copyright registers.<sup>46</sup> The novel can be interpreted as partially autobiographical: it tells the story of a young woman, deeply catholic, who discovered she was attracted to other women, was torn between her faith and her love, and in the end, committed suicide.<sup>47</sup> Which part of it is autobiographical, which is not, we will never know for sure, but maybe we can begin to say that she was probably somewhat conflicted. After she wrote this novel, she was

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42 *La Teste-de-Buch* Archives, file Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, manifesto for the legislative election, 1968.

43 Interview with Évelyne Sullerot by Sophie Pépin and Florys Castan-Vicente, January 25, 2008.

44 One could argue that her family, her catholic, sports, and political friends tried after her death to hide her homosexuality. Three years after her death, in 1981, François Mitterrand, her political mentor and friend, became the French president, which could have amplified the phenomenon. In addition, she has been recently put back in the closet again, online: after I wrote her French Wikipedia page, it has been re-written to erase her homosexuality and her exclusion by the catholic federation. These facts were replaced by a comment that she was 'encouraged to resign' because of her political and feminist involvement, which is at odds with the time-line. The author cited me to back up this information (Florys Castan-Vicente, *Marie-Thérèse Eyquem*, 86) whereas I stated the exact opposite. This way, the conflict of memory between her catholic and feminist heritage is still open. "Marie-Thérèse Eyquem," wikipedia.fr, as at July 12, 2018.

45 She joined the socialist party in 1960 and was close to François Mitterrand.

46 Wendy Michalat, "Marie-Therese Eyquem: Feminism, Lesbianism and the Development of Women's Sport under Vichy", *Essays in French Literature and Culture*, 46 (2009): 161–81. *Catalogue of copyright entries 6*, no. 1, Washington, The Library of Congress, (1952): 75. Let's thank her again for it.

47 Catherine Lange (Marie-Thérèse Eyquem). *Les Impures*. (Paris: Denoël, 1951).

expelled from the catholic federation she worked for, turned to feminism and socialism, and lost her faith for a few years.

### **Gender performances and social class**

Studying gender performances gives the opportunity to highlight the importance of iconographic sources both in sports and gender history. Photographs can be used to study the way people performed their gender, how they physically incorporated or rejected gender norms.<sup>48</sup> How can we relate constructions of “public selves” (which can also be shown in discourses), private life and political opinions? These potential “public selves” are restricted by the context, and particularly, shaped by social classes.

### ***Milliat: a middle-class woman champion against the IOC***

International sports organizations are known as patriarchal structures, especially the International Olympic Committee (IOC). According to Carpentier and Lefevre, “The Olympic Movement, [...] was conceived as a tool to promote and spread European aristocratic and masculine values.”<sup>49</sup> Milliat came from the middle class and promoted sports for middle- and working-class women.<sup>50</sup> As the president of the Fémina-Sport club, later the French Women’s Sports Federation and the FSFI, she had constantly to fight to achieve and preserve the fragile autonomy of these organizations. She presented herself in photographs, either as a sportswoman or as an organizer and a president, always with much sobriety and

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48 Natalie Barker-Ruchti, Karin Grahn and Claes Annerstedt, “Moving towards Inclusion: An Analysis of Photographs from the 1926 Women’s Games in Gothenburg,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 8 (2013): 871-91.

49 Florence Carpentier, Philippe Lefèvre, “The Modern Olympic Movement, Women’s Sport and the Social Order during the Interwar Period,” *The International Journal of the History of Sports* 23, no. 7, (2006): 1112.

50 Laurence Prudhomme-Poncet, *Histoire du football féminin au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003).

modesty: no make-up, discrete or no jewellery, dull colours, simple forms and fabrics.<sup>51</sup> In her pictures as a president, she looked like she wanted to appear as a simple, classical, almost traditional or authoritarian woman – the severe maternal kind who inspires confidence in the families who hesitated to let their girls join a sports club, which was a constant preoccupation in her discourses.<sup>52</sup> As a champion of women’s sports, she always had to deal with suspicions of debauchery, as women’s sport was considered immoral. In response, she performed respectability, which was typical for a middle-class woman of the time who wanted to be taken seriously, and confirmed the social respectability of her widow status by a physical performance of the wise and serious woman.

But she was not only the president of a club, or a federation, she was also the president of the FSFI and had to negotiate directly with the IOC leaders. One has to picture her, the only women, from the middle class, surrounded by old men from the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie of the IOC, trying to negotiate with them as their equal, while they asked her to serve as the ‘secretary’ of the meeting.<sup>53</sup> Actually, what they called ‘standing’ was used as an argument by the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) to argue that they should run women’s track and field, because they had a better ‘standing’ than Milliat’s federation: for them, ‘women’s sports did not have the same standing’ as the men’s federation.<sup>54</sup> This

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51 ‘Mme Milliat [aviron]’, press photograph, Agence rol, 1920. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530374165.r=alice%20milliat?rk=21459;2>; and ‘Mme Alice Milliat, présidente de la Fédération des Sociétés Féminines Sportives de France’, Agence Rol, March 1920. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53036511z.r=alice%20milliat?rk=85837;2>

52 For example, Official Bulletin of the FFSF, *Les Sportives*, no. 19 (January 6, 1923).

53 Minutes of the IAAF-FSFI commission, Paris, April 29, 1926 (AMNS). Quoted by Carpentier, and Lefèvre, “The Modern Olympic Movement.”

54 “The IAAF argued that the present dualistic control was expensive and troublesome, that many countries wanted men’s and women’s track and field to be managed by one organization, and that since women’s sports did not have the same standing on the International Olympic Committee, women would be best represented by the IAAF.” *AAU Minutes of the Annual Convention* (1934), 12. Cited by Mary Leigh and Thérèse Bonin, “The Pioneering Role of Madame Alice Milliat and the FSFI in Establishing International Trade (sic: Track) and Field Competition for Women,” *Journal of Sport History* 4 (1977): 72–83.

reference to ‘standing’ shows a will to put forward a social distinction between the two federations.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the conflict between the International Federation of Women’s Sports and the IOC/IAAF was not only about gender, it was also about social class. As Milliat could not possibly transgress her social class values, she could only try to achieve the same dignity within the range of authorized attributes possible to her class and gender.

Eyquem, who did not know Milliat personally, must have had “eminent qualities,” and “a strong personality” to become “the most striking figure of French and international women’s sports of the interwar period”.<sup>56</sup> For historian Quintillan, she succeeded “thanks to her character, charisma and actions”.<sup>57</sup> And indeed, she probably was a charismatic, strong woman, to lead a club, a national and an international federation, and stand up against the IOC. She had to act like a serious and trustworthy widow before the IOC and the French government (the latter funded her organizations)<sup>58</sup> or even the parents of girls she was trying to encourage into sport. Nevertheless, inside her club, probably within a circle of people she trusted, she provided photographs of herself as a rower, with the simple sports outfit of her club, in shorts.<sup>59</sup> This way, she looked a lot more popular and joyful than in her official photographs as a federation president. It is then my conclusion that she built a severe “public self” to match her presidential status, and had to hide the most popular, carefree, and sometimes transgressive aspects of her strong personality, inside the narrow boundaries prescribed by her gender and social class.

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55 Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*. (Paris: Ed de Minuit, 1992).

56 Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, *La Femme et le sport*. (Paris: J. Susse, 1944), 51.

57 Ghislaine Quintillan, “Alice Milliat and the Women’s Games,” *Revue Olympique* 26, no. 31 (2000): 27–8.

58 Prudhomme-Poncet. *Histoire du football féminin*.

59 “Alice Milliat practising rowing on a Parisian lake,” 1920, National Institute for Sport and Physical Education (INSEP), picture library, Femina Sport collection. The dedication is “Bien affectueux souvenir aux camarades de Fémina-Sport: In loving souvenir of Fémina-Sport comrade.” [http://www.iconotheque.insep.fr/desktop.htm?session\\_id=wWFithGmqeW1w&language\\_id=fra](http://www.iconotheque.insep.fr/desktop.htm?session_id=wWFithGmqeW1w&language_id=fra)

### *Lenglen, transgression and seduction*

Coming from a totally different social class, Lenglen had different possibilities in terms of gender performance. Much has already been said about Lenglen as a “tennis diva”. She actually staged her entries, wore a lot of make-up, bright red lipstick, big fur coats, silk dresses by famous fashion designers, and struck poses surrounded by flowers.<sup>60</sup> She performed a “deliberately excessive femininity,”<sup>61</sup> like the stage actresses Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) before her or Marguerite Durand at the same period (1864–1936). Both of those actresses have been analysed as having performed such femininity to hide their transgressions. As a famous actress, Bernhardt showed on stage the possibility to perform different kind of femininities – and even masculinities, since she also played male parts, like Hamlet.<sup>62</sup> Marguerite Durand was first an actress, before creating the feminist newspaper *La Fronde*. She became a journalist, editor-in-chief and a feminist militant: for her biographer, she performed an outrageous femininity to hide her “transgressions” and true feminist purpose.<sup>63</sup> This exaggerated femininity shown to the public eye opened a space for her to live a life that was not considered as feminine. She manipulated traditional gender identities (the real woman; the actress) to produce a public image both culturally acceptable and transgressive. It can be facilitated by the fact that, as Judith Butler stated, femininity is

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60 Thomas Bauer, *La sportive dans la littérature française des années folles*. (Villeneuve-d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2011); Florys Castan-Vicente, “Suzanne Lenglen.” Many photographs are available online on Gallica: “Cannes, Mlle Lenglen buying a balloon (CNews),” Agence Rol, 1924. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53125412n.r=suzanne%20lenglen?rk=536483;2>; “Mlles Browne and Lenglen,” Agence Rol, 1926. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b531639034.r=suzanne%20lenglen?rk=815454;4>; “Cannes: Mlle Lenglen, Miss Wills,” Agence Rol, 16 février 1926. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53158237x.r=suzanne%20lenglen?rk=922751;2>.

61 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography*, 20.

62 Ibid. Jill Edmonds, “Princess Hamlet,” in Vivien Gardner and Susan Rutherford (eds). *The New Woman and Her Sisters. Feminism and Theatre, 1850–1914*. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 59–76.

63 Mary Louise Roberts, “Acting up: The Feminist Theatrics of Marguerite Durand,” *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 4 (1996): 1103–38.

the spectacular gender.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, women considered as a “genius” by their times, like George Sand or Germaine de Staël, used this persona to justify their eccentricities or transgressions: their exceptional status gave them privileges and opened possibilities for them.<sup>65</sup> Lenglen, as a tennis champion performing “on stage,” under the gaze of an audience, and as a multiple champion considered exceptional for her time, shows similarities with the actresses and the geniuses, and benefited from her shared exceptional status.

For Lenglen, the transgression was about being a champion, particularly one who was able to play against men and had a powerful game. As she aimed to win, she adapted her outfits in a way that freed her movements and facilitated her performances. She did not wear what she was supposed to. Without a corset, and showing her knees and armpits, nevertheless she did not make that much of a scandal in the very uptight world of early-twentieth-century tennis. Protected by her social class, her success, the admiration of the press and the nationalistic context in France, her style became fashionable, and she contributed to the formation of a new norm. As an upper-bourgeoise woman, and a public figure, she was able to perform an eccentric exaggerated femininity, that Milliat could never have attempted without a scandal. Lenglen performed this “deliberately excessive femininity” while performing as a powerful champion; the femininity compensating for the transgression of the performance of power. By contrast, another champion at the same period, Violette Morris, transgressed without any concession, dressed as a man, with short hair, smoked, was openly bisexual and became the second woman in France to have a double mastectomy.<sup>66</sup> For a time, her multiple successes as an international champion protected her, if not from the disapproval and irony of part of the press, at least from total public shame and ostracism. She also benefited from her status as a First World War participant (a motorcycle courier). She was

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64 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

65 Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography*, 21.

66 Marie-Josèphe Bonnet, *Violette Morris: histoire d'une scandaleuse*. (Paris: Perrin, 2011).



still considered a great champion, authorized to compete by Milliat's federation, until Milliat left the French federation to lead the FSFI, and the new president, Dr Legrand, had Morris expelled permanently for bad behaviour. She was not able to enter any competitions after that incident. Her example illustrates the necessity for other women champions such as Lenglen, or any transgressive woman of the time, to build a reassuring or seductive public image.

In 1936, for the opening of her school, Lenglen appeared still sophisticated in an upper bourgeoisie way, but more simple, and still playing with gender norms with her shorts (typical in other sports but not in tennis).<sup>67</sup> She built a new public self in order to present herself as a suitable teacher and organizer of a school.

### ***Eyquem: the last of the "garçonnes"?***

Eyquem began her career as a sports organizer first in a catholic sport association, and, during the Second World War, in the Vichy government, which promoted a very traditional image and status of women. In these years, Eyquem appeared feminine, according to the fashion of the time.<sup>68</sup> After the war, she continued her career as a women's sports inspector in the French government. She was expelled from her catholic federation and, in the sixties, joined a feminist organization, the Mouvement démocratique féminin (Women's Democratic Movement, MDF); formed by earlier first-wave feminists and new, younger members who would take part in the second wave. From this time, she only appeared with very short hair, wearing white shirts buttoned all the way up, and a strict black skirt suit, no jewellery, and no make up except for a little bit of lipstick. Physically, she assumed a neutrality, if not a certain masculinity, in total opposition to her discourse about the necessity for sportswomen to stay

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67 "Suzanne Lenglen inaugure son école de Tennis," Agence Meurisse, 1936, Gallica, Bnf.

68 Photograph of Marie-Thérèse Eyquem during the 1940s, *La Teste-de-Buch* archives, reproduced in Florys Castan-Vicente, "Marie-Thérèse Eyquem," in Claude Pennetier (ed.), *Le Maitron. Dictionnaire biographique, mouvement ouvrier, mouvement social, de 1940 à 1968*, 5 (Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2009): <http://biosoc.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article114>.

feminine and be good wives and mothers. This strict, elegant style is similar to the Parisian “garçonnes” in the 1920’s, at the time associated with homosexuality. For a socialist friend, she was a sort of George Sand,<sup>69</sup> for her feminist friend Yvette Roudy, she looked “almost a little bit like a garçonne.”<sup>70</sup> In the patriarchal spaces of politics and sports, this androgynous aspect could be a way to neutralize any attempts at seduction by the supposed heterosexual males of the socialist party, if not to assume her own sexuality. It did not seem to have harmed her, and may have helped her blend in.

Besides, her novel *Les Impures* shows similarities with the famous and scandalous 1920s novel *La Garçonne*.<sup>71</sup> The story of *Les Impures* is centred on a young woman, hesitating between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and finally, after experiencing homosexuality, getting married to a man. Both novels contain explicit sex scenes, though the narrated debaucheries are condemned by the authors. The major difference being that the protagonist of *La Garçonne* finds happiness in her final marriage though in *Les Impures*, she finds only despair.

According to testimonies, Eyquem also assumed a masculine lifestyle. She hunted with former President François Mitterrand, fished, smoked a pipe and cigars.<sup>72</sup> According to one particular testimony, she received her friends while smoking a pipe sitting near the fireplace, while her wife was cooking.<sup>73</sup> This last testimony comes close to a homophobic stereotype and can be considered as biased. Nevertheless, Eyquem did rejected feminine norms for herself, while asserting them for women’s sports. This rejection of femininity in her own life put her close to the radical feminist Madeleine Pelletier and even the scandalous Violette Morris. But in her discourse, Eyquem presented Morris as a repellent model that

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69 Interview of Stélio Farandjis by Florys Castan-Vicente, April 11, 2008.

70 Interview of Yvette Roudy by Sophie Pépin and Florys Castan-Vicente, January 7, 2008.

71 Victor Margueritte, *La Garçonne*. (Paris: Flammarion, 1922).

72 Interview of Yvette Roudy by Sophie Pépin and Florys Castan-Vicente, January 7, 2008.

73 Interview of Évelyne Sullerot by Sophie Pépin and Florys Castan Vicente, January 25, 2008.

sportswomen should avoid in all cases. Eyquem, while deploring that France was late in women's sport development compared with other European countries, attributed it to a lack of means and to "violent hostility" arising from the "excesses" of sportswomen, questioning their lack of gracefulness, their crude speech and their bad behaviour. She criticized Violette Morris, whom she said would have damaged women's sport by her behaviour. Eyquem described masculine sportswomen as "unbalanced,"<sup>74</sup> then showed different "public selves" at the same time: one physical, performing androgyny, and another one in her discourse, where she claimed that sportswomen "should also be women," and by women, she meant, the heterocentric model of the loving mother and wife. The gap between these multiple public selves, the one she performed and incarnated, and the one she used in her discourses, can be explained by the propaganda needs of women's sport, as she was trying, like Milliat, to promote its respectability.

### **Consequences for their careers as organizers**

These different gender performances can help us understand their conceptions of gender norms, and the way these conceptions impacted their decisions as women's sport leaders: did they ask young sportswomen to act just as they did? The methodological issue here in these cases would be to be too hasty and deterministic, seeing causality everywhere. Where do we stop in the interpretation? How far can we interpret a career through private life, socialization, and gender performances?

### ***Milliat: winning and reassuring***

As a national and international organizer, Milliat fought hard for competitive women's sports, in all kinds of sport, including soccer and rugby. But at the same time, in her discourses, she

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74 Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, *La Femme*, 63, 34, 207.

admitted gender differences, both physical and psychological, and presented her players as “normal women:” feminine, wives, and mothers. She sought respectability for herself and her organizations: simultaneously, she wanted to create change and reassured everyone (the parents, the IOC, the physicians) that she was not changing gender norms. For example, sport competitions she organized included, gymnastics demonstrations that served as demonstrations of femininity.<sup>75</sup> I choose to interpret this as a conscious strategy, as it is also established by other women of the time; like Cécile Brunschvicg, an interwar leader of the feminist movement, who wrote that she deliberately kept her long hair to show that she disagreed with the “garçonnes.”<sup>76</sup> In the French feminist movement of the time, even the more moderate suffered numerous attacks and criticisms, such as for masculinization, ugliness and sterility, and tried to neutralized these critics by conforming with gender norms.<sup>77</sup> Milliat used this strategy: in her discourses and in the events she organized, and applied it to herself. Thereby, unlike Eyquem, the “public self” of Milliat was coherent with her discourse and acts as a leader.

Milliat also used the argument of “difference” of the sexes to justify a separate organization for women’s sports, which meant independence and liberty to include the activities they wanted. Under her direction, the French federation excluded men from the management, which can be seen as a militant strategy of separate development.<sup>78</sup> Also, in the particular context where women athletes were criticized for promiscuity, the journalist Jeanne May commented that women’s athletics afforded the ‘greatest safety to mothers’ who might refuse to send their daughters to mixed clubs. Milliat wanted to expand sport for women

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75 Iconothèque de l’INSEP, Photographs of Fémina Sport, September 1918. “Démonstration de danse hellénique inspirée de la méthode R. Duncan par les élèves de Fémina Sport 1916,” *Programme officiel du premier meeting international d’éducation physique féminine et de sports*, 24 to 31 March 1921.

76 Formaglio, *Féministe d’abord*, 72.

77 Christine Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne: histoire des féminismes 1914–1940*. (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 27.

78 Jeanne May, “Pas de mâles! Pas de mâles,” *La Vie au grand Air*, March-April 1920.

because it “develops personalities, gives confidence and courage, generates a resourceful spirit.” She explained how these qualities had helped her as a sports administrator and in her fight for the recognition of women’s sport at national, international and particularly Olympic levels.<sup>79</sup> Even though Lenglen’s career as an administrator is quite different, she used the same arguments to justify women’s tennis.

Hence, Milliat’s social class, gender performances and conceptions about gender can help us understand her strategies as a women’s sports international leader.

***Lenglen: “Fighting until victory, or defeat”<sup>80</sup>***

As the director and teacher of a tennis school, Lenglen promoted sport for all and co-education. She wished to open tennis classes to everyone by collective lessons,” more efficient than private lessons.<sup>81</sup> We can link her choice of co-education with her own positive experience of co-education, her primary socialization and the training she received that helped her become a champion. Tennis is a sport particularly relevant to co-education, because of the mixed doubles event. Lenglen adopted this tradition. She pointed out the need for sports in education and affirmed that girls should not be limited to gymnastics.<sup>82</sup> She defended sports, including competition, for girls and women, and claimed that sport is important in girls’ education, because it helps them develop courage, a strong will, strategic thinking, decision making and a competitive spirit. This objective was the same for Milliat, but Lenglen wanted to achieve it through co-education. She also added that sports teach

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79 Ghislaine Quintillan, “Alice Milliat.” She quotes Alice Milliat, *Cahiers de la République des Lettres des Sciences et des Sports* 6 (May 1927).

80 Suzanne Lenglen, “Le sport. Ni trop, ni trop peu,” text from the conference of February 2, 1937, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, file S. Lenglen; and *Tennis et Golf*, February 16, 1937.

81 J. Casanova, “Une journée avec Suzanne Lenglen, la grande championne de tennis,” *Minerva*, August 23, 1936.

82 Lenglen, “Le sport. Ni trop, ni trop peu;” and *Tennis et Golf*, February 16, 1937.

players to “fight either in victory and defeat,”<sup>83</sup> which evokes Kipling’s poem “If”.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, Lenglen remained cautious about women’s competition, and stated elsewhere that she did not necessarily want to form an “incubator of women champions” but only “good players.”<sup>85</sup> For Lenglen, sport teachers must be better trained, and physical education be added to every school teacher’s training, because “a teacher mustn’t be a muscular brute but a real educator.”<sup>86</sup> She also wrote several textbooks for tennis, in French and English, with Margaret Morris, a famous English dancer using the Isadora Duncan technique. Lenglen stated that dance was a very good way to improve footwork, and very useful to tennis practice.<sup>87</sup> However, she died in 1938, only two years after the opening of her school, so we cannot compare her discourse with her actions.

Lenglen’s convictions about sports education for girls came from a champion from the upper bourgeoisie, who always obtained all she wanted from her federation, and never had budget or training issues, while Milliat had to fight all along the way (for finances, or training locations). Also, co-education was easier to defend in tennis, where the tradition of high society mixed doubles created a space where promiscuity was not as feared as it was in other sports. Finally, unlike Milliat, Lenglen never had to create a separatist organization, because the tennis federation accepted women. Her social class, primary socialization, conception of gender, but also, the context of the tennis federation are relevant here to explain her choices as a leader.

83 In French: “à lutter jusqu’à la victoire, ou jusqu’à la défaite.”

84 “If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster:” Rudyard Kipling, “If” *Rewards and Fairies*. (New York, Doubleday, Page & Co, 1910). Was Lenglen conscious that she evoked a poem about the construction of masculinity to talk about girls’ education? The irony may be deliberate.

85 Casanova, “Une journée avec Suzanne Lenglen.”

86 Suzanne Lenglen, “Éduquer, organiser, nous dit Suzanne Lenglen, voilà la première tâche de nos dirigeants sportifs,” *Le Figaro*, August 12, 1936.

87 Suzanne Lenglen, *Lawn Tennis. The Game of Nations*. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1925); Suzanne Lenglen and Margaret Morris, *Tennis by Simple Exercises*. (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1937); Suzanne Lenglen and Margaret Morris, *Initiation au tennis. Principes essentiels et préparation physique*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1937). Préface by René Lacoste and Jean Borotra.

### *Eyquem: a feminist against co-education*

Eyquem was totally against co-education, perhaps for familial and psychological reasons, and maybe also because of her catholic education. At first, during the war, her arguments were different from those of Milliat, and more moral, to avoid promiscuity. After the war, she joined the International Association of Physical Education and Sports for Girls and Women (IAPESGW),<sup>88</sup> and in the 1960s, a feminist association. The IAPESGW and the MDF were both separatists, not with a moral purpose, but, like Milliat, as a way for woman to guarantee their independence.

In the IAPESGW, Eyquem was confronted with other conceptions of gender, from other countries, and particularly, she communicated with the first president of the association, who became her friend, Dorothy Ainsworth, from the USA. She studied, and then worked, at Smith College, then a women-only university. First, Eyquem invited many male doctors, to the IAPESGW conferences, as though she believed it would give more credibility to her discourse.<sup>89</sup> Ainsworth disagreed.<sup>90</sup> In time, Eyquem was convinced by her friend and president. In 1961, she wrote: “Experience proves that women’s groups are more efficient when they are independent.”<sup>91</sup>

The IAPESGW was then a woman-only association, and, in congresses, women were invited to talk as a priority. They defended physical education for girls, taught and led by women.<sup>92</sup> This idea is also linked with their conception of gender: Ainsworth and Eyquem were convinced that women and men were different, and needed different physical practises,

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88 Florys Castan-Vicente, “International Intellectual Exchanges, Women and Sports.”

89 Her own book was prefaced by a physician: Marie-Thérèse Eyquem. *La Femme et le sport*, Préface by Dr. Boigey.

90 Letter from D. Ainsworth to Phyllis Colson (August 8, 1955), Dorothy Ainsworth Papers, Smith College, box 22, file 13.

91 Letter from M.-T. Eyquem to D. Ainsworth (February 28, 1961), Dorothy Ainsworth Papers, Smith College, box 22.

92 “L’Association internationale de l’éducation physique et du sport féminin de compétition s’est réunie à Berlin,” *Revue Olympique* (1962): 33–4.

based on women's specificities. Indeed, for Gertrud Pfister, two conceptions of 'sport feminisms' prevailed: one is egalitarian, pleading for strict equality, identical activities and integration in male federations, and another one is differentialist, wanting to build special physical activities for women, in independent federations.<sup>93</sup> Ainsworth presented the role of IAPESGW this way: "we believe that women have a different and special contribution to add to civic and professional life."<sup>94</sup> Eyquem agreed: "Women have no interest in imitating men, because they would fail where men succeed. But when they do things their own way, they succeed where men would fail."<sup>95</sup> As differentialists, they considered that women and men had 'natural' differences which must be taken into consideration. Thus, women could have a different, more adapted contribution to physical education and sports for girls. As an international leader of women's sports, Eyquem thus synthesized the moral separatism of catholic sports and the militant one from differentialist feminists and adopted the idea that women did not just need less intense activities because they were weaker, but specifically different activities created for them and by them, to match their differences. This way, differentialist feminism was consistent with her conception of femininity and her definition of women's role and place in society, if not with her own behaviour.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of private life and gender performances helped to analyse these three women and understand their involvement, convictions and strategies as women's sports leaders. When the traditional sources are lacking, it is possible to fill the blanks with new

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93 Gertrud Pfister, "Her Story in Sport: Toward the Emancipation of Women," in Pierre Arnaud and Thierry Terret (eds), *Histoire du sport féminin*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 213–28.

94 Dorothy Ainsworth, "The Function and Purpose of the Congress," *Report of the International Congress on the Physical Education of Girl and Women* (Washington DC: AAHPER, 1950), 26–8. Quoted by Ann Hall and Gertrud Pfister, *Honoring the Legacy. Fifty Years of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women*. (Nanaimo: IAPESGW, 1999).

95 Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, "Le sport féminin et les Jeux Olympiques," *Revue EPS*, no. 52 (1960): 39–43.



sources, like photographs, novels, and interviews. Comparisons with other women of the time, other parallel lives, can prove meaningful too.

The private lives of Eyquem and Lenglen gave clues to highlight their convictions on women's sports. But for Milliat, the lack of sources is an important issue. Studying private life implies confronting oneself with the lack of sources, the difficulty of finding secrets the protagonists wanted to hide, and the ethical question: to what point can we reveal something which the actors themselves were trying to conceal? As we have seen, interviews are not always a good way to reveal personal lives, as they can produce important bias, personal judgement or even gossip.

These three lives gave examples of different gender performances of selves: the middle-class respectable woman, feminine, strict and simple; the diva, exaggerating her femininity; and the rejection of femininity or neutralization of gender. These three gender performances correspond to three different kinds of strategies for women in patriarchal structures, and cannot be interpreted without taking other categories in consideration, particularly social class. Milliat trying to perform "the president" worked for a while, before the French and international federation were dissolved in the 1930s, but the male leaders of the IOC and IAAF probably never considered her as an equal. Lenglen performed an exuberant femininity, for the media and sponsors, to serve her career and hide her transgressions but also because her social class allowed it. She was also willing to look simpler (though still elegant) to perform the roles of teacher and school director. Eyquem evolved from Vichy into the postwar period, when she rejected feminine appearance and stayed that way. Doing so did not harm her in patriarchal (sports, politics) nor feminist (MDF, IAPESGW) structures.

In this way, studying gender performances and private lives can contribute to biographies of sportswomen and women sports administrators, to help explain how women

were involved in sports organization.

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