Towards a feminist playology: social sport studies and the limits of critique

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TOWARDS A FEMINIST PLAYOLOGY

SOCIAL SPORT STUDIES AND THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE

NATHANJA VAN DEN HEUVEL

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Social Sport Studies and the Limits of Critique

Nathanja van den Heuvel

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Contents

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Introduction: Social sport studies and the limits of critique

Why do elite women's football players sacrifice their health, social life and financial security to playing their game? One elite women's football player quips: '*Football is actually not that important, but then at the same time it is*.' This paradox illustrates the collision of two incongruent systems of values, two different notions of "importance". According to the one, football is unimportant, according to the other it is not. Sacrificing one's health, social life and financial security to something unimportant is not a rational thing to do. For a player to make those sacrifices, there must be a sense in which the importance of playing football outweighs these real-life values: a mysterious commitment that can explain why women's football players would sacrifice their health, social life and financial security to playing their game.

This project started with the aim of developing our understanding of the social significance of the experiences of elite women's football players in the Low Countries. More precisely, it pursued the following research question: "how do elite women's football players experience football as both an emancipatory and an oppressive practice?" It asked this in the context of two related developments. First, women's football has seen enormous growth over the past years in terms of levels of participation and media attention. Second, the sport is no longer solely an amateur one, but became semi-professional with increased infrastructure, facilities, sponsorship and support systems. Both developments should, however, be understood in relation to the still dominant image of football as a masculine sport. It was only in 1971, with the end of the ban on organized women's football in Europe, that women's football players could officially occupy a place on the field and it was only in 1979 that the Dutch football organization enshrined girls' football in its regulations.

That was the starting point. The data that emerged from the empirical part of this study forced me to focus on another question however, which is the question with which I started above: "How can we account for the willingness of players to make sacrifices in terms of health, social life and financial security?" It turned out, as will become clear shortly, that the question of emancipation and oppression could not be approached until the question of sacrifice was clarified. And the existing literature was unable to do so. Although the making of sacrifices seems to be part and parcel of any elite sportsperson's life, the insights that we find in the current field of social sport studies are not able to make adequate sense of the elite women's football players' experiences of sacrifice. These insights, largely informed by Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism, allow us to make sense of the diverse ways in which elite women's football players are constituted as subjects in the context of the above-mentioned developments and the dominant image of football as a masculine sport. However, these theories appear insufficient for making sense of the women's football players' experiences of sacrifice. In short, these frameworks understand the willingness of players to make sacrifices in terms of normalising and oppressive productions of subjectivity. The data of our study points out that this understanding overlooks a deeper level of experience which the paradox with which we started illustrates, namely

that there is something in or about playing football that cannot be understood in terms of instrumental reason: the irreducible lived meaning of playing football underpins the player's ability to make sacrifices for its sake. And the data gathered in this study shows that the current models that we find in social sport studies are not sufficient. As a result, the central aim of this dissertation is to use the elite women's football case to develop a method that provides adequate theoretical tools to theorize the very fundamentals of what it means and takes to be and become an elite sportsperson.

The thesis that I put forward is that the existing Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist frameworks that we find in the field of social sport studies must be supplemented by the theory of play inherited from Johan Huizinga, Eugen Fink and Hans-Georg Gadamer for both conceptual and ethical reasons. As I shall argue, the theory of play allows us first of all to make sense of the player's experience of sacrifice. More precisely, understood as an independent, irreducible structure of experience, play allow us to make sense of the women's football players' experiences of sacrifice in a way that is compatible and complimentary to those insights of Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian post-structuralism, which remain indispensable. Secondly, the theory of play makes visible that the existing frameworks miss important insights in theorizing the subject, and, by extension, brings forth a notion of freedom and resistance that is currently *lacking* in the field of social sport studies. 'Lacking', as we cannot find these notions in the field of social sport studies, but also 'lacking' because the field of study is in need of alternative ways to think about freedom and resistance. This thesis thus contains a systematic point, namely our discovery that "players play", that their experience cannot be understood without an account of play as such, alongside an analysis of what that means; and a methodological point, namely that in order to take into consideration that players play, we need a new method, which I describe as a feminist playology. The prefix feminist refers to the commitment of this method to understand sport as a gendered activity.

This research contains thus an empirical part followed by a theoretical part that interprets the findings. In the empirical part of the research, I gathered data in three domains. First, I carried out content analysis of diverse media material to reconstruct the public debate and to track down networks of informants and key stakeholders. Second, I observed several football matches at various clubs in the Low Countries and spent a week as a participant observer in one of them. Third, I carried out semi-structured in-depth interviews with technical staff members, club managers and elite women's football players, ranging from the so-called pioneers of Dutch elite women's football to current day players. I detail the data and the procedures further in chapter 1. An overview of the data collection and the data can also be found in appendix 1. The theoretical part of the work consists first of all of an analysis of the data informed by the theoretical insights that we find in the field of sport studies. There, I conclude that we need to both confirm and supplement the existing theoretical frameworks. Second, I formulate the central question this research poses:

How should we conceptualize the experiences of the elite women's football players in order to do justice to the experience of sacrifice that always accompanies it? Third, I analyze the experiences of sacrifice in terms of play. Fourth, I critically establish the conditions under which the diverse theses that we find in the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigms and the theory of play can complement each other. Finally, on this basis, I establish a new method to do full justice to the experience of the elite women's football players. This method is called feminist playology.

Overview of the chapters

The first three chapters of this thesis present my empirical research about elite women's football in the Low Countries. Chapter 1 gives a detailed presentation of the empirical methodologies I used and provides an overview of the key findings that emerged from the data. Chapter 2 begins with a presentation of the existing theoretical framework of sport scholarship in the social sciences and the humanities. Secondly, it presents the analysis of the data that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study, informed by the insights provided for by the existing frameworks that we find in the field of social sport studies.

The analysis presented in chapter 2 argues for the necessity of both maintaining and supplementing the key theoretical insights that we currently find in the field of social sports studies. As the current paradigms predict, the empirical research concludes that both the 'policing of gender' and 'high performance' are central to the experiences of elite sport players. The theme of 'high performance' in particular, is central to those social sports studies that interrogate the modern instrumental approach to sport and its neoliberal developments. The theme of 'gender policing' is central to all those social sport studies that focus on identity construction and the question of gender-normalization, transgression and compliance in relation to high performance sport. However, the analysis reveals that a key part of the data that emerged from the interviews, namely those many entries that refer to sacrifice, cannot be accounted for by the existing frameworks in social sport studies. More particularly, these entries show that in contrast to the view upheld by the existing frameworks in social sport studies, the themes of 'gender policing' and 'high performance' do not exhaust the experiences of elite women's football players. The existing framework thus fails us when it comes to making sense of the references to sacrifice that we find in the data. What this implies is that our data analysis pushes against the established view that elite athletes solely intend sports as a form of gendered labour. Accordingly, chapter 2 concludes that the available methods that we find in the field of social sport studies are insufficient to account for the experience of the players as represented in the data.

On this basis, chapter 3 starts with the formulation of the central question this research poses: **How should we conceptualize the experiences of the elite women's football players in order to do justice to the experience of sacrifice that always accompanies it?** In order to answer this question, this chapter seeks theoretical insights that (i) allow for an understanding of the theme of sacrifice; (ii) allow for a theorisation of the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' as unified (for the women's football players experience 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in conjunction with one another). To this end chapter 3 critically discusses two related, yet distinct theories. These are the an-economic theory of sacrifice, such as we find in the work of the main figures of the Collège de sociologie, amongst whom Roger Caillois, Michel Leiris and most notably Georges Bataille, and the pre-rational theory of play such as we find in the works of Johan Huizinga, Eugen Fink and Hans-Georg Gadamer amongst others. On this basis chapter

3 concludes that a synthesis of both theories provides a deeper concept of play that allows us to make sense of the experience of sacrifice in a way congruent with the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing'.

Chapter 4 of this thesis presents the philosophical significance of the introduction of play within the existing frameworks in social sport studies. I argue in this chapter that we must establish a method capable of giving a comprehensive account of the data that emerged from the interviews with the elite women's football players. More particularly, I argue that the theory of play makes visible that the existing frameworks in social sport studies misses important aspects of the experience of elite sportspeople. Accordingly the central question set out in this chapter is: how does the theory of play force us to rethink the existing frameworks in social sport studies? To this end chapter 4 provides a synthetic account of all the insights that have proved indispensable for the analysis of the experiences of the elite women's football players, in their own estimation. Thus, importantly this chapter does not simply complement the existing frameworks with the theory of play, but it establishes a method capable of making adequate sense of the experiences of the elite women's football players as a whole, one that is currently lacking.

Chapter 1

Methodology and data

1.1 Description of the research procedure

1.1.1 Sampling and access

In order to understand the social significance of elite women's football, this research adopts a multi-method ethnographic approach.[1] First of all, I analysed the content of various media material in order to reconstruct the public debate and to track down networks of informants and key stakeholders. Of key importance, here were the websites of the various elite clubs based in the Low Countries, the website of the Dutch football organisation and a booklet published by the football organisation, 'celebrating' 25 years of Dutch women's football, which includes a list of players active in the 1970s and 1980s. The semi-structured in-depth interview was however the most important method. To elicit insights into the experiences and perspectives of football players, I conducted interviews with former elite women's football players and technical staff and current elite players, technical staff and management. To complement the interviews, I made observations during several football matches at various clubs in the Low Countries and conducted a week of 'day in the life' participant observation. These observations allowed me to immerse myself in the settings, cultural practices, and daily activities of elite women's football players and facilitated further understanding of what the interviewees believe and why, and how they experience the place of sports in their lives.

In order to gain access to informants, stakeholders and important sites, and to initiate sampling, I deployed various strategies/tactics. First of all, based on the list of players and coaches active in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, included in the booklet *KNVB Jaarboek 25 Jaar Vrouwenboetbal* (Stolk & Wagenaar, 1997), I conducted an internet search to find contact details of potential interviewees. This resulted in a few 'hits', which were followed up. Gaining access to these former elite players proved to require patience and much sensitivity since I approached them by cold calling, by telephone, Facebook or e-mail. Once rapport was established and the interview conducted, I deployed the method of snowball sampling, that is access to interviewees through contact information that is provided by other interviewees (Atkinson & Flint, 2004, p. 1043, 1044). I approached the Dutch football organisation to smoothen the process of data sampling. For privacy reasons, they were unwilling to provide contact details. To gain access to stakeholders (management and sponsors) and important sites (stadiums, skyboxes, training fields etc.), I approached the various elite clubs in the Low Countries. I visited the majority of the clubs at least once when hosting a match. These visits allowed for a general feel of the field and for an understanding of the concerns and motives of stakeholders and for the establishment of rapport with those stakeholders in a position to provide further access to the field (gatekeepers). At this early

1 I follow here the *Sage Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research* (Taskakkori and Teddie 2010a), which describes multi-method studies as studies involving multiple types of qualitative research or multiple types of quantitative research. This in contrast to mixed methods studies, which involve the mixing of both types of data (Taskakkori and Teddie 2010b, p. 11).

stage, it became clear that most clubs were evidently suspicious of the Dutch football organisation. First of all because of the fear of funding cuts and secondly because of the fear of a decrease in the quality of the competition. At the time I conducted the fieldwork, both Dutch and Belgian elite clubs were united in the transnational BeNe League. Particularly Dutch club affiliates lamented this structure, as they believed that Belgian clubs would bring down the level of play. In order for me to establish the necessary rapport, I had to repeatedly reaffirm my scientific independence from football organisations. Competitive sentiments were also expressed between the affiliates of the various Dutch clubs. To certify proper care in the dealings with the various clubs, these competitive sentiments required to be handled with diplomacy. Most club affiliates generously welcomed me and as these meetings generally took place during matches, they likewise expected me to root for their team. Overall, I did not have trouble in navigating through the competitive sentiments, but in some instances it was tricky. For instance, on one occasion I accompanied a club during an away game. Upon arrival, I enthusiastically greeted the affiliates of the host club. This was however clearly frowned upon by the director of the club whom I travelled with.

Following up on club visits, I approached management teams to arrange interviews with current elite players and coaches. In consultation with management teams, I drafted lists of potential interviewees. In some cases, managements arranged meetings for interviews, generally those who had provided the contact details of players. Once rapport with the players was established and the interview conducted, some players would also provide the contact details of their peers. The selection of the site for the week of participant observation was based on the quality of my relation with the clubs and their accessibility. The very opportunity of engaging in fieldwork illustrates some key aspects of the relatively 'open' character of Dutch elite women's football clubs. This is in contrast to male football clubs, which are in general closed to people who are perceived as 'outsiders', making it very difficult or even impossible to gain access (Roderick, 2006, p. 7). This being said, the access I was granted was nevertheless limited in scope. I very much hoped to be able to observe interaction within the changing room before and after matches and personal encounters between coaches and players, and amongst players, physiotherapist and coaches. However for privacy reasons the coaches decided to limit my access. Within the timeframe of a week, access was allowed to the training field in the stadium, the sky box, and the office spaces. At the start of the week of participant observation the coach informed the players about the context of my presence and stressed my availability for any questions, remarks or concerns. Notably, I was allowed to attend the discussion of tactics for the upcoming match, both amongst the coaches and amongst the coaches and players. Given the competitive nature of the games, this might be considered remarkable. It is, however, unclear to me whether the coaches allowed me this access either because they simply smelled my ignorance of football strategy, or trusted me with potentially sensitive information.

1.1.2 Fieldwork settings

The interviews primarily took place at the interviewees' homes and at club cantinas and offices, but in some cases also at my own office or via skype. The choice of these settings predominantly depended on practical factors, that is availability of the informants. As the majority of Dutch and Belgian based elite football players combine their football practice with part-time work or education, their available time was limited. Hence, I needed to be as flexible as possible in deciding upon interview locations. In all cases I made every effort to ascertain that the interviewees felt relaxed, with the aim of allowing them to speak at length and in their own terms

The week of 'day in the life' participant observation took place at a club located in the Netherlands. Along the overall majority of elite women's football clubs, this club makes use of the facilities of its host clubs, that is stadium, office space, training fields etc. The club is however a semi-private foundation and finances the usage of facilities and the payments of staff members and players with income generated by financial sponsors, public funding and allowances from the Dutch football organisation.

1.1.3 Fieldwork activities and methodological reflections

In total 10 of the 15 clubs taking part in the Dutch-Belgian transnational competition were visited. Eight clubs based in the Netherlands and two clubs based in Belgium. Some Dutch clubs were paid a few visits. These visits enabled not only the establishment of rapport with gatekeepers, but also enabled casual informative talks with sponsors and with relatives of some of the players. These talks were not recorded, but jotted down as field notes. The week of participant observation was devoted to an exploration of three themes: group behaviour, relation between players and technical staff and physicality. The theme of physicality was explored on the basis of the following questions: How do players address their bodies and physical issues in talks with medics? How do players address their bodies and physical issues in talks with peers? How do players negotiate injuries during training sessions and matches? Field notes were made in case of relevant remarks and remarkable social encounters or situations.

The semi-structured in-depth interview was however the most important research method. In total, I conducted 31 interviews. I interviewed 15 current elite football players and 12 elite players active between the 70s and the 90s, of whom four started a professional career as coaches of a national team, either in the Low Countries or abroad. The ages of the current players ranged from eighteen to thirty-four. The age of the former elite players ranged from thirty-seven to sixty-seven. At the time of the interviews, five of the current football players were taking part in the selection of the Dutch national team and two in the selection of the Belgian national team. Three of them played their club football outside the Low Countries. Nine footballers played their club football in the Netherlands and three in Belgium. One of the current elite players was from a mixed cultural and ethnic background and one of the former elite players was of Asian descent. That only two of the players

were from a non-Dutch ethnic background reflects something about what is often called the whiteness of professional women's football (Allison, 2018; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999). During the course of the interviews, both players reflected on their ethnic and cultural background in relation to their football careers. In general, however, ethnicity and race, including whiteness, could not be explored with all of the interviewees. Certain other demographic information was volunteered by the players during the course of their interview, in particular former elite players were keen to discuss social class. I also interviewed two (former) male coaches of the Dutch/Belgian national teams and two female managers, one working at national and the other at club level. As discussed in the previous section, the sample of players interviewed was not randomly selected. In the positivist sense of the word, and as is often the case in qualitative studies, the sample can thus not be considered statistically representative of the broader population of past and current footballers. Meeting such a methodological standard would have required unlimited access to the research population, which was, as mentioned above, impossible. In the rest of this chapter, I show how I take this into account in the way I draw conclusions from the data.

I interviewed all the players who responded positively to my request. The sampling continued after the 'saturation of knowledge' occurred (Bertaux, 1981, p. 37). The resulting data confirms the established view that 12 interviews of a homogenous group is all that is needed to reach saturation (Guest, et al, 2006). Saturation occurred after interviewing both 12 former and 12 current elite football players. Three additional interviews with current players were however conducted, as these were already arranged. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, but they generally tended towards two hours. At the time of arranging the interview, and again at the start of each interview, all interviewees were informed of the purpose of the research, its aims and objectives and what was expected of them, including the amount of time likely to be required for participation. I also made explicit that participation in the research was voluntary and that interviewees could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions. Many of the current elite footballers, whether playing on local or national level, are more or less public figures enjoying celebrity status. To prepare them for public appearances, they received (online) media training, instructing them about the ins and outs of successful public appearances, with a strong focus on what not to say, or what not to share on social media. Since they are accustomed to media interviews and drilled to speak in public in a largely depersonalised tone, it was important to be very explicit about the purpose of the interview. I also encouraged them to talk in a personal way about their experiences. Given their status as public figures and the fragility of their football careers, it was also of key importance to reassure them that their comments would not be traceable to them. To protect confidentiality, agreements were made that the interview transcripts would not be made available to third parties, not even in anonymized form. Elite women's football is a 'small' world, meaning that even in anonymised form, full interview transcripts run the risk of revealing the identity of the interviewees. In the discussion of the research findings below, I make no reference to recognisable persons, dates, locations and contexts.

The interviews were structured around seven key themes: sports biography, social networks, everyday life, gender identity, physicality, media and future plans.[2] These themes provided a comparative framework for all the interviews and at the same time allowed the players to explore their own concerns. Important to note is that the questions I asked were not based on any expectations regarding the three main categories delineated: 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' (see the section '*Overview of the data and key findings'* of this chapter). In effect, I had not expected to ask about sacrifice, but this came up spontaneously as a theme.

Prior to the interviews, I informed myself about the players, including aspects of their football trajectories. This contributed not only to the establishment of rapport, but it also allowed me to formulate more specific questions.

It might be important to note that, with the exception of a few school competitions, I have never been an active football player myself, neither in organised nor in informal form. I can recall that I enjoyed taking part in elementary school competitions, but in general I've never experienced much interest in football, not even passively. However, from my sixth birthday till early adult life, I did practise classical ballet on an intensive basis. What I can recall from my experiences is that many of the clichés about the disciplinary characteristics of ballet are justified. I still feel the eyes of my instructor burning on my shoulders, as these were my weakest spots, the stick behind my back, and the imaginary string puppet player. I thus have experienced what it means to be physically disciplined and to be challenged to push one's body to a next or further level, even when in pain. Both points about my position as an absolute outsider to the world of football and my experiences with harsh training regimes are important to stress, for there are multiple ways these experiences could have affected the research process. These experiences would for example influence the questions I formulated, my reactions to the players' responses and my interpretation of the meanings attributed by the players to their experiences. It also gave me and the players a basis for mutual trust. Several players thanked me for my interest in their experiences of being and becoming an elite football player.

Some players commented on the nature of my questions or were interested in my personal motivations for undertaking research on women's football. These comments and questions contributed to my awareness of the embodied and situated character of knowledge production and also sharpened the data analysis. Without doubt my gender identification has influenced the research procedure. Like any other encounter, an interview is a social situation and demands that the researcher adopts a 'responsible' attitude towards this relation. While I cannot know how my interviewees would have responded to me if I had been a man, what I did experience is that the interviewees felt encouraged and safe to speak

2 In delineating the themes, I followed the insights of Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, in: Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999

about their gendered experiences when I shared some of mine and expressed sympathy and showed understanding. As I wanted the interviewees to construct their own narratives, I did of course not speak at length about my own experiences. I can only speculate about the role of my ethnic background in the research process. Like the overall majority of the interviewees, I am white.

Unfortunately for the reasons discussed above, issues relating to race and ethnicity could not be sufficiently explored with the interviewees. There is thus a risk that this research positions white women's football players as the 'universal' or at least 'paradigmatic' subject. I am mindful about this risk, which in fact haunts gender and sports studies in general, as in these inquiries gender and ethnicity tend to be studied in isolation, each constituting a separate field of enquiry (Ratna, 2011; Scraton, 2005). What must however be emphasised is the fundamental role gender plays in the organisation of football. First of all, in the past women were denied access to the sport. Secondly, as in elite sports more generally, competitions are still distributed into men's and women's competitions.

I can also only speculate about the role of physical ability in the research process. In an obvious manner elite sports celebrate physical abilities. Would the interviewees have responded differently if I were visibly disabled? I cannot tell. I would, however, have faced a great many more obstacles and barriers in gaining access to the field had I been, for instance, reduced in my mobility. I jumped from train to train, bus to bus, got lost in the middle of nowhere, slipped on wet grassland, got stuck at night and hitchhiked.

As the detailed and lengthy discussion of the data in section 1.2 of this chapter suggests, the interviews yielded rich data. Even as regards issues of race and ethnicity, their limited occurrence in the interview materials might on its own be instructive. It might seem that this thesis could have done more with the data. However, it is precisely the data that dictate the route this thesis takes. As will be made fully clear, a key part of the data concerns the insistent references to sacrifice. In so far as it is any researcher's obligation to take the data of their research as seriously as possible, this anomaly required my utmost attention. There is no denying that many further studies can be envisaged on the basis of this data, but for the scope of this thesis, I had to prioritise the most conspicuous part of the data.

1.1.4 Structure of the analysis

With the interviewees' permission all the interviews were recorded. The records were manually transcribed by me, which took around 6 hours per hour of recording. The advantage of manually transcribing the data was that it enabled me to become familiar with the data from an early stage of the research process. Initially, I alternated between data collection and analysis, allowing for both a first reading of the data and a sharpened focus in subsequent interviews (for a concise discussion of the importance of 'contant comparison', that is alternation between data collection and analysis, see: Boeije, 2010, pp. 83-85). The interviews were conducted in Dutch. Because of time constrains, I only translated the

excerpts presented in this thesis into English. It goes without saying that every translation comes with deformations and alterations. I have translated these excerpts to the best of my abilities being attentive to tone and subtleties. As the excerpts only make sense in their larger context, that is prior comments and questions, or the interview as a whole, I am however confident, that possible mistranslations have not impacted the research in any significant way.

Initially I used a software programme for the analysis of the data. While data analysis programmes clearly have several advantages, I very much felt that the data analysis would benefit from manual data coding. At the first level of coding. that is 'open coding', distinct categories were found in the data, which subsequently formed the basic units of analysis (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). In practical terms this means that I broke the data down into different categories. I used different coloured highlights to distinguish the categories. For instance, as the interviewees consistently talked about gender difference, each time an interviewee mentioned gender difference or something related to gender, I used the same colour. Hence, gender difference would become a category.

Then during the second level of coding, that is 'axial coding', I first of all used the distinct codes to reread the transcripts to ascertain that the codes sufficiently covered the data (Boeije, 2010, p. 108). Secondly, I analysed the relation between the diverse categories and made distinctions between main and subcategories. To examine these relations, I asked myself some questions, such as the following: what conditions caused or influenced these categories? what was the social-political context? and what are the associated effects or consequences? Of particular importance here were contextual differences between the experiences of former and current elite players. As stated above, it was only in 1971 that the Dutch football association enshrined women's football in its regulations and in 1979 that it allowed membership to girls under the age of 16. Some former elite players didn't enjoy today's facilities, neither was there a scouting apparatus, such as current players are familiar with, in place. In the presentation of the data, references are made to these contextual differences. Bringing into focus contextual differences enabled me to familiarise myself with the differences in the experiences of different participants, but also with their continuities. Deliberately, I did not choose a comparative research design. First of all because the age between the so-called former and current players did not always differ substantially. Secondly, some of the former and current players even trained or played international matches together. As such it would have been impossible to identify 'hard' criteria for comparison.

Finally, during the 'selective coding phase', but already initiated by the process of axial coding, I re-confirmed the selection of both core and subcategories or themes (Boeije, 2010, pp. 114-117). This selection resulted in the delineation of three superordinate and 15 subordinate themes.

1.2 Overview of the data and key findings

1.2.1 Major results of the coding analysis of the interviews

Table 1 presents the major results of the coding analysis of the interviews conducted with former and present elite women's football players. The table shows three superordinate and 15 subordinate categories emerging from the analysis of the experiences of elite women's football players. The superordinate categories include 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice'. The table also indicates that six subcategories are associated with the major category 'high performance', seven with the 'gender policing' and two with the major category 'sacrifice'. All players discussed the superordinate categories 'high performance' and 'gender policing' and the overall majority 'sacrifice'. However no individual player discussed all the 15 categories in describing their experiences of being and becoming an elite women's football player.

Table 1. Major categories of the experiences of women's football players.

Major categories	Associated concepts
High performance	Culture of competition, Working attitude, Structures of control, Public expectations and surveillance concerning performances, Fragility and uncertain nature of football career, Post football plans
Gender Policing	Youth experience, Club culture, Gender identity, Negative view of Femininity, Sexualisation, Female Apologetic, Cynicism and self-protection.
Sacrifice	Football versus real-life values, Disempowerment

The dominant category referred to in the interview is 'high performance' and includes descriptions, interpretations and assumptions on what it takes and means to take part in and succeed in high performance sport. The focus on high performance most emphasizes: (a) culture competiveness, (b) working attitude and (c) the fragility and uncertain nature of a football career. As Table 1 indicates, three other categories referring to high performance are also elaborated on by the players, however less frequently and not by all the players. One of these categories is future plans and refers to post football career plans. This category is not elaborated on by former elite football players and nor by a few current players still at the start of their football career.

The second irreducible category referred to in the interviews is 'gender policing'. Here the players' personal language reflects descriptions, interpretations and assumptions about the role of gender in the context of their experiences of being and becoming a football player. The focus on the role of gender most emphasize: (a) youth experiences, (b) gender identity and (c) negative view of femininity. However as Table 1 indicates, four other categories referring to the role of gender are also elaborated on by the players, albeit less frequently. Two of these categories are female apologetic and cynicism/self-protection. I use these categories to refer to strategies or tactics deployed to cope with the diverse forms of sexism at work in the context of football. As the subcategory 'female apologetic' refers

to a specific gendered form of behaviour, this category is distinguished from cynicism/self-protection, which in themselves are not gendered. Overall, these findings support the view that the policing of gender forms a substantial part of the experiences of being and becoming an elite football player.

The third irreducible category identified is 'sacrifice' and refers to the willingness of players to make sacrifices in terms of health, social life, financial security and future prospects for the sake of career advancement in sport. This category reveals that making sacrifices is part and parcel of the lives of the players. However, the testimonies of the players show something curious is going on. In the reflections and elaboration classified under the category 'Football versus real-life values' we see first of all that the players describe their experiences of being and becoming an elite football player as being characterised by contradictions between divergent commitments and values. More particularly we see that the players describe their commitment to their sport in opposing terms to their commitment to health, financial security and social life. Secondly we see in the expressions of the players that they do not attribute equal weight to the diverse commitments and values, but by contrast attribute more weight to their commitment to football, regardless of the value or commitment that its stands in opposition with. Third, we see that the players cannot explain why this is the case. To be more precise, what we see is that the players judge their participation in football as relatively insignificant, compared to the real-life values of health, financial security and social life, but nevertheless attribute more weight to their commitment to football. The curious thing going on is thus that the players judge their participation in football as unimportant, while this participation at the same time motivates them to make sacrifices in terms of health, financial security and social life. The second category referring to sacrifice is 'disempowerment' and refers to feelings of disempowerment, induced by the players inarticulable yet complete commitment to their sport. What we see in the expressions of the players classified under this category is that the very fact that they cannot makes sense of their willingness to make sacrifices in terms of health, social life and financial security, makes the players feel powerless, incapable of making sense of their own lives and of taking their life paths into their own hands.

As will be made apparent, the irreducibility of the theme of sacrifice precisely consists in that it cannot be explained in terms of real-life values. By contrast, it points to an experience of the co-existence of two scales of value: one referring to real-life objective values and one referring to the value of being immersed in football. What we on the other hand see in the descriptions, interpretations and assumptions about the meaning of taking part in and succeeding in a high performance sport and about the role of gender therein, is the experience of only one scale of value, namely one referring only to real-life objective values.

In the following section I will give a detailed presentation of the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data. Both in terms of scope and focus this presentation may seem superfluous. That is, I am well aware that the presentation demands some patience from the

reader. However, the choice of a lengthy discussion of the data has been duly considered. First of all, since I am not allowed to disclose the interview transcripts, the presentation provides a feel of what the data looks like and what kinds of people and contexts we are dealing with. Second, the detailed and lengthy discussion of the data shows that the categorisation of the data into three irreducible themes and especially the introduction of the theme of sacrifice is not artificial, but emerges naturally form the data. Important to note is also that the excerpts that I discuss within each of the 15 subordinate categories stem from different interviews.

1.2.2 Key findings 'high performance'

Culture of competition

As suggested in the previous section, one of the subthemes most frequently discussed by the players concerns football's culture of competitiveness. The majority of the players, both former and present expressed worries with the competitive culture of football. Telling is the following excerpt from an interview with a former elite player:

> *I am an easygoing person, but in the team, you just had to fight for your place. Sometimes even during training sessions they tried to kick me out of the field, really this happened. Fortunately, the coach would speak with the culprits. I can handle these kinds of things, but it is not really how things should be. You know, when you are pushing yourself during training and then they tackle you, or kick you in the shin, in the hope of replacing you. Those who would sit on the bench during matches were the worst. I think there is nothing wrong with competiveness, but no, and besides I could handle it.*

For some former players the competitive characteristics of elite football even continued to play a role in their post-football lives. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with a former player who pursued a career as an international coach.

> *Well look at my self-development. I had learned that to achieve something I had to fight, to push myself and battle for my position. And that is great, it allows you to achieve things. It brought me a lot for myself as a player and as a coach trying to fan the fire in the players so they'd achieve their full potential. That energy is something that I still bring with me. But there is also a downside to it. Fighting is not always the best thing to do. But it was only later in life that I learned that. Then I understood that it is sometimes important to take a step back from your emotions. But I only learned that later in life. When I was playing football or working as a coach I was a kind of fighting machine and that became my way of life. After my football period, I followed some courses that allowed me to understand these processes and then I decided to change things. That brought me peace.*

A few current elite players negotiate competiveness in a fairly similar way:

> *In women's football everyone is focused on their own success and position in the field. In the changing room, people would say this or that didn't go well or is badly organised. And then I'd go the coach and tell him what we discussed. And then the coach wanted to know who had said those things. But then no one would take responsibility and then the coach would blame me. So I learned that in women's football people are selfish and only concerned with themselves and their position. I learned it is not the best thing to start friendships with your teammates. You can't really be friends with them, as you can't count on them, because they are all focused on their own position.*

> *It is only now that I realise how selfish the world of football actually is. This week I went to the library and there I found a book by this guy who had done research on the personal characteristics of elite athletes. Well, we have always been treated as if we were extraordinary: you are so good. What I read was really about me, and I thought I am actually making a fool of myself. I know that other people will fix things for me. I recognised myself in the book and there are quite a few characteristics I want to get rid of. In the team things are really bad, they are so self-centred. That's a big difference with friends who do not play. They are much more empathetic.*

The majority of the players considered the 'world of elite football' a hostile environment, dominated by a focus on personal gain and success. To a certain extent competiveness was taken as a given, but on the condition that teammates would respect fair play. Some current players however suggested that in preparation for an important match some solidarity could also be found:

> *The more matches I play the better I become and then my contract also gets better. Receiving a better contract reminds you of your motivations for engaging in elite sports. Everyone in the team works for herself and has her own ambitions. But now we have a common goal, which is winning the competition.*

Working attitude

While the players in general lament the competitive nature of 'the world of elite football', a winning mind-set, self-control, working hard and putting the team above oneself are considered key characteristics of a good working attitude. Articulations of what constitutes a good working attitude were also found in the interviews with coaches. A good illustration of their points of view is to be found in the following excerpts, each from different interviews:

> *The national team flew charter to that country, for those princesses should not be disturbed. But really, we are not there yet. Who is going to disturb them, at best they receive some positive responses, like 'good luck girls.' Organising a charter is something you only do in men's football. They only started with that when the boys really needed it. During my*

training camps I literally rented bikes. That is much better. They must go through tough spots and experience being in deep shit. Only then they realise what it is all about. I really believe that is the way to success.

All that matters during matches is that you achieve your goals. And, injuries are just part the game. Sometimes you have to make an exception, but only when there are good reasons to take measurements, for instance when someone just returned from a knee injury. That's something different than a player who is fit and just fine.

They are a bit spoiled you know. There are players that say, please organise this or that for me. But organise this for me, fuck off. Everything is organised perfectly fine for you. You should go for it and take responsibility. And you know, these sort of persons, you recognise them from the start. But I am really allergic to that. You have to work hard. Talent may be given to you, but what matters is what you do with it. And only the best ones make it.

Lots of things are organised for today's players, the conditions are much better. But there are still players who still mess things up. But they are talented and could develop into really great players. Mentally, there is a top, but also an absolute top.

For these coaches, a player who possesses a good attitude is someone who always works hard, has a will to win, is constantly looking to improve their level of performance and is willing to play with pain. Many of the current players who I interviewed made reference to 'hard work', a 'winning mind', 'self-control' and 'putting the team above oneself'. The importance of a 'winning mind' is clearly expressed in the following excerpts.

There are people who can't deal with competitiveness. Those are the ones that drop out of the national team. But they are also clear about that, saying that it is not for them. If the drive to win is not part of your nature or character, things become really difficult. But I really feel the need to win. And the advantage is that the more pressure I feel, the better I become. I perform much better, because I want to be the best. If you resign yourself to the situation you won't achieve anything. For instance when you are selected for the National team, but not granted minutes to play and are still happy. That is not the mentality needed to achieve things.

It is not always easy to deal with defeats, sometimes it is more difficult. When announcements are made about who will be given a spot in the team, 11 players are happy and all the others are disappointed. But they should be disappointed, because if you're not disappointed you accept the situation. That is not how it works, you just need to learn to deal with those things. There are two options, either you say, 'well then I quit', or you start focusing on improving yourself.

Next to a winner's mentality, various players mention self-control as a key characteristic of a successful elite football player:

> *Right now we don't have to play matches for 2 weeks as the national team is abroad. What you then see is that people start training in the gym, because they then say they are in pain. And as soon they have to play a match they again start training outside. I don't thing that is good. I also train outside, even when it rains, and push myself.*

> *It's not only about training 6 times a week. There is much more discipline to it. You have to be strict with your diet, but also train your strength. You shouldn't go to clubs, or drink, or smoke. There are many more things that you should or shouldn't do if you aim to perform like an athlete.*

What emerges from these excerpts is not only the importance of self-control, but also one's willingness to play in pain:

> *I always keep on playing. Even when I broke my nose. We were playing against Germany and already after 10 minutes I broke my nose, but I just kept on playing.*

Also indicative is the following remark from a former coach:

> *During a match, the only thing that matters is how you pass the time and how you achieve your goals. Sustaining an injury is then just part of the game, unless there are underlying reasons. If someone just recovered from a cruciate ligament injury, you deal with that player differently than a player that is fit.*

Another characteristic of a good working attitude is working hard. Exemplary are the following articulations of current players:

> *If people think it's unfair that they have to sit on the bench, they lack the means of critically assessing their own performances. Because you don't sit on the bench for nothing. If that makes you angry, or you make negative remarks about someone else's performances, then that is just not right. If you want to play you have to push and improve yourself.*

> *If you don't go to the gym, for strength training, I understand that. But then again there is this but, for if you're then not given time to play, you should not complain. Because you know that you're not working hard enough.*

Expressed in these excerpts is not only that working hard is considered a key characteristic of a good working attitude, but they also suggest the importance of accepting one's defeat. Something also elaborated on in the following excerpt:

If someone on the national team turns out to be better than I am, then I have to accept that. Of course I would find it hard, as I have always been allowed to play. It would be very difficult to have to sit on the bench, because you also hope to perform well for the national team.

All the excerpts presented so far indicate that it is necessary for players to possess a 'right' working attitude. However an adjusted player not only possesses the right attitude, but also demonstrates and proves to others that she is fitted for the job. Consequently players that fail to live up these demands, risk serious punishments. Particularly telling are the following testimonies from current players.

I played two matches for the national team. But the coach and I didn't really get along. That is also the reason why my international career was put on hold. Perhaps I wasn't myself such a good girl. I must say I found it really hard to deal with all those rules and regulations. From the outset it looks of course amazing, playing for the national team. But there are so many rules and regulations, you have to go to sleep and have your dinner at such and such time. That blights your life and there are so many things you are not allowed to do. We also received a code of conduct on paper. The football organisation and the coach have these views on how things should be done and most people just obey, but I would start discussion and said that I didn't agree with the rules, because of this or that. But, no they cannot handle criticism.

The coach of the national team sent me off, because she thought that I wasn't serious enough. Well, that was fine with me. I was 18 and I found it really great to be part of the national selection and I also played matches for the national team under 19. But you know, when games were lost and someone makes a joke, I just have to laugh. But then the coach didn't think I was taking it seriously enough, so I was sent off.

What is expressed by these two players is that there is an expectation of obedience: 'I wasn't myself such a good girl', 'on inappropriate moments when you know that should actually keep your mouth shut'.

Structures of control

As already suggested in the excerpts presented above, elite women's football is characterised by an authoritarian management style. Coaches, but also managers corporeally control the players and promote an attitude of obedience in them. Players' lives are, however, not only constrained by strict codes of conduct, but also by availability, daily training timetables and diet. As suggested in the following excerpt:

There are all these obligations. It is not only playing football, but then you have to show up for dietary advice, or an activity with the team, or another obligatory meeting, or a meeting with the sponsors. Last year they also organised a new year's reception and I didn't show up for that and I got reprimanded.

The majority of the current players combine football with work or education. Exceptions are those players that can make a living out of their footballing career. For many players combining a 5-day training regime with a part-time job or studies provokes tensions inside and outside the football field:

> *Here at the club they demand from you to be flexible, but it doesn't work like that at my job.*

> *At 6 VWO I wasn't feeling really well, but not that bad actually. So I played the match and the next day I had an exam, an official state exam, but I woke up and I felt extremely sick. Thus, well, my mother called the school to explain that I was sick. That was a thing, because it was an official exam. And I do not get sick that often, but then. At school they were of the opinion that I had become sick because I had played a match the day before. So they decided to fail me and give me a 1. Obviously I was far from amused and at home we decided not to let it go. We filed a suit against the school, and in the end I won. I was given the opportunity of a resit and received a very good mark.*

> *At this moment I feel that I am failing both the club and the school. I can't give myself 100%, only 90% and that doesn't feel right. Because of that I feel that I am failing both the club and the school, actually I am failing everyone. So I should start making some decisions.*

In addition to availability and daily training timetable, players' lives are also constrained in terms of diet and body measurements:

> *The national team very strictly monitors you. Our weight and fat percentage are constantly measured. And then they evaluate the results, this is ok, that is accepted or that is too much. They are very strict in that. It's not that consequences immediately follow. They give you 2 or 3 months, but after 6 months they would say there is a limit to it, in putting energy in you, because you're not doing anything with it.*

> *My level of fat was too high and for me it was difficult to lower it. I've been quite concerned with that. Sometimes I had to show up for a meeting to discuss how things were going, and that my fat percentage should be lowered. That would improve my performances. Well my fat percentage really should be lowered. But actually all that didn't make me better. The monitoring didn't make me better. Because, you kind of know when to expect these measurements and then I would try hard to lose weight, but then I didn't manage to do so. At least that's how things were for me. Every time I thought now I am really going to lose weight, the opposite was the case.*

It is noteworthy that for some current players body measurement and dietary norms are just part and parcel of being and becoming an elite player, while others would critically reflect on these forms of control.

Public expectations and surveillance concerning performance

The majority of the players expressed that at an early age their 'dream job' was to become a professional footballer. For some, the realisation of this dream was of symbolic value. In particular playing for one of the internationally renowned Dutch clubs, was considered to be of great value. Other players however, considered playing for a well-known club an honour, but not a matter of prestige:

> *It's an honour to play for this club. Sometimes when I see a small club flag in a car, then I think, ohh, that's my club. But it's never like, 'You know I play football and that I am allowed to play football at my own level that is something really great.' But that I play at this club, a well- known club has little meaning to me. But, yes, if I see a little flag, I think well it's actually nice. But it's not that I am outspoken about it, I hardly ever tell people that I play for this club.*

For all players, playing in the national squad is invested with prestige and symbolic value. Playing matches for large audiences or 'before the eyes of the whole nation' influenced their attitude towards the game. With the aim of ensuring a balance between what the public wanted and what the player could offer, those players granted a place on the national team are challenged to manage the expectations of the public:

> *Playing for the national team is a bit different. I feel more pressure ahead of international competitions. I am not sure, but the stakes are higher when you play an international match. Naturally you want to deliver, and prior to matches you are a bit tense and have a certain focus. I also experience some tensions here during matches, but in a different way than during international matches. Many more people watch you and the stakes are higher.*

> *I once had to play a match, in 2008, or perhaps in 2009, in any case during the 2008/2009 season. We lost 6-0 and the stadium was completely full, I think with around 30,000 people. And then already during the first 15 minutes I made the worst mistake of my life. It was so bad, really a nightmare. I can still visualise what happened. I was devastated for quite a while. We lost by 6-0 and of course I was not to blame for everything. But because of my early mistake we started with 1-0. We started that badly because of me. So many people had watched it, in the stadium or at home in front of the T.V. I was really devastated.*

For injured players or players recovering from an injury that had taken them out of the game for a considerable amount of time, the key challenge to expectation management is related to public criticism. Particularly international players working on their 'comeback' on the national team, or who sat on the bench during matches, or were granted only a few minutes to play, expressed difficulties in negotiating public demands.

> *Well right now, things are getting better. But it's not always fun. You know, people don't know about your situation and then you hear, you are sitting on the bench, or you're not*

in shape. But then I say, I have been out of the game for 8 months and that the coach already asks me back is a very positive sign. And then they say, 'oh, you have been out of the game for so long'.

Particularly telling is the response to this player's performance by a self-proclaimed women's football expert in the context of an informal meeting, who was however unaware of the players condition.

She doesn't impress me. Have you seen her? Her performance is unsatisfactory. I must tell you that I can't believe that the coach selected her. She will not bring us where we have to be.

Fragility and the uncertain nature of a football career

The majority of the current players expressed concerns about undesired endings of their footballing practice. First of all, in particular players aiming to take part in the national team, or already granted a place, expressed that they felt subjected to the whims of coaches. Take for instance the following excerpt from a player who was in her own words sent away by the coach of a club:

She asked me to join her team. And as we had already experienced working together, I said well I'll do that, but I need to be sure that things will be different. And she said, yes, what happened in the past stays in the past. But then already after one month she told me to leave. I was really angry you know. Sometimes I can be a bit naïve, I just believe what they say. I am like that, also with meetings. I told you that I would be here at 11 o'clock, and then I just need to be here at 11 o'clock. 11 o'clock is 11 o'clock for me. So I needed to start protecting myself from this kind of thing. I misjudged her. She just sent me away.

Or from a player aiming to take part on the national team:

I was invited by a club abroad to play there for 3 months. I very strongly felt that I should accept the invitation, it had been on my list for so long by then. I told the coach that I would go abroad for 3 months to develop myself and then not only for football, but also for myself. The coach told me that he was happy for me and also told me that he would call me to make arrangements for the championship. And then I said to him, fine I'll hear from you. But you know I never received a call. And then I received this e-mail that I should return my equipment. Of course I never did that.

However, uncertainties in footballing careers are predominantly caused by injuries. All players noted that they had suffered from injuries. Some players were recovering from an injury at the time of the interview. The overall majority of the players stated that injuries represented a threat to their careers. Indicative are the following testimonies:

In women's football, maybe you know this, but lots of women suffer from cruciate ligament injuries, actually I can't name a girl that didn't suffer from a cruciate ligament injury. I would find that really awful. But it can happen to anyone. I train and do the best I can, I do everything to prevent it, but no matter how hard you train, or how fit you are it can happen to anyone. I try to comfort myself thinking like that. I really do everything that is in my power, but anyone can get seriously injured.

I had three operations. But that was at the start, lately things have been going pretty well. Naturally I was extremely frustrated. I had just had an operation and then they started with selections. I was worried, because I couldn't take part in selection matches. It's really frustrating for an athlete, because you want to practise the game every day, especially if you don't have hope of a quick recovery, things don't get better and you don't know when you will be capable of playing again.

Things are a bit different with selections for the national squad. There it's like: 'If you're injured, well too bad, we'll take someone else instead of you.' On the Dutch national team, you are basically a number.

You play because you want to and to achieve something. But at the same time you have to realise that it can be over just like that. For this reason education is also important, in case something goes wrong, or the circumstances are such that you can no longer achieve anything.

Quite often I thought about quitting, as I was afraid things would never get better. I was quite depressed. It still goes through my mind, but then I thought about what to do after finishing my studies, for what if I don't get better? Now, though, it seems that I will recover. Of course I've suffered from cruciate ligaments injuries and they are something that take between seven and eight months and, if all goes well, you can at least return. But with this injury, things are much more complex. It can take a few months or a few years. Little is known about it. That is the most difficult part, that I don't know what to expect. Sometimes it was alright, but a few days later the pain would return and then I'd be super unhappy. That was the most difficult part, the uncertainty.

Post football plans

As previously mentioned, the majority of current players, combine football with work or education. The exceptions are those players who can make a living out of their football career. The majority of players that combined football with studies or educational programmes 'organised' school around their football. Quite a few of them expressed feelings of regret related to the limited investments in their education. Exemplary is the following excerpt:

Looking back, I wish things had turned out differently with my studies. I studied physiotherapy and it took me a few years longer, because I played two European championships and well, that takes a lot of time. And for me it was easy, I could decide to skip some courses

and focus on football. But if I look back at all those classes that I missed and all the difficulties to get through exams, I regret that.

The difficulties experienced in negotiating both the demands of elite football and those of study programmes or future careers and the uncertain nature of football made a few players decide to quit the game by the end of the season.

You are the first person I am telling the news. But I decided to quit. It's just too much. I have to go on, make a career and earn a living. I have a new goal and that is finding a job. I'm doing an internship right now and I hope to convince them to hire me in the future. But right now I am not certain that I fully meet expectations. That makes me upset, because I really want to show them what I am worth. But that's the reason why I decided to quit.

As I am now a bit older, you realize there are more things in life. My girlfriend and I started with this aim to have a baby. I've always wanted children. We talked about the right moment to start, as I still play football. But we've been dating for five years now and this is the right moment to start with it. So I'm concerned with quite different things now. So I have decided that I'll quit when I'm pregnant.

At 2 o'clock I always have to tell my colleagues, sorry but I need to go. But then my colleagues continue working and that doesn't feel good. Lately I am also suffering a bit more from injuries. Perhaps my body is resisting. But, yes, I'm done with it.

Right now things are going pretty well. And with the national team, I could continue. But eventually I don't think it's worth it. I can explain to myself that I tried it, and that I am capable of it and that I am good enough, but it's not what I desire. That's what I realized this year. It's just not for me to set everything aside for football. In the end my social life and my studies are more important. Thus next year I'll start with a Master programme abroad and then I'll quit football.

Predominantly the level of education received, but also one's socio-economic background would influence their assessment of the 'value' of the game, as well as their decisions to continue or quit the game. The following testimonies are telling:

I am actually happy that my parents always reminded me of the importance of education. Looking back, I am really happy with that. Some girls playing in the national team completed their studies, but never had the chance to start a career outside football. And the longer you wait the more difficult that becomes. But at a certain moment football is done. Lots of younger girls on my team quit school or their studies because they find it too hard to combine the two. But I am really happy that I finished my studies.

There was a match of the under-19 National team during my exams. They arranged that I could take my exams at the embassy. But I wanted to do this special programme combining economics and law and in order to get accepted my grades needed to be really good. Thus, I said, one way or another, taking my exams there will influence my results. Football is great and all that, and it's also great that I can take part in a European championship, but no I won't join them. So I didn't go, I took my exams here and received good marks.

In contrast to these footballers, players who make a living out of their footballing are concerned with their post-football career. Yet they do not attribute the same level of urgency to this. The following excerpt is exemplary:

Lots of people confront me with my future: 'What if your football career is over, because you can't continue playing the game? What are your plans and shouldn't you already make arrangements, or take some courses?' Continuously people ask me 'But what are your plans for the future?.' But I don't know, I'll see. At this moment I still play and I do not feel that I should worry that much. Of course I do think about it. But I'll see. I am not in that much of a hurry. I earn enough and I don't have to work besides football. And later, well I can work the rest of my life. Thus I'm not really motivated to take courses at this moment.

1.2.3 Key findings: 'gender policing'

Youth experiences

All the players interviewed started playing football at a young age. All the current players started playing football in an organised form. During their childhood years a few of the former footballers played informally, as they were not allowed to take part in organised football. These early experiences were generally in informal spaces within local neighbourhoods. In talking about their first experiences with football, the former players recounted the significance of the street, but also grassland as the spaces where they began their footballing careers.

Of course, I started playing football on the streets. I come from a working-class neighbourhood. When I grew up, kids would only play outside, really outside and I loved playing outside. I loved all sports, but football the best.

I was born in the countryside and I started playing football with my brother and boys from the neighbourhood. I have some tiny black and white photos that portray me at the age of 5/6 and you see me wearing a pleated skirt and a ball, very proud. From that moment onwards we always played football. There was, of course, plenty of space, because of the rural area. I've just always played football. I also know that from my diary. I played football every single day, in the morning, at noon. Before school, after school, always. I played with boys from the neighbourhood. My neighbours, I think, were a family with eight children and six were boys. My brother played football, my sisters too. So it was a kind of football family.

In these quotes, former players reflect almost nostalgically on their earliest experiences with football. For the majority of them, leaving the relatively safe space of their neighbourhood came at a social price.

> *My parents really enjoyed it; they were fine with it. I never heard something along the lines, 'you are a girl and therefore you are not allowed to play football.' But then I went to primary school and there I encountered the first obstacle. At primary school you play football during each lunch break, you form groups and there is no real distinction between girls and boys. That's the great part at that age, there is no distinction. I encountered the distinction when older groups started with organised school football and I couldn't join them, there I found out that I was a girl.*

> *My brothers were playing football and I stood behind the side lines and then I ran along the lines during the game, fantasising I took part in the game. At a certain moment the parents found out about my wish to play football, so they made space for me to run around the field.*

> *No one came up with the idea to let me play football. My parents found it very sad for me, but well that was the just the way things went and with school football you were also not allowed to participate. I was allowed to take part in training sessions, but not in matches. Thus, always separated. And wearing a skirt was also a hindrance, because boys made me fall on the floor, on the ground to see your underpants, so everything that had to do with being a girl was an obstacle for me. When I went to high school I played football with a can during breaks and this guy who was a class above me, literally told me that my place was on the bench. I wanted to play football, but I had to sit on the bench. At PE classes girls and boys were separated and we had separate dressing rooms, so I thought it must be for that reason. But when I entered the gym I heard boys playing football above me, for six years. It took five years for someone to ask me to go upstairs to play football. That was in the 5th grade. Things were different back then.*

When playing unofficial football within the relatively safe space of their neighbourhoods for these players gender differences were not really significant. Being denied access to organised school football made them aware of gender normalisations. One of the former players, desiring to take part in organised football, had her hair cut off as that would make her look like a boy and thus allow her to take part in the game:

> *And then I got to this age where you can play at F level and I really wanted that. But then girls were not allowed to play football. So I made sure I had a short haircut. I told the hairdresser to cut my hair so short that people wouldn't see I was a girl. My parents always acted as if it was the most normal thing in the world. I enjoyed it and my parents have always supported me.*

While current elite players didn't encounter legal restrictions in participating in organised football, nevertheless the reflections on their youth experiences highlight the tenuous position of girls within the space of organised football. They were insiders, yet marginalised others, as highlighted by the reflections of players that took part in mixed competitions:

> *I was around six and occasionally you would see another girl. But no, it was not normal. Every week, or at least very often, opponents and their parent said things like, look that is a girl, that is weird. It's going to be an easy game today. And later, I heard people guessing my gender, is it a girl or a boy? And when I did something well, they would say, she looks like a boy. Those kinds of typical things. I will never forget. I was quite frustrated about the whole thing.*

> *There was a coach who initially didn't want me on his team. We played at national level and then the guys were so strong and big. But then the following year the board decided to give me a place on that team, but they said they could not be held responsible for injuries. Later the coach apologised and said that he'd never seen someone that tough and that he was really happy with me. But damn, I always had to prove myself first. And then there were the opponents and their parents, shouting 'it's a girl.' I had a good time with those guys. But looking back, I don't know if I would recommend it to my daughter, if I have one.*

Club culture

The majority of the former players reported feeling under threat at football clubs, as the extent they could make use of facilities was subject to change and much depended on the benevolence of boards.

> *It was a continuous comparison, between men and women's football. Between men and women and that was the fight. They received that and we only that and when we wanted to train more, it wasn't possible. Or at the club, I am thinking of club x. We were training somewhere in a corner, with only space for seven against seven and the men played on the main training field. They played on field one and we played on field two. We had those balls, clothing and facilities and they had that, you know. That was always a fight. I know that. So there were always differences in what counts as important and what not and that is still the situation. Not only between men and women, but also between the teams. The first men's team is the most important. Even where a former teammate of mine for instance coaches now. The men play fifth grade and the women play in the first division, and still they have to fight to be able to train on the first field.*

Of interest is that one of the former players not only discussed unfair distribution of resources, but also said that she experienced difficulties with team mates who explicitly called themselves feminist, or openly displayed sexuality.

> *Some would call themselves feminists, but for me that was not a thing. I'm not sure how to explain this, but they were right, sometimes. I mean men and women are equal. I mean*

the one is not better than the other or should receive more than the other. At the football organisation men had it all. I do understand it if you fight for that, but not when you fight for feminism. That a guy would bully me, because I am a woman, I never experienced that. So I don't need to fight for that. What did hurt me in women's football and that happened quite often in the past, when you went to a match, there were groups of girls kissing each other on the field. Then I thought I don't do that with my boyfriend, either, you can also do that later, why does that need to happen on the field? They were challenging others, they wanted to show and prove themselves. That bothered me at times.

It was, however, not only former players, but also current coaches and players who felt they were being mistreated by club managers and coaches. Recall that the majority of women's football clubs make use of the facilities of their host clubs, that is stadium, gym, training fields etc. and are dependent on the benevolence of managers and coaches of the host club. The following, rather long quotes, are exemplary:

Just look at the struggle here at the club. There were five directors and they all started with, 'let's have a chat' and then they said that they had some affinities with women's football. But eventually men's football is their core business, women are just dangling out there. And if times are good with the men and if the men's coach and the director support you, you can stay, but if they don't like women's football or things go wrong then they dump you and your team. Actually that happened, but then someone else jumped in. If it wasn't for him we wouldn't be sitting here right now, then this club wouldn't have existed, well that's obviously a shame. At times I talk about it with the head of the foundation. But, the men's team got a new trainer and I just made some arrangements with the old one. The new trainer immediately started to make demands about training dates and times. The head of the foundation assured me the new men's trainer had to adjust to the situation, but I really worry, we are just secondhand goods. Once we came to train with the team, and I am always extremely early and then I saw men on the field, and we could not train. At such moments I feel so slighted. Then I said, we will simply not train here, we'll go somewhere else. They said it was a matter of starting up communication, but it happened three times a week. I've had so many bad experiences and struggles to overcome the past years, it's really difficult'.

Well, we have a new coach for the men's team and he counts us for nothing, and he shows this. Yesterday we had a meeting with the team and he just runs into the changing room. When the men's team is having a meeting, we are, so to speak, not even allowed to breathe in the hallway, because that might possibly disturb them. Yet when we have a meeting, they just knock and bang on the door and when they need something from the changing room and yes we share the same changing room. For example, yesterday we had a meeting and this coach just walked through the room. Afterwards my coach asked us what we thought about that. So, I said, you mean about that man. Everybody started laughing and I know it's not always the wisest thing to do, but if you do not allow me, than I won't allow you.

He just has something against women's football, but I do not know what. He doesn't allow us anything and hates women's football. I really explode from this kind of thing. Every single time I come across him I need to show myself off, because you are not the boss and we also play football.

Noteworthy is how the coach describes herself and her team as secondhand goods and the current player is certain that the coach of the men's team hates women's football. These words reflect the tenuous position of women's football players, occupying privileged positions which have not been reserved for them, and for which they are not the norm. Violating the space players and coaches regard as their own, the coaches and managers of men's teams make clear that the presence of women at the club is not uncontested. In this regard, the following incident is worth mentioning. One afternoon during my week of participant observation, I observed the coach and the assistant coach developing the strategy for the upcoming match, making use of a board and pawns, which all took place in the women's team's skybox. At a certain moment one of the facility employees entered the room followed by a group of potential (male) sponsors, apologizing for the fact that the other skyboxes were closed. He showed them the room and informed them about all the conveniences, the great atmosphere and the opportunities for business networking. Perhaps unaware of the presence of the coaches, he made the telling remark: 'while the men watch the game their wives can make themselves comfortable with some wine at the bar, because after all women do not really like football.' The coaches did not seem to have heard the facility employee and because I didn't want to add fuel to the flames, I decided not to start a conversation about the incident. The incident however makes clear not only that stereotypical images still persist, but it also points to the marginal position the women's team occupies within the confines of the club. Also telling in this regard are the following quotes:

Sometimes the guys make an effort to watch a match.

Here at the club it is okay to greet the men and sometimes they are up for a little chat.

In general, current players report that their male counterparts hardly show interest in them or in the achievements of their team. Receiving recognition—in the ethical sense of the term—by male players would then be a source of excitement. This however, clearly indicated that women's football players reproduce stereotypical ideas about what counts as a good or successful football player and put into question their own belonging in the space they occupy.

Gender identity

Issues relating to self-perception of gender identity were a strong theme for the players. The majority of both former and current players talked about themselves as being other than female or feminine, particularly when describing their childhood experiences.

I have two brothers and at home we always played together and with one of my brothers I was also on the same team. I always wanted to be one of them, I didn't want to be a girl. I wanted to make the same jokes, talk about the same things and play football at the same level. I just wanted to be one of them, I didn't want there to be a difference.

When I was a child I was almost a boy. I was always outside, playing tricks and all that. Not only football, but also climbing trees. I just did what the boys did.

Once at school I raised my hand when they asked who would rather be a boy. I raised my hand, but then why? Well, as a girl you can't become a professional football player. I knew that that was impossible at that time.

In these excerpts, the players reflect on their gender identity, via what they didn't want to be, that is a girl. They distance themselves from anything that they define as feminine, something made very explicit in the following reflections of former players:

When I went to primary school, being a girl became an obstacle since I wasn't allowed to play with the boys.

At the end of primary school, things became clear to be. The girls reached puberty, but I didn't. I could delay that till I was 15 years old, then I got my first period. I didn't want it, and I managed to delay it as long as possible. But then things became unsafe. I could no longer be myself.

The majority of the players reported that they still 'struggle' with their gender identity. Exemplary are the following quotes:

Actually I think that I dress myself not as I'd like to. Sometimes I think that it is actually quite strange. I'm not sure if I dress myself the way I do because I've learnt that football and femininity don't go hand in hand, or because it is my dream to be a bit more feminine.

I'd like to be a role model, but not only for girls, also for boys. So, in that I prefer not to make a difference. I can imagine that I could be a good example of how boys and girls can work together and achieve something together. But, I wouldn't like to be a role model for girls only, I am bit against that. Then it's like, you know only girls and women, that's not what I want.

My friends sometimes tell me that I'm a feminist lesbian, because I am very sensitive to gender inequality and always had to fight in the past. But I fall much more easily in love with boys. It's why I found the role division between men and women very difficult to cope with.

For the players, their own gender identity was a point of continuous negotiation. One player referred to a 'struggle' with her ethnic background:

> *X: When things get difficult, I am someone that very easily bends her head down. I think I have become stronger in everyday life because of football, because it brought me a lot of structure. Because yes, you have to train in the morning and then the next morning. You have to be present all the time and before it was like: 'I'll go where the wind takes me'. I have had years like that and perhaps it is also because of my non-Dutch blood. I am still trying to cope with that, with my Dutch side and my non-Dutch side actually.*
> *N: Because you're half Dutch, half...*
> *X: Yeah, half Dutch, half non-Dutch. My structure is clearly from my mother. And my perseverance.*
> *N: Your father is non Dutch?*
> *X: Yes. They live day by day and people enjoy the moment. Dutch people are more organised. They work towards a goal. With foreigners this is not always the case. They are, what do you call it...? So that is actually what I am trying to cope with. But that is what I get here at the club, structure and perseverance if things turn out to be difficult. So yes, that has been of great importance to my life.*

The demands of elite football are here contrasted with a particular ethnic background, which clearly says something about racist portrayals of elite athletes.

Negative view of femininity

A recurring theme in the life histories of both former and current players is the negative evaluation of femininity. Something already apparent in the description of their childhood experiences, 'everything that had to do with girls or girlish things was an obstacle for me', 'when I went to primary school, being a girl became an obstacle since I wasn't allowed to play with the boys'. In order to participate in football and to gain acceptance, the women defined themselves in opposition to femininity and regarded girlish things as a negative aspect of their identity. This is perhaps unsurprising as allegedly typical feminine qualities are not valued in sport. As a result of the negative confrontations with their own gendered selves, they bestowed preference upon masculinity, boys and men. Quite striking is the following excerpt from an interview with a former international female coach. In this quote the coach reflects on the relation between femininity and the performances of the national men's team:

> *In the Netherlands we live in a feminine culture. Germany and France are masculine cultures, the emancipation goes via women, who take up more masculine values. They are product-oriented, goal-oriented, and the more the pressure, the more they are willing to improve their performances. But, Dutch culture is feminine, the emancipation goes via men, they take up feminine values and as a result of this women in the Netherlands are peace builders, more concerned with harmony and less goal-oriented. Men start to act as carers, an example is daddy day. Or take for instance the last European Championship.*

It was really awful that the wife of one of the players lost her baby. And then the whole team paid a visit to that woman in the hospital. But all that caring and all those feelings. Then they decided to wear mourning bands during the match. And then they were totally knocked out, because they were busy with each other and not focused on their performance. In Germany this would never happen. They'd say, 'dude, you know what, you need to be with your wife, not on the team.' He would have been kicked out of the team, to make sure the rest of the team is focused. But Germany is a masculine culture.

For this coach, characteristics often attributed to women negatively influence performances. In a similar way both former and current players articulated negative ideas about femininity.

X: There I learned to set everything aside and to completely focus on the match for 90 minutes, but before I was very easily influenced.
N: What do you mean by being influenced?
X: Well that I regressed into girlish behaviour.
N: And what does that mean, girlish behaviour?
X: Not being assertive, being passive and reactive, being nice and focus on social aspects and harmony.
N: And that is something you experienced in your team?
X: Yes, and that also impacted my performances. At a certain moment my brothers told me they would no longer watch me play, if I continued to play like that. I did everything to be part of the social circle.

I perfectly understand that people prefer men's football above women's football. Men are just much better. They are stronger, they are faster.

Sometimes, I think now it's done, shut up with all the complaints. They continue talking about minor issues for ages. Then I think, we've understood everything, everything is clear now, so shall we continue with what we were doing. With guys you don't have that. If something happens they talk about it and that's that. Sometimes I wish that I was on a men's team

Sexualisation

A recurring theme in the interviews is the (media) representation of women's football players. An often-heard opinion, even from managers is that women's football should be made more attractive to watch, as this would attract sponsors. While attractiveness can mean many things, here it is synonymous with sexiness. Women, according to managers and PR officers, would do well to wear sports clothes that were a bit sexier and preferably some make-up during photo-shoots. Some players followed this line of reasoning:

It depends on your priorities. If you want to attract more sponsors and supporters, well then the shorts should be a bit shorter and the shirts a bit tighter. From a marketing

perspective I do understand that. But on the other hand, if it's your ambition to increase the level of performance, then you have to increase the level of support systems. But, it doesn't really matter to me. I also want to look good on the field. But it's not that I think we should make a calendar. I think that's, what do you call it? Sexist.

Other players were clearly of the opinion that one's way of dress should not be considered important for the purposes of popularity.

There they play with these short shorts. But that is something we don't want here. We don't want to have to dress like that so that people will show up during matches. Perhaps there would be more supporters if they can watch sexy looking women, but it's really sad they stress that.

It is telling that these players not only challenge dominant marketing discourse, but also openly criticize the sexualisation of women in football. The following excerpts are exemplary:

It's almost dirty that people are that sexist that they can't perceive us as human beings. You don't accept someone for who she is. Because you force your opinion on them. I find that pathetic. But I must say that that is something I learned relatively late. Someone once told me she found it really upsetting that guys would catcall her in the street. And then she said to me she wasn't wearing those skirts for them, but for herself. Since then I am much more attentive to these things. Generally, people think that women wear skirts to get attention from guys, that's what people think. But it doesn't work like that, I am not an object.

If you post a photo of the national team on Facebook, then people often respond with, oh, all the guys in the first row and all the women in the second. But why is this the first thing you think of when you see the photo? They turn us into objects, but I never asked for that.

Female apologetic

In general, both former and current players reproduce stereotypical ideas about the ideal football player and equate the characteristics of high performance football with masculinity. In negotiating gender roles and expectations some apologised for their presence on the field, by highlighting their femininity:

I went to a club and then you'd talk with guys. And then they'd say 'you play football?' And then nobody wanted to kiss me, because I must have been a lesbian. And that's really awful. If you play football, people immediately think all these things. So then I decided to grow my hair, because I wasn't accepted. Otherwise they'd call me a tomboy.

People tend to think that all players are lesbians, because they look masculine on the field. I do understand that some of them aim to look feminine. Like, on the field I look like a football player, but off the field I am a real woman.

I really hated it when people thought that I was a boy. I mean, I had long hair and was wearing sports clothing, but that's not considered feminine. So if you're good then you're a boy, but girls, girls that play well? They just don't understand that. So that had quite an impact on me. When I reached puberty I decided that I would do extremely feminine things.

Back then it was still exceptional for girls to be good at football. I had short hair and then they thought that I would be a boy. I started to grow my hair. And I tell you, I'll never wear it short again. I like it a lot, but I won't wear it short again.

If I can, I skip going to the gym. Because I don't want to become that muscular. I find that really masculine.

Appearing explicitly feminine, or taking part in explicitly feminine activities count here as responses or strategies to deal with gender normativity.

Cynicism and self-protection

While some of the former and current players apologise for their presence on the football field, other stories display cynicism. Exemplary of both former and current players is the following excerpt:

Some girls at school would say, 'you play football.' But then I said 'well everyone has a sport.' It's just like that and I've always been like that. Sometimes girls think that if you play football, you must be a tomboy. I don't care that they say that. I don't care about that at all. I just do what I like.

1.2.4 Key findings 'sacrifice'

As already suggested in section 1 of this chapter, what we find in the following quotes, categorized under the theme of 'sacrifice', is first of all that the players describe their experiences of being and becoming an elite football player as being characterised by contradictions between divergent commitments and values. They do not attribute equal weight to the diverse commitments and values, but in contrast, they attribute superior weight to their commitment to football, regardless of the value or commitment that its stands in opposition to: health, social life, financial security, future prospects. Second we see in the testimonies that the players seem unable to make sense of their full commitment to football. Third, we see that this incapacity to make sense of their life-choices does not leave the players untouched. Rather we see that the players feel torn between the divergent values and commitments, and feel as if they are being disempowered. Let us start with some excerpts in which the players not only describe the value of playing football in opposition to health, but also as being more important than health.

Football versus real-life values

I never realized that I only have one body. And that I should have played a bit smarter. No, I always wanted the ball. But I must say that I do things a bit different now. Sometimes I think, well I'll let that ball go. If I really think about it, I would quit playing football. It's madness. But then I don't.

Back then, I often thought that I should quit playing football, as I was afraid that I'd never recover. But, what was I thinking! It's actually quite a depressing thought that I was thinking about quitting.

My neighbour saw me playing football with the kids from the neighbourhood. Without my knowledge he had registered me at the football club. And then he came by telling me that. And well, I just went to my first training. But after the first training I got injured in my groin. That was terrible. But, I really, really enjoyed playing. Since that moment I play football.

As a goal-keeper, you really cannot be afraid. Sometimes, when I go for the ball, later on I think 'well if I had', but I never think about that when I am playing. As a goal-keeper you just do things that are best not thought about. Actually, no-one in my team would say 'yes I'd like to become a goal keeper'. They are all afraid of standing in the goal.

I never realized that football is dangerous. But with my head, I got dumber. I could no longer make connections, and I also lost my empathetic abilities, much to the frustration of others. But really, I got dumber. And then I thought this is not what I want. It is like suffering from dementia and you realize that you have become a different person. That is really confronting, but then I still go on. But honestly, saying this here makes me want to call the coach and tell the coach that I quit.

X: Football gives me a lot of satisfaction. I have to give up a lot, but I think that it also brings me things, in terms of experiences. Also with injuries, I then just need to return to the field. It's a way of life. And I think that it brings me a lot. Otherwise it would also become really hard to continue playing the game.

N: What then does it mean that football brings you a lot, what is it that football brings you?

X: I find it difficult to explain what it means that football brings me a lot. That is a hard question. It is also a question that is not commonly asked during interviews. What it brings me? Satisfaction. That is a difficult word, an abstract word.

What we see in these quotes is that the players are well aware of the physical risks of playing elite football. A few players even explicitly state that just the thought of the physical dangers, would make them want to put an end to their career. But, they don't. Noteworthy is the reason given by one of the players: 'Football gives me a lot of satisfaction', and 'a lot

in terms of experience'. Importantly the player does not say that she is willing to play when hurt and take risks for the sake of money, or prestige, but because of what she experiences when playing football. In effect, as the following quotes indicate, the players do not only experience their health as being opposed to their participation in football, but likewise financial security, social life and their future prospects:

> *I fully devote myself to football. What you see is that I adjust my work to football and not the other way around. A lot of people call me mad. But then I think, 'well, call me mad'. As long as I can do it, I am happy.*

> *It was never a conscious choice promoting women's football. My passion is the game. I just really like the game. It stirs me right up. But I also hate unfairness. But this doesn't mean that I think that things between men and women need to be equal 100 percent. If you look at the past it makes perfect sense that men earn more money and that we shouldn't have the illusion that things must be fully equal. For me it's really about playing the game and contributing to that.*

> *We didn't really get along so I was sent off. I have very strong opinions and I am always clear about that, but also at inappropriate moments when you know that you should actually keep your mouth shut. But I didn't and sometimes I also made jokes, because it is just football. Football is number 1 and I set everything aside for it, school, everything, but it is still just football. And perhaps it's a bit strange, but often I think, we're not at war, football is not a war where people get killed for whom we then have to mourn.*

> *When I was 16, I was playing for the national team. And well, it's almost impossible to achieve something higher. But my teammates at the club, they started going out, drinking beer, dating girls. That was a difficult period for me. They were relaxing with a beer and I could not join them. But I always had the feeling of being at the right place. When I am playing I always enjoy it extremely.*

What emerges from the above testimonies is that the players' commitment to their sport, comes with difficult choices, not only related to health, but likewise financial security, and social life. However, as one of the players quips, even when called mad, she is willing to sacrifice financial security for football. Again, these players are not sacrificing one real-life value, in this case financial security or social life, for something else rewarding in an objective sense, such as prestige, but because of what they experience when playing football: joy and happiness. What we however read in the following, almost sad quote, is that, at the same time, it is also precisely because of the enjoyment that participating in football generates, that it becomes difficult for players to make sense of their life choices:

> *I really love it and I never really think about all the investments. The moment that you win something, that you win a game, that gives so much pleasure. When you win you realize*

why you worked that hard. But if you think about it, about all the investments. It is really hard for people who do not play to understand that. It's only a game, 11 against 11 and a ball. Why then lose yourself in it?

Disempowerment

In general, what we see in the reflections of the players is that they not only experience contradictions between diverse values and commitments, but also feel torn between them. In effect, it seems that the players sense that the contradiction they live by, can't be resolved. Health, social life and financial security are important values in their lives, but when it counts, they simply and almost unconsciously sacrifice these for their sport. This in turn results in feelings of disempowerment, that is of being unable to take matters into their own hands. Particularly telling are the quotes in which some of the players discuss their social life:

My sister got married to an Eastern European man and they decided to get married in Eastern Europe. But unsurprisingly they picked a date that didn't work for me. So, I called him saying that I couldn't make it that particular date and whether he could not move the wedding by a few days. But asking your brother-in-law to change his wedding date is for me actually too bizarre to believe. Fortunately my family is understanding towards my situation, so my brother-in-law responded positively to my request. But, actually, it's just too bizarre to believe. With these kind of events, my family first consults me. On the one hand, I do really appreciate that, but on the other hand, I think, football, football is actually not that important, but then at the same time it is.

After all these years, my mother is getting a bit tired of the whole thing and tells me that it is also my own decision. Like, what in life is actually of importance? And I must say that I do really understand her. More and more I also get the feeling that other things in life are actually more important than football. I find it increasingly difficult to miss out on things. But then yes, it's a deliberate choice and I wouldn't have done things differently.

However, it was not only in the context of discussions about social life that players expressed feeling torn between different values and commitments. Particularly worth mentioning are the quotes in which players reflect on their future prospects. What we likewise see in these quotes is that players lament the consequences of prioritizing football above other commitments and values. For instance, one player expressed feelings of regret looking back at the difficulties she experienced during her studies. Nevertheless, she did 'call off everything for football'. And certainly, to sacrifice something considered important (studies), for something considered less important (football), must be confusing and induce feelings of disempowerment.

Looking back, I wish things had turned out differently with my studies. I studied physiotherapy and it took me a few years longer, because I played two European championships and, well, that takes a lot of time. And for me it was easy, I could decide to skip some courses

and focus on football. But if I look back at all those classes that I missed and all the difficulties to get through exams, I regret that. And yet football is always number 1. I call off everything for football. I am always present and I do everything for it. But on the other hand, it's number 2, as school is more important to me, but then I shift my exams for football.

1.3 Summary of the key findings

Methodologically undergirded by the process of triangulation (Boeije, 2010, p. 176, 177), the data of our research brought into focus three irreducible themes: 'high performance', 'policing of gender', and 'sacrifice'. The first overarching theme that emerges from the data is that of 'high performance' and refers to all those experiences related to women's football's move toward professionalization, based on the production of results, maximisation and hierarchisation. Central here are reflections on what 'it takes' to become an elite player, the social, physical, but also economic price paid for becoming an elite football player and their (mis)treatment by staff members and coaches, particularly in the context of international competitions.

Secondly the data shows that all players were and still are confronted with the problem of 'how to do gender right' in a male dominated context. From early childhood till today's professional experiences, all players articulated that they were subjected to gender policing, from being denied access to elite sport facilities in the case of the pioneers of Dutch women's football to more subtle forms of marginalization, stereotyping and exclusion. Key is that the players 'internalize' these norms and hold a negative attitude towards the quality of women's football, the 'feminine' characteristics of their peers, and their gendered selves. Hence all the players developed tactics or strategies to negotiate gender norms, from the so-called 'female apologetic' to dressing up like the lads.

The third overarching theme that emerged from the data was more unexpected. It deals with the willingness of players to make sacrifices for the sake of the sport. Central here is that the players describe their experiences of being and becoming an elite football player as being characterized by contradictions between the commitments and values related to playing the game and those related to the real world, such as health, social life, financial security and future prospects. To be more precise, the players judge their participation in football as relatively insignificant, compared to the real-life values of health, financial security and social life, but nevertheless attribute more weight to their commitment to football. Thus, the players judge their participation in football as relatively unimportant, yet it motivates them to make those sacrifices all the same.

Although I shall develop this in chapter four, already worth noting is that we also found in the data that this experience of contradiction results in confusion and a certain sense of disempowerment, visible in the ways the players seem to regard themselves as irrationally committed to their sport.

Chapter 2

Sacrifice and the limits of the existing theoretical frameworks in social sport studies

2.1 Introduction

The presentation of the data in chapter 1 indicates that any attempt to make sense of the lived experience of being and becoming an elite women's football player should first of all give an account of the diverse ways gender norms are negotiated, challenged and reified. Second, the data discloses the need for an account of the various ways sporting norms are obeyed, negotiated and challenged, for football management controls the players and promotes in its players an attitude of obedience, accompanied by habituations in terms of availability, daily training timetables and diet. Third, the data discloses the need for an account of the willingness of the players to make sacrifices in terms of health, social life and financial security. Accordingly in chapter 1 we delineated three irreducible themes that must be accounted for in order to make full sense of the lived experience of being and becoming an elite women's football player.

In section 2 of this chapter, I shall show that our research findings support the established view that both the 'policing of gender' and 'high performance' are central experiences of elite sport players. The theme of 'high performance' is accounted for in those social sports studies that, taking their cue from either a Marxist, cultural studies or a Foucauldian post-structuralist framework, interrogate the modern instrumental approach to sport and its neoliberal development (classic works are amongst others: Brohm, 1978; Gruneau, 1983; Hoch, 1972; Shogan, 1999). The theme of 'gender policing' is accounted for in all those social sport studies that, drawing upon cultural studies and (feminist) poststructuralist frameworks, focus on identity construction and the question of gender-normalization, transgression and compliance in relation to high performance sport (classic works are amongst others: Birrell, 1988; Felshin, 1974; Hall, 1996; Theberge, 1981).

However, in section 3 of this chapter, I shall argue that a closer look at the experiences of the elite women's football players, as expressed by themselves, reveals that even though the players are both subjected to gender normalisation and a culture of obedience, the themes of 'gender policing' and 'high performance' do not exhaust their experiences. More precisely, I shall argue that the third overarching theme deduced from the data, 'sacrifice', escapes the established frameworks in social sport studies. The players' own reflections reveal that their 'willingness' to make sacrifices cannot be explained either in terms of external constrains or in terms of the culture of obedience in football. Accordingly this means that the existing theoretical frameworks in social sport studies are not sufficient for our task of giving a comprehensive account of the experiences of elite women's football players, for in these frameworks elite sports players' willingness to sacrifice, or play when hurt and risk injuries are erroneously reduced to either irresolvable symptoms of alienation induced by the internalised drive for the achievement of a higher good or to mere expressions of independently established normalising and oppressive productions of subjectivity.

Hence, this chapter shall conclude that the experiences of the elite women's football players cannot be fully accounted for by the existing theoretical frameworks alone, but that they must be complemented with a theoretical framework that can do justice to the references to sacrifice in the data. More precisely, I shall argue that we are in need of a theoretical framework that (i) allows us to make sense of the theme of sacrifice; and (ii) allows us to theorize the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in a unified manner. This is essential given that the women's football players experience 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in conjunction with one another.

2.2 Navigating the field of social sport studies

2.2. 1 Key debates and theoretical frameworks: Marxism, Cultural Studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism

While the field of social sports studies is a growing academic discipline today, in the past it was certainly not, due to at least an academic disdain of sport, obstacles in gaining access to the field and the commonly held belief that sport was politically and ideologically neutral (Edwards, 1973).

First of all, sport was met with disdain from academia, reflecting 'the characteristics of Western academia as a whole' emphasizing 'intellectual development as opposed to physical expression' (Edwards, 1973, p. 6, 7). Sport was considered a trivial and marginal dimension of working-class life, unworthy of serious academic attention: 'Indeed, the well-entrenched and popular stereotype of sport as anti-intellectual has been hard for academics to shake off. To put it tersely, within a context in which respect is linked to content area, sport has been less than lucrative. Perhaps the reasons behind the scepticism about, even strong opposition to, the study of sport are familiar: the mind/body split, the related denigration of the physical, academic divisions of labour' (Cole, 2001, p. 341). The second element contributing to the historical dearth of scholarly writing on sport has to do with obstacles in gaining access to the field, as sport professionals would have little patience or tolerance for potential intruders, or saw no value in research projects that would not contribute to the improvement of athletic performance (Edwards, 1973, p. 8). In the words of a former college-based sports psychologist: 'Entry in the sports arena at the present time is all but completely closed to social scientists, except to those who they (coaches and athletic administrators) feel represent absolutely no threat to them or their notions of what sport is all about. This means no threat to them intellectually; no threat in terms of disrupting their orientations by pointing up needed change; no threat in terms of complicating their lives as coaches and administrators by demonstrating the intricacies and complexities of an institution that they see in very simplistic and intuitive terms' (Thomas Tutko cited in Edwards, 1973, p. 8). The third factor contributing to limited scholarly attention to sport, was that a 'folk understanding of sport' prevailed, according to which sport was politically and ideologically neutral: 'Many people have succumbed to the sports propagandist theme

that organised athletics is, for the most part merely recreation' and thus radically distinguished from the political sphere (Edwards, 1973, p. 8, 9).

Despite these challenges, which we are in fact still faced with, scholars began to produce scholarship that analysed sport as a social and political phenomenon. During the late 1960s and 1970s, radical critiques, especially Marxist and Leftist, proliferated, criticising sports under capitalist developments (e.g. Hoch, 1972; Vinnai, 1973; Brohm, 1978). Central to these studies is first of all an understanding of elite sports in terms of labour and subsequently a critique of elite sport in terms of the alienating character of labour. Here, athletes or sport workers who sell their labour, are considered no different from other workers (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 91). In his classic Marxist text *Sport A Prison of Measured Time*, Brohm states: 'All the values of the capitalist jungle are played out in sport: virility, sexual athleticism, physical dominance, the superman, muscle worship, fascistic male chauvinism, racism, sexism, etc.' (Brohm, 1978, p. 15). Second, it is argued that sport or more generally leisure could only be a repressive force in life, leading the working-class and other oppressed groups to false fantasies of hero worship and fictitious worlds (Morgan, 2010, p. 27, 28, and see Gruneau, 1983; Lefebvre, 1991). For Marxist-informed sport studies, sport must be considered alienating when dominated by the values of capitalist society (private property, exchange value, etc.), or as an illusory domain that falsely promotes freedom, at the expense of overcoming the alienation found in labour.

To further elucidate the Marxist critiques, a few notes about Marx himself and his reception by those sports theorists are in order here. While Marx did articulate a theory of leisure, debates concerning leisure and sports were not his primary concern (Hinnaman, 1978, p. 194). By contrast, for Marx the alienated character of sports, or more broadly leisure, should be understood as a derivative phenomenon, growing out of the alienating character of work. Labour makes humans what they are and defines the parameters of human society. Yet, as a distinctive feature of humanity, according to Marx, work appears alienated in capitalist society. Accordingly, for Marx the transition to a classless society requires the emancipation of work. Important for our understanding is that this implies for Marx the overcoming of the distinction between the sphere of necessity and that of freedom (Hinnaman, 1978, p. 194), or put differently, between work and leisure.[3] The following passage

3 Huizinga brings into view that the distinction between work and leisure/play can be traced back to at least Aristotle and his discussion of freedom (Huizinga, 1980, p. 160, 161). For Aristotle work and related activities must be purposed to serve leisure: 'The whole of life is further divided into two parts, business and leisure, war and peace, and of actions some aim at what is necessary and useful, and some at what is honorable. And the preference given to one or the other class of actions must necessarily be like the preference given to one or other part of the soul and its actions over the other; there must be war for the sake of peace, business for the sake of leisure, things useful and necessary for the sake of things honorable' (Aristotle, 1995, p. 4537). However, as leisure provide the ground for a virtuous life, according to Aristotle it should be considered an end for the ruling class, i.e. those that do not have to work. Labour by contrast was the end for the labouring classes and slaves and their free time only a means to recharge.

from *The German Ideology* is particularly instructive: 'For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or an informed critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic' (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 53). This quote reveals that eventually what is honourable for Marx in his envisioned classless society has no objective beyond itself and belongs to the sphere of freedom from ideologically-informed subjectivity: hunting without becoming a hunter, or fishing without becoming a fisherman.

However under the capitalist mode of production, the value of these sorts of activities is determined by something outside of them and thus belongs to the sphere of necessity. To be more precise, for Marx, under the capitalist mode of production, the positive values of leisure are either negated or recognized only in an illusory fashion. They are negated in the absence of leisure, when leisure becomes a means for the workers to satisfy physical needs, thereby leading to an increase of work productivity, and when it becomes dominated by the values of capitalist society (private property, exchange value, etc.), that is when leisure becomes work (Hinnaman, 1978, p. 200). Hence, the argument made by Marxist scholars of sport to the effect that sport must be considered alienating when dominated by the values of capitalist society, or as an illusory domain that falsely promotes freedom.

In the 1980s, sport scholarship reacted to certain orthodox tendencies in Marxist theory by taking recourse to the work of Gramsci (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 108 and see: Gruneau, 1980, 1983; Hargreaves, 1986; Hargreaves, 1982). Within this so-called 'cultural studies' paradigm, it was argued that the concept of hegemony would avoid economic reductionism and encourage more specific questions about the nature of oppression in sport (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 52; Scambler, 2005, p. 148). Gramsci was critical of the distinction between base and superstructure, which posits culture as a mere reflection of the economic base. Rather he argued that hegemonies can be built by and for more than one class. The superstructure can influence the base as well as the base the superstructure (Scambler, 2005, p. 148). Hargreaves and McDonald cite Stuart Hall, who argues that Gramsci's use of the concept of hegemony was 'always made specific to a particular historical phase in specific national societies', and, further, was 'elaborated specifically in relation to those advanced capitalist societies in which the institutions of state and civil society have reached a stage of great complexity' (Hall cited in: Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 50). Hegemony for Gramsci, then, is 'a process of experience, negotiation and struggle by individuals in real-life situations, rather than one in which subordinate groups are simply duped by dominant ideologies' (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 50). Accordingly, it is not simply

a matter of class control, but 'an unstable process which requires the winning of consent from subordinate groups', 'never complete and fixed, but always 'diverse and changing' (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 50). Thus, instead of reducing sport as such to relations of production, the cultural studies paradigm in sport research uses historically and culturally specific examples to demonstrate the dialectical and changing relationships between human agency and social/political struggles.

In the mid-1990s, scholarly attention shifted away from ideological critique to a poststructuralist analysis of the discursive circulation of meaning, the production of power-knowledges and the production of power through surveillance and discipline. Based on poststructuralist theoretical and methodological strategies, social sport studies shifted their focus to the construction of narratives and the contesting of meanings (Birrell, 2000, p. 69). In particular, under the influence of Foucault, who famously demonstrated that in Western societies life itself, or living beings, are at the heart of political battles and economic strategies (Foucault, 2008; Lazzaratto, 2002), sport research increasingly turned to analyses of the body as a site organised by social power strategies (e.g. Vlieghe, 2011).[4] Organised along highly rationalised lines, physical activity and sport were considered central sites for the training of docile bodies. Shogan for instance doesn't mince her words, arguing that Foucault's 'art of distribution', his conceptualisation of the apparatus of spatial control (Foucault, 1995, p. 141), would be an invaluable tool for coaches, including herself, for producing athletes capable of winning (Shogan, 1999, p. 20). In addition, the Foucauldian concept of the production of power through surveillance and discipline provided provocative new points of departure for the study of the athletic body (Birrell, 2000b, p. 69).

The central insight in these critiques is that what Foucault calls the techniques of power-knowledges function not only as means of control, but at the same time as ways to enhance the productivity of those subjected to these techniques. Foucault argues in direct reference to Nietzsche that knowledge is both the creator and creation of power (Smart, 2002, p. 69): 'power produces knowledge . . . power and knowledge directly imply one another . . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (Foucault, 1995, p. 27).[5] This connection is circular, as the more extensive and detailed

4 As Rose explains: 'Politics now addresses the vital processes of human existence: the size and quality of the population; reproduction and human sexuality; conjugal, parental and familial relations; health and disease; birth and death. Biopolitics was inextricably bound up with the rise of the life sciences, the human sciences, clinical medicine. It has given birth to techniques, technologies, experts and apparatuses for the care and administration of the life of each and all, from town planning to health services. And it has given a kind of 'vitalist' character to the existence of individuals as political subjects' (Rose, 2001, p. 1).

5 Hence Foucault's famous assertion that power is not repressive: 'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this

knowledge is, the more it enables the control of subjects, which in turn offers further possibilities for more intrusive inquiry.[6] As a consequence, the 'regulation of the sports (wo) man's body no longer takes place in a collective way, but occurs at a more individual level, and because 'instead of being directly controlled by a teacher that commands her pupils to behave in a specific way, the sports(wo)man is made herself responsible for controlling her own body, in a sometimes scrupulous and no less harsh manner' (Vlieghe, 2011, p. 937).

Taking its cue from the poststructuralist framework, an increasing amount of scholarly work has emerged over the last 35 years analysing (professional) men's football culture, in the context of football fan associations (e.g. Giulianotti, Bonney, & Hepworth, 1994), globalisation (e.g. Cleland, 2015; Foer, 2010), hooliganism (e.g. Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1999; Dunning, 2002, 2015), migration (e.g Elliott & Harris, 2016), and referees (e.g. Webb, 2017).[7] Particularly worth mentioning here is Roderick's *The Work of Professional Football. A Labour of Love?* (Roderick, 2006), in which he examines the professional careers of men's football players through a social interactionist lens, assuming that for players, work, in the Marxian sense, is the central life interest and that they expect to get more from it than most other people (Roderick, 2006, p. 33). Key themes explored in this work are the culture of work in professional football, the changing identities, aspirations and expectations of players during their careers, the fragile and uncertain nature of professional sport careers, the performance and dramatic aspects of a career under public scrutiny, the role of relationships with managers, owners, support staff and partners, and players' responses to the insecurities inherent in professional football such as injury, ageing, performance and transfer. The key outcome of the data Roderick collected is not unfamiliar to our own research, namely that uncertainty is central to, and is a built-in characteristic of the experiences of players, for whom career advancements and attainment are never secure, predominantly because of the threat of injuries. For all the players he interviewed, injury and the threat of injury was routine. Drawing on the sociology of uncertainty and most notably Goffman's work on impression management, Roderick argues that, 'injuries in the professional game are socially constructed' as footballers are 'expected to play tolerating pain' and to take risks (Roderick, 2006, p. 12, 82). This leads to the conclusion that insofar as the world of professional football normalizes playing with pain and taking risks, those

production' (Foucault, 1995, p. 194). Power does not only act as law (through prohibition and exclusion) but is also productive. The subject, as Foucault suggests, is both the effect of discourse or the bearer of power-knowledge and subjected to discourse. To put it differently, the subject is made, constructed and not given, yet she is made to fit properly within certain social structures.

6 In this context, Foucault for instance shows how social scientific knowledge about sexuality is produced by and results in new forms of power(Foucault, 1978).

7 Due to the relative closeness of the world of professional men's football, very little research includes the testimony of players (Roderick, 2006, p. 7). For example the social biography of David Beckham (Cashmore, 2002) and the study of the football and public career of Paul Gascoigne (Giulianotti & Gerrard, 2001) are largely based on media representations. Only a small number of scholarly works make use of in-depth interviews with players or draw on participant observation (Parker 1996; Magee 1998; Back et al. 2001; Roderick, 2006).

who do not play while injured are denied, or deny themselves, the means necessary to sustain a meaningful life and a valued sense of self-identity (Roderick, 2006, p. 82). In other words, Roderick concludes that players internalize football's culture of obedience in such a way that it becomes their mode of self-realisation.

2.2.2. The feminist turn in social sports studies

In the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, along with the growth in women's sports, sport and gender research became more and more accepted as an academic discipline. While primarily social science based, a growing number of scholars started to question the disparity between men's and women's participation in sport and to theorize the cultural meaning of women's relative absence from sport (Birrell, 1988, p. 459), moving the debate to the domain of cultural studies. Largely focusing on the experiences of women in sports in North America, Birrell differentiates three stages in the scholarly work on sport as a social phenomenon up to the 1980s: a slow tentative start from 1960 to 1971, a period of groping for identity and direction from 1971 to 1980 and a current trend since 1980 towards greater theoretical sophistication and diversity (Birrell, 1988, p. 460).[8]

In the 1960s interest emerged in the analysis of the social aspects of women's sport experiences. In these years the overall majority of research adopted social psychological modes of enquiry and focused on personality traits of women athletes, attitudes held towards women athletes, role conflicts and motivations for sport involvement (Birrell, 1988, p. 464).[9] Central to these 'sex role' studies was the assumption that labels for behaviour and for gender had to match and that so called cross-sexed behaviours and preferences would indicate emotional disturbance and sexual deviation (Hall, 1996, p. 18-19; Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 314). By contrast good mental health assumed gender orthodoxy (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 314). Accordingly, these studies reflected the public fear at the time that girls and women would be masculinised by sports, particularly if the sport in question was, like football, associated with typical masculine traits. In addition, the sex

8 While it was only in the 1980s that the Dutch football association started to take an interest in extending the structures of women's football, Birrell recalls it was already in the 1920s with the growing public interest in Olympic sports that the North American Amateur Athletic Union and National Amateur Athletic Federation became increasingly interested in developing female talent. Women physical educators, organised in the women's division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation and responsible for the agenda of women's high school and college sport, were, however, staunchly opposed to such highly competitive ventures, calling for an elimination of the evils of selfishness, extrinsic rewards, sensational publicity, gate receipts and the exploitation of athletes for the sake of fans (Birrell, 1988, p. 462). Rather they advocated a 'game for every girl and a girl for every game'. Influenced by the dominant views in the medical sciences, these early women physical educators were convinced that it was in the best interest of women to minimize physical overexertion, to preserve a feminine appearance and manner, and to avoid the abuses of the male sport system, i.e. commercialism and violence (Birrell, 1988, p. 462). Until 1960, paradigmatically early women physical educators, not only reproduced the image of women as weak, fragile and unsuited for competitive sport, but also lamented the upsurge of the sport industry.

9 For an overview of scholarly work on sex roles see: Knoppers & McDonald, 2010.

role research depicted sport as a neutral institution, outside of social and political concerns, thereby failing to question the structure of sport and the contingency of the history of sporting practices (Birrell, 1988, p. 465).

Research in the mid-1970s shifted from social psychological models and began to consider the absence of women in sport as the result of social-political exclusion instead of a matter of motivation. Paradigmatic is the work of Felshin (Felshin, 1974). In her classic work the *Triple Option for Women in Sports*, she differentiates three approaches to sport: the apologetic, the forensic and the futuristic. The 'apologetic' is a conservative approach that calls on women to apologize for their participation in sports by emphasizing femininity. The 'forensic' is a liberal approach that assumes that women are equal to men and whose proponents fight for the rights of women to enter male sports. The 'futuristic' approach consists of the more or less radical view that the dominant developments in sport do not meet the wishes of all participants and that women are endowed with the capacity to turn sport into a more humane practice (Felshin, 1974). An account such as that of Felshin, did not, however, immediately receive recognition by the larger social sport research community. This was largely because the radical critiques of sport in the 1970s took class and not gender to be the primary form of domination (Hall, 1996, p.7). For example, Hoch does include a chapter on gender in his *Rip Off the Big Game: the Exploitation of Sports by the Power Elite*, but eventually traces sexism in sport back to 'the system of monopoly capitalism' (Hoch, 1972, p. 161). Similarly, Marxist feminists generally agreed to privilege class over gender, a choice deemed unacceptable to many feminists (Birrell, 2000, p.65). In the Marxist view, gender oppression is derivative of class oppression, in short 'rid the world of economic exploitation and gender inequities would also disappear' (Birrell, 2000, p. 65).

In the following years, explicit feminist analyses appeared that articulated a socialist feminist project as a corrective to existing class-based analyses of sport (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 317).

A central work is Theberge's 1981 *A Critique of Critiques: Radical and Feminist Writings on Sport,* in which she analyses the connections and divergences between Marxist and feminist approaches to sport (Theberge, 1981). While Theberge considers both stances invaluable, she also questions both prescriptions for change: 'In the case of a reorientation to a women-defined sport, it is not clear how the diminution of the instrumental orientation of modern sport and its replacement with an alternative will be effected' (Theberge, 1981, p. 351). Similarly, she doubts the radicals' position, as 'they, like feminists, seek a movement away from the instrumental orientation of sport', but, 'have not, however, offered an alternative to the hegemony of secularization and rationalization in the modern world'. (Theberge, 1981, p. 351). For socialist feminists such as Theberge the challenge was to *integrate* class and gender critiques of capitalism and patriarchy; however, they often ended up focusing on the ideological significance of sport as a gendered institution at the expense of the class analysis (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 317).

The challenge of rethinking the nexus of gender and power in women's sports was further taken up in the early 1980s by researchers working in cultural studies, questioning 'why sport participation was seen as a masculinizing activity in the first place' (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 315). Birrell argues: As our consciousness grows, our questions have changed from 'why aren't more women involved in sport?' to 'why are women excluded from sport?' to 'what specific social practices accomplish the physical and ideological exclusion of women from sport?', 'how and why have women managed to resist the practices that seek to incorporate them?', and 'how do women work to transform sport into an activity that reflects their own needs as women?' (Birrell, 1988, p. 492). Important to note is that these questions were hardly ever addressed by the larger field of scholars working in the cultural studies paradigm. By contrast a major criticism of the sport cultural studies trajectory is its failure to grasp the relevance of sport to sexual politics (Birrell, 2000, p. 54). Moreover, the argument was often made, that insofar as references were made to gender, it was alluded to as if it is an 'extra' which must not move attention too far away from the priority of class (Birrell, 2000, p. 54). For feminists working in the cultural studies paradigm, sport is a particularly public site for ideological struggle, however 'what is being contested... is the construction and meaning of gender relations' (Theberge and Birrell, 1994 cited in: Birrell, 2000, p. 67).

In accordance with the overall developments within the field of social sport studies from the mid-1990s onwards, more and more scholars looked outside of the typical social scientific and sport studies disciplines to expand their range of analytic tools and theoretical groundings (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 318, 319). The result of this 'interdisciplinary quest' was an embrace of poststructuralist perspectives, that shifted the attention of sport and gender studies to 'cultural narratives, the discursive circulation of meaning and production of knowledge imbued with power' (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 319). More and more gender and sport scholars turned to Foucault's and Butler's theories , which offered them a theory of incoherent identities, a radical critique of biological essentialism and an anti-normative politics (e.g. in the context of football: Botelho & Skogvang, 2013; Boxill, 2006; Clark & Paechter, 2007; Pfister, Lenneis, & Mintert, 2013; Ratna, 2011; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999; Skogvang & Fasting, 2013). This orientation has encouraged its advocates to uncover the influence of discourses in order to analyse 'the production of sex/gender systems, identity effects, and bodies through practices associated with sport' (Cole and Birrel in: Knoppers & McDonald, 2010).

While the application of Foucault and Butler to social sport and gender research has not lost its momentum, calling for more attention to bodily sensations and meaningful knowledge gained from the 'prediscursive' feeling and physically active body, several sport and gender researchers today adopt a phenomenological-anthropological perspective (e.g. Kerry & Amour, 2000; Allen Collinson, 2005; Hockey & Allen Collinson; 2007; Sparkes, 2009), quite often accompanied by auto-ethnographic fieldwork. The dominant source of these accounts is Young's famous *Throwing Like A Girl*, in which she proposes to take the 'lived' body as 'a

point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and other' (Young, 2005). She gives an analysis of how patriarchal structures both shape how women inhabit and experience their bodies and shape body comportment. However, while these studies claim to belong to the field of phenomenological research, they hardly ever critically discuss the notion of experience itself.

To conclude, as a result of the developments within social sport studies, at present there are three different (families of) methods available for the theorisation of the women's football players' experiences of 'gender policing' and 'high performance': a Marxist, a cultural studies and a (feminist/queer) Foucauldian poststructuralist informed framework. What must be noted here is first of all that the prefix 'Foucauldian'

Two notes must be made with regard to this review. First, while poststructuralist social sport studies often share similar concerns and can be said to at least share a methodological commitment to an understanding of the social in terms of the circulation of discourses and the power that emerges from discourse, it is far from constituting a coherent whole (see for an overview of the differences: Andrews, 2000, p. 106-138). Yet, at the moment the poststructuralist presence within the social study of sport may be described as primarily Foucauldian, specifically when it comes to those studies that, like ours, are primarily concerned with the experiences of elite athletes. Even the Marxist theorist Brohm, whose work was discussed in the previous section, regarded sport as 'perhaps the social practice which best exemplifies the "disciplinary society", analysed by M. Foucault' (Brohm, 1978, p. 18). In addition, those studies that appeal to the work of other poststructuralist authors for the purpose of theorizing the experiences of athletes do not differ in any relevant way from those that explicitly draw on the work of Foucault (see for an overview: Andrews, 2000, p. 106-138). Hence, this discussion will be limited to those studies indebted to Foucault and, in the wake of his critique, the theorisations of gender and sexuality by Butler. To be more precise, following Brohm's suggestion, the discussion in this thesis is limited to a discussion of the significance of Foucault's approach to modern knowledge, subjectivity and society for the social study of sport. This is why I will be referring to 'Foucauldian poststructuralist sports studies'.

Secondly, it must be emphasised that 'feminist' does not simple refer to the study of gender in sport, but to a commitment to an explicit method that interprets sport as a gendered activity (Birrell, 2000b, p. 61). Accordingly, not all feminist work focuses on girls and women in sports, but increasingly also 'focuses on the ways that sport serves to consolidate male privilege, and on the often deleterious impact that masculine ideologies played out in sport have on many boys and men' (Birrell, 2000b, p.61, and see: Kidd, 1990; Messner and Sabo, 1990, 1994; Curry, 1991). Secondly it must be emphasized, that, at least today, the prefix 'feminist' more and more refers to an intersectional approach interpreting the intersections between sport as first of all a gendered, and secondly also a racialized, ableist and heteronormative activity.

Now that we have reviewed the existing frameworks, we can see that each of them is structured around one key idea. Central to the Marxist-informed framework is the theorisation of the experiences of elite athletes with reference to labour, that is the reproduction of material existence. For Marxist informed sport theorists, elite sport is a derivative phenomenon growing out of alienated labour, in which those positive values that are usually associated with leisure and sports are either negated as a result of the dominance of the values of capitalist society (private property, exchange value, etc.) or recognized in an illusory fashion. Accordingly, within Marxist informed sport studies, the experiences of elite athletes are either understood in terms of the alienated character of work, or in reference to an illusionary realm that is falsely equated with the realm of freedom, or leisure. Eventually in both cases, sport is considered alienating and athletes alienated, even when personal reflections of athletes may (falsely) suggest otherwise. Marxist feminist informed sport studies aimed to complement these critiques with a focus on the experiences of women in sport. However, those faithful to the central Marxist thesis that the basic oppression is economic would eventually end up prioritizing class at the expense of gender. Hence, the delineation of a Marxist informed social sport studies paradigm, instead of a Marxist feminist one, as the first available method in social sport studies.

Central to the cultural studies paradigm is the explanatory value attributed to Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Informed by Gramsci's insights and countering the Marxist focus on class relations, the cultural studies paradigm is based on the assumptions that power is distributed inequitably throughout society, often along lines of not only class, but also gender and race, and that these relations are not fixed but contested. Moreover, in this framework power is not conceptualised in terms of coercion, but as more subtle forms of ideological dominance. Accordingly, in these studies sport is conceived of as a particularly public site for ideological struggle. However, in congruence with the Marxist paradigm, eventually the cultural studies trajectory failed to grasp the relevance of sport to sexual politics.

(Feminist) Foucauldian poststructuralist informed sport studies emphasize the local, or in short localities as the site for the theorisation of the workings of power. Based on the Foucauldian insight concerning the relation between discourse, power and the subject, in this framework the experiences of elite athletes are understood as subject effects of particular elite sports techniques of control, related to both gender and high performance. Central is the thought that sport produces docile athletes who 'internalise' the sports culture of obedience in such a way that they consider the techniques of control that best serve their interests. For feminists working in this area the central focus is on the construction and the question of gender normalization, transgression and compliance within elite sports.

2.3 Discussion of the research findings: 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice'

Chapter 1 presented three superordinate categories emerging from the analysis of the experiences of elite women's football players. As indicated by table 1 the dominant category is 'high performance' and includes descriptions, interpretations and assumptions on what it takes and means to take part in and succeed in high performance sport. The second category is 'gender policing'. Here the players' personal language reflects descriptions, interpretations and assumptions about the role of gender in the context of their experiences of being and becoming a football player. The third category is 'sacrifice' and includes descriptions and interpretations about the making of sacrifices in relation to health, financial security, social life and future prospects for the sake of sport.

What follows from the data is that any attempt to make sense of the social significance of elite women's football should first of all give an account of what it means and takes for a player to build a career in football. Central here is that football management controls the players and promotes in its players an attitude of obedience, accompanied by habituations in terms of availability, daily training timetables and diet. For the players, however, the idea of building one's own career as an elite football player becomes integral to the players' sense of self. The theme of 'high performance' is accounted for in those sports studies that, taking their cue from the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist insights, interrogate the modern instrumental approach to sport and its neoliberal development. Secondly, the data indicates that any attempt to make sense of the experience of elite women's football players should provide an account of the various ways gender norms are negotiated, challenged and reified. Hence, the findings support the established view that the policing of gender forms a substantial part of the experiences of being and becoming an elite woman athlete. The theme of 'gender policing' is accounted for in all those social sport studies that, drawing upon cultural studies and poststructuralist feminist frameworks, focus on identity constructions and the question of gender-normalization, transgression and compliance in relation to high performance sport (e.g. in the context of football Botelho & Skogvang, 2013; Boxill, 2006; Clark & Paechter, 2007; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Pfister, Lenneis, & Mintert, 2013; Ratna, 2011; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999; Skogvang & Fasting, 2013).

Third, the data indicates the need for an analysis of the meaning of sacrifice in being and becoming an elite women's football player. As suggested above, the themes of 'high performance' and 'gender policing' can be accounted for by the existing theoretical frameworks in social sport studies. The same does not apply to the theme of sacrifice. Thus, neither the present Marxist, nor cultural studies, or the Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigm suffice in giving a comprehensive account of the experiences of elite women's football players.

This section will proceed by taking a closer look at the data. This will bring out that the experience of 'sacrifice' escapes the existing frameworks. To recall, the experience of sac-

rifice refers to the players' willingness to make sacrifices in relation to health, financial security, social life and future prospects, for the sake of sport. I will show that what the data reveals is that even though the players are aware of the sacrifices they make and lament the consequences, nevertheless their experience of and willingness to make sacrifices cannot be explained adequately with reference to football's culture of obedience that conditions their willingness to make sacrifices.

Before turning to the data, let me spell out that this implies that the data contradicts the dominant theoretical frameworks in social sport studies. According to the latter, it is precisely football's culture of obedience and control that would encourage players to take risks as slavish followers of sacrificial practices (e.g. Giulianotti 1999, McGillivray et al., 2005, Roderick, 2006). The data resists the reduction of sacrifice to labour alienation. First, Marxist informed social sport studies are confined to theorizing sacrifice in reference to labour, that is the reproduction of material existence. As stated in the previous section, in this framework sports are only a derivative phenomenon growing out of alienated labour, in which those positive values that are usually associated with leisure, are either negated or recognized only in an illusory fashion. Accordingly, sacrifices are said to belong either to an illusionary realm that we falsely consider to be of importance, or considered irresolvable alienations necessary for the achievement of a higher good. Second, Foucauldian poststructuralist sports studies are confined to theorizing sacrifice solely in reference to the normalising and oppressive production of subjectivity. In this framework, the willingness to sacrifice is understood as a possible mode of self-realisation. Athletes are then said to have 'internalised' the sports culture of obedience in such a way that they consider the sacrifices they make to serve their best interests. It is through making sacrifices that one can become who one really is.

Thus, according to the Marxist framework by making sacrifices we either delude ourselves, or risk something for the achievement of a higher good. On the other hand, Foucauldian poststructuralist sport studies make sense of the theme of sacrifice by reducing it to oppressive modes of self-realisation. It is by making sacrifices that we can become who we really are, provided that we listen to the knowledge of experts. In this view the tendency of players to 'play when hurt and at risk' is understood as a 'powerful motivating force' which makes it likely that players will choose to play when hurt, namely that of 'displaying an appropriate attitude' towards the game (Roderick, 2006, p. 45), or as a valuable asset in displaying masculinity (Curry 1993; Messner 1992; Young et al. 1994).

At this point, there are two reasons to turn to Wacquant's classic analyses of the motivations of boxers to sacrifice themselves to their occupation' (Wacquant, 1995a; 1995b). One of the key claims Wacquant makes in "*Pugs at work: Bodily capital and bodily labour among professional boxers*" is that 'sacrifice stands at the core of the occupational belief system of professional pugilism', providing 'the organizing principle of the daily routine

of its practitioners, both in and out of the gym, and anchors the entire moral economy of the specific universe'(Wacquant, 1995a, p. 75).

In line with our concerns, Wacquant is particularly interested in the apparent disjunction between boxers' discursive awareness of the hazards of their trade and their practical disregard of them. This disjunction, he argues, is one of the founding antinomies, one of the *irresolvable paradoxes* of boxing' (Wacquant, 1995a, p. 82, my emphasis). Wacquant thus observes that the life of a professional boxer is characterised by a paradox, more particularly by a paradox of sacrifice. On the one hand, the cultivation of her body is all that matters to a professional boxer, yet at the same time she risks its destruction for her sport. Moreover, boxers are discursively aware of the hazards of boxing, yet on the practical level they simply seem to disregard them. Fighters know that boxing causes irreversible damage and leaves indelible marks on the body, but, 'like all entrepreneurs worthy of their name, they are willing to take risks and put their capital – i.e. their body – on the line in the pursuit of occupational success' (Wacquant, 1995a, p. 82).

As I will explain in what follows, it is precisely this 'paradox of sacrifice' that points to the insufficiency of the existing frameworks in social sport studies for our aim of making adequate sense of the experiences of the elite women's football players. However, instead of unravelling the apparent contradictions that give rise to the tensions that mark the lives of professional boxers, Wacquant himself eventually explains this paradox away by arguing that risk-taking must be understood in terms of the culture of obedience in boxing. Professional boxers, concludes Wacquant, are trapped in 'a self-contained web of social relations and cultural meanings that act as a prism refracting outside information and judgements according to its own logic' (Wacquant, 1995a, p. 85). By contrast, our contention is that a closer look at the experiences of the players reveals that the paradox of sacrifice remains unintelligible by any appeal to sports' culture of obedience.

Our position is in line with that of Randolph Feezell in his *Sport, Play, and Ethical Reflection*. While not being explicitly concerned with sacrifices, but with a general understanding of sportspeople's attraction to sport, according to Feezell, and unlike Wacquant, the apparent contradictions that mark the lives of athletes, resist being dissolved by sport's culture of obedience (Feezell, 2004, p. xi, 31). To be more precisely, echoing Feezell, we argue, as will become clear in what follows, that we must stay with the paradox of sacrifice. In our study, the players' testimonies suggest that they sacrifice their health, but also family life and financial security not because of an internalised drive to show their attitude towards the game for the sake of career advancement, but for other reasons. Let us look at a few of the passages that we find in our interviews with the elite women's football players, categorized in chapter 1 under the theme 'sacrifice'.

Sometimes I think, well I'll let that ball go. If I really think about it, I would quit playing football. It's madness. But then I don't.

Back then I often thought that I should quit playing football, as I was afraid that I'd never recover. But, what was I thinking! It's actually quite a depressing thought that I was thinking about quitting.

But after the first training I got injured in my groin. That was terrible. But, I really, really enjoyed playing. Since that moment I play football.

As a goal-keeper, you really cannot be afraid. Sometimes, when I go for the ball, later on I think 'well if I had', but I never think about that when I am playing. As a goal-keeper you just do things that are best not thought about.

But really, I got dumber. And then I thought this is not what I want. It is like suffering from dementia and that you realize that you have become a different person. ***That is really confronting, but then I still go on****.*

I fully devote myself to football. What you see is that I adjust my work to football and not the other way around. ***A lot of people call me mad. But then I think, 'well, call me mad'. As long as I can do it, I am happy.***

With these kind of events, my family first consults me. On the one hand I do really appreciate that, but on the other hand, I think, football, ***football is actually not that important, but then at the same time it is.***

After all these years, my mother is getting a bit tired of the whole thing and tells me that it is also my own decision. Like, what in life is actually of importance? And I must say that I do really understand her. ***More and more I also get the feeling that other things in life are actually more important than football. I find it increasingly difficult to miss out on things. But then yes, it's a deliberate choice and I wouldn't have done things differently.***

I really love it and I never really think about all the investments. The moment that you win something, that you win a game, that gives so much pleasure. When you win you realize why you worked that hard. ***But if you think about it, about all the investments. It is really hard for people who do not play to understand that. It's only a game, 11 against 11 and a ball. Why then lose yourself in it?***

Football is number 1 and I set everything aside for it, school, everything, but it is still just football. *And perhaps it's a bit strange, but often I think, we're not at war, football is not a war where people get killed for whom we then have to mourn.*

But if I look back at all those classes that I missed and all the difficulties to get through exams, I regret that. ***And yet football is always number 1. I call off everything for football. I am always present and I do everything for it. But on the other hand it's number 2, as school is more important to me, but then I shift my exams for football.***

Football gives me a lot of satisfaction. I have to give up a lot, but I think that it also brings me things, in terms of experiences. Also with injuries, I then just need to return to the field. *It's a way of life. And I think that it brings me a lot. Otherwise it would also become really hard to continue playing the game.*

N: What then does it mean that football brings you a lot, what is it that football brings you?

X: I find it difficult to explain what it means that football brings me a lot. That is a hard question. It is also a question that is not commonly asked during interviews. ***What it brings me? Satisfaction. That is a difficult word, an abstract word.***

As already suggested in chapter 1, what we find in these quotes is first of all that players describe their experiences of being and becoming an elite football player as being characterised by contradictions between commitments and values. More precisely, what we see is awareness on the part of the players themselves of contradictions between commitments and values. Echoing the contradictions that Wacquant observes in the data that emerged from the interviews he conducted with elite boxers, what these quotes evidence are first, a series of contradictions inherent in the lived experience of being and becoming an elite women's football player, accompanied by an awareness of these contradictions on the part of the players themselves. Secondly, we also see in the expressions of the players that: (i) they do not attribute equal weight to the diverse commitments and values, but by contrast attribute more weight to their commitment to football and act accordingly, regardless of the value or commitment that it stands in opposition to; and (ii) that they cannot explain why this is the case. In very concrete terms, what this means is that, even though the players do not seem to be capable of articulating why, they give up certain values and commitments for their sport.

These two considerations imply that the experience of sacrifice points to a paradox. However, contrary to the view upheld by Wacquant, our data suggests that the paradox of sacrifice cannot be explained away by an appeal to football's culture of obedience. Why? We see in the above quotes that objective reasons or arguments fail the elite women's football players when articulating why, even when confronted with a serious head injury, they are committed to (continue) playing the game. To be more precise, when they evaluate the costs of the making of sacrifices, they consider football the most unimportant thing in the world, for example there is nothing in or about football that makes it worth risking health, financial security, or miss out on family life. For the players football is literally devoid of value compared with the articulable and conventionally held values of health, financial

security and family life. For the players by contrast, real-life values such as health, financial security and family life, surpass playing the game. Yet, at the same time they set everything aside for playing the game (sacrifice) as they consider football to be the most important, or most valuable thing in the world, even though they cannot explain why this is the case. In effect, one of the players is already ahead of us: '*What it brings me? Satisfaction. That is a difficult word, an abstract word.*'

In very concrete terms this means that even in the absence of a proper discourse that would allow them to make sense of their decisions, the players nevertheless set everything aside for the game. They deliberately choose to run their lives in ways that they can only regard as irrational. Accordingly, there must be something in or about football that cannot be explained in terms of real-life objective values, but can at the same time compete with these, even in such a way that it surpasses real-life objective values. Thus, we must stay with the paradox of sacrifice and refuse to reduce it to pre-established categories the way that Wacquant, alongside the general view in social sport studies, does. In these frameworks, sacrifices are understood in terms of real-life objective values, that is as sacrifices of real-life goods for other real-life goods. On the contrary, the experiences of the elite women's football players, indicate that they sacrifice objective goods for the sake of an as-yet inarticulate commitment to football. Accordingly, contrary to the view upheld by the existing theoretical frameworks, the references to sacrifice in the data cannot be understood in terms of discipline, obedience, or control, that is, in short, power.

From the point of view of the Marxist theoretical framework, the objection here could be made that what is finally at stake is a conflict of interests, or values resulting from the scarcity of life. By this I mean the very thought that sacrifices are part and parcel of the achievement of a higher good, as life would be characterised by scarcity, whether one does so willingly or unwillingly, forced or authentically.[10] The references to sacrifice in the data, however, counter the logic of scarcity and the assumption that giving up something one wants in order to have something else should be understood as the primordial condition of human kind. Certainly, for the players football it is a matter of difficult choices, and this implies measuring costs and benefits. However, their willingness to sacrifice cannot be fully understood in these terms. This is because such terms, inherited from Marxism, assume a unity of value which is precisely what the players' testimonies question. According to this unity, one sacrifices something for a value recognized to be higher but commensurate to the value sacrificed. For the players, football is the most important thing in the world, however

10 Like capitalism which finds it justification in maximal returns from a presupposed initial condition of scarcity, the premise of Marxism is based on scarcity. (Shaviro, 2005, The Pinocchio Theory, accessed 24 September, 2020, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog>). On this basis, Marx argues that both individual and collective alienations are sometimes necessary for the achievement of a higher or greater good (Marx, 1973, p. 409, 410). Thus, as life is characterised by scarcity, for Marx every decision we make involves a concomitant sacrifice. In addition, the achievement of a higher or greater good may imply that these sacrifices result in alienations.

it can't be understood as some sort of a higher or greater good as this would involve a more or less precise articulation of what that higher good would entail. By contrast, rational discourse precisely fails them when explaining why football is worth making sacrifices for. The above cited quote is again paradigmatic: 'Football is actually not important and yet at the same time it is.' With reference to real-life or objective values, football is without value, yet at the same time for the women's football players it is, for inarticulable reasons, the most valuable thing in life. The players testify to their inarticulate yet existentially real commitment to two incommensurable and competing scales of value.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the references to sacrifice in the data of this research cannot be accounted for by the existing frameworks in social sport studies. As suggested, these frameworks understand sacrifices with reference to football's culture of obedience, whether in terms of alienation or oppressive modes of self-realisation. Alternately, as some Marxists would argue, it could be understood as trade-offs that are part and parcel of the (re) production of material life. However, the experiences of the players as reflected on by themselves reveal that even though they are aware of the fact that they make sacrifices and sometimes even lament the consequences, there is at the same time something 'outside' football's culture of obedience that conditions their willingness to make sacrifices. To be more precise, what the references to sacrifice in the data reveal is that the women's football players do not make sacrifices of the real world to the real world, but in a sense that I will investigate in a moment, because of their irreducible yet inarticulable commitment to football. Accordingly, the references to sacrifice in the data can neither be understood on the basis of power, nor on the basis of scarcity. It follows that the references of sacrifice in the data demand a reconsideration of the existing theoretical frameworks in social sport studies. These frameworks aim to provide an exhaustive account of the experiences of elite women's athletes by appeals to the themes of 'gender policing' and 'high performance'. The references to sacrifice in the data indicate, however, that even though the players are indeed subjected to gender normalisation and a culture of obedience, the experience of sacrifice escapes and exceeds both.

Thus, insofar as the existing theoretical frameworks cannot give a comprehensive account of the experiences of the elite women's football players we are in need of a new theoretical framework. More precisely, we are in need of a theoretical framework that: (i) allows us to make sense of the theme of sacrifice; (ii) allows us to theorize the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in the way that they present themselves in the experience of the subjects, that is to say, as unified.

Chapter 3

Understanding Sacrifice in terms of Play

3.1 Introduction and central research question

The data gathered in this study has shown that the current models that we find in social sport studies are not sufficient. Recall that we concluded in chapter 2 that in order to do justice to the experiences of the elite women's football players, we cannot rely on the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist theoretical frameworks alone, but must complement these critiques with a theoretical framework capable of making sense of the experience of sacrifice as a key structure of the experiences of the elite women's football players. Accordingly, we must now further specify the central question this research poses. The central question this research poses is:

How should we conceptualize the experiences of the elite women's football players in order to do justice to the experience of sacrifice that always accompanies it?

The analysis of our data already pushes us in the direction of an answer. To be more precise, it already provides us with the requirements our conceptualisation should meet in order to answer the central research question. Recall that we argued that the data that emerged from the interviews fall into three irreducible themes: gender policing, high performance and sacrifice. The irreducibility of sacrifice consists in the fact that it cannot be reduced to either gender, labour conditions or identity-formation. More generally, we argued that the references to sacrifice cannot be reduced to the domain of real-life objective values. This contrasts with the view upheld by the existing frameworks that we find in the field of social sport studies, according to which sacrifices refer to rivalries between real-life objective values. We argued on the other hand that women's football players do not make sacrifices of the real world for the sake of the real world, but for the sake of their irreducible yet inarticulable commitment to football.

The implication of this is first of all that the experience of sacrifice must be understood as an experience of the subject's sovereignty. That is, the players seem to choose to sacrifice real-world values to playing the game for no particular reason identifiable from the point of view of real-world priorities. In short, they do so freely. The second implication is that the values of (football) play, to which real-world values are temporarily subjected (Huizinga, 1980, p. 9), do not need to justify themselves in other terms than their own, in particular not in terms of real-world values.

When we take these considerations into account, we must conclude that what we need is a theory that accommodates an understanding of the experience of sacrifice that is: (i) not reliant on power/power-discourse, as the experiences of sacrifice can't be explained in terms of modes of subjection; (ii) pertaining to the subject as such, but neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse, for if this were the case, it could be described in terms of real-life objective values; (iii) incommensurable in value, as it can't be understood as a

trade-off with real-world values; (iv) intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants, as it cannot derive its meaning from real-life objective values.

In this chapter I shall develop each of these four requirements. However, as concluded in chapter 2, it is not only our task to make sense of the references to sacrifice in the data, but eventually to establish a theoretical account that allows us to understand the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' as being unified, for the women's football players always experience all three in conjunction with one another. Thus, what we need is a theoretical framework that allows us to develop the above listed four requirements *in a way congruent with* the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

In this chapter I shall argue that the solution lies in combining two distinct, yet related theoretical frameworks. Perhaps unsurprisingly we must first of all consider the an-economic theory of sacrifice which we find in the work of the main figures of the Collège de sociologie, including Roger Caillois, Michel Leiris and most notably Georges Bataille. Second, and perhaps more surprisingly, we must consider the pre-rational theory of play which we find in the works of, amongst others, Eugen Fink, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Johan Huizinga.

As I shall argue in section 2 of this chapter, the an-economic theory of sacrifice will allow us to meet the following requirements: (i) it is not reliant on power/power-discourse; (ii) it pertains to the subject as such, but neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse; (iii) it accounts for values that are incommensurable with those of the real world. Of key importance in this framework is Bataille's radicalization of Mauss's theory of the gift. For Bataille, gifts or sacrifices are 'sovereign' moments of non-production that negate the demands of utility and subservience and induce within the subject an experience which is not that of the coherent subject of calculative or objectivist reason, but rather an experience of unadulterated freedom. More specifically, I shall argue that Bataille allows us to understand that sacrifices are irreducible experiences that free sacrificers from normative monism (that is: the view that all values belong on one unified scale).

While Bataille allows us to meet the first three requirements that we delineated, I shall subsequently argue that he does not allow us to meet the fourth requirement, 'playing should be accounted for as intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants' nor the congruence criteria, according to which we must theorize the experience of sacrifice in a way congruent with the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing'. By positing the logic of excess as the other pole of scarcity, Bataille's account maintains a conceptual dependence of abundance and excess on their opposite. Accordingly, Bataille would demand that we posit the experience of 'sacrifice' as the other side of the experience of 'high performance', or 'gender policing.' This would entail the failure of both the fourth requirement and the congruence criterion outlined above. Hence, I shall conclude in section 1 of this chapter that we are in need of a theoretical model that allows us to theorize the experience of sacrifice in the footsteps of Bataille's thesis of irreducibility, but that at the

same time does not assume that that which is not ordered by calculative reason, remains conceptually dependent on calculative reason.

Here we arrive at the second theoretical framework we must consider, namely the so-called "pre-rational theory of play" (Spariosu, 1989), which we find in the work of, amongst others, Fink, Gadamer and Huizinga. Following Spariosu, we call their account pre-rational as they direct our attention to a notion of experience that precedes the distinction between irrationality and rationality. In section 3 of this chapter, I shall argue that these theorists of play offer us a concept of experience—the experience of play—which both temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causal chains operative in the dominant reality, yet should not be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, according to the pre-rational philosophy of play, the distinction between the rational and the irrational—or in terms of the language of play, the playful and the serious—is only a secondary or historical phenomenon. In 'reality', they argue, playfulness and seriousness are united. Accordingly, I shall argue that the pre-rational theory of play offers us the theoretical framework needed to conceptualize the experience of sacrifice. More precisely I shall argue that an understanding of the experience of sacrifice in terms of play covers both the four requirements we outlined above and the congruence requirement. Subsequently, I shall conclude that the pre-rational philosophy of play offers us: (i) adequate theoretical tools to theorize the experience of sacrifice by way of the establishment of the five requirements such as listed above; (ii) an adequate model to theorize the experience of 'sacrifice' as united with the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

Two notes must be made with regard to our adherence to the theory of play. First, speaking about 'the pre-rational philosophy of play' may wrongly suggest the existence of an already fully established friction-free framework that can be summarised and put to work for the task of this thesis. This is far from being the case. As in any field of study, there exist vast differences between the diverse theorists of play. However, as the object of this thesis is the establishment of a theoretical account that can do justice to the experiences of the elite women's football players and not a scholarly debate about the theory of play as such, the differences between these authors, where they don't affect their applicability to the experience of women footballers, will be left aside.

Second, to the best of my knowledge, theorizing sacrifice in terms of the pre-rational philosophy of play is an innovation in the field of social sport studies. Within the existing (sports) literature few examples can be found that argue for the importance of the pre-rational philosophy of play (see for instance in the context of the relationship between skill and spontaneity: Howe, 2007, and in the context of a discussion about the nature of sports: Novak, 1976; Feezell, 2004). However the broad majority of those few social sport studies that engage with the philosophy of play subsume play under the study of objective reality, thereby reducing and treating it as any other object in the world (see for instance: Brown,

2009). Concretely, this means that instead of play, these studies are engaged in the study of games (see: Suits, 1977, 2005).

This study distinguishes itself from game scholarship and its corollaries that regard play as an objective process that can be measured and manipulated. Rather we understand play as a subjective and meaningful way of relating to and experiencing the world.[11] Thus, what my theoretical account of play offers is a theorization of play as a key structure of experience that should be understood as a proper, independent and irreducible object of philosophical inquiry.

3.2 Sacrifices beyond the logic of the gift

3.2.1. Sacrifices and abundancy

Historically most theories of sacrifice have been based on an economy of debts and credits in which one gets a return on one's sacrificial investment (Keenan, 2005, p. 10). In general, within this economic framework sacrifices are understood as necessary passages through suffering or even death on the way to a moment of transcendent reward, whereby the latter is said to overcome, negate or cancel out the negative aspects of sacrifice. This economic understanding of sacrifice played an important role in sociological theory at the turn of the twentieth century (Keenan, 2005, p. 10). For instance in Max Weber's exploration of the role asceticism plays in the relationship between religion and economic and social life in modern culture in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and in Simmel's theory of economic exchange *Philosophy of Money* (Keenan, 2005, p. 10). Exemplary here is also the position of Marx, which we discussed in the previous chapter. Within life as characterised by scarcity, for Marx every decision we make involves a concomitant sacrifice. For our purposes, this economic understanding of sacrifice does not suffice, as the experiences of the elite women's football players, as reflected on by themselves, indicate that they do not think their sacrifices are performed for the sake of any calculative motives.

Importantly for our study, there is also a tradition of thought about sacrifice that challenges the economic model by positioning sacrifice within the non-instrumental realm. Here sacrifices are considered independently of calculation. They are an-economical sacrifices, that is sacrifices for nothing, or for no reason or goal. Paradigmatic here are the works of the main figures of the Collège de sociologie, which includes Caillois, Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille. In line with the view that we find in the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist social sports studies paradigms, these authors argue that a society organized around utility or rational production is necessarily an oppressive one (Richman, 2003, p. 9). In such a society all possible activities and both non-human and human actors are evaluated in terms of costs and benefits, thereby reducing them to their usefulness:

11 For recent discussions of the philosophy of play, including from a phenomenological perspective, see for instance the volume edited by Ryall et al (Ryall, Russell, & Maclean, 2013).

'[E]each man is worth what he produces; in other words, he stops being an existence for itself' (Bataille, 1986, p. 138). Such a society is necessarily also a homogenous one, where 'each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity valid in itself' (Bataille, 1986, p. 138). Activities matter not in or by themselves, but solely in relation to other useful activities (Bataille, 1986, p. 138).

In order to counter the prevalence of utilitarian thought and to impute to humans the need to move beyond themselves in order to participate in a broader social experience, the main figures of the Collège de sociologie turned to the origins of the sacred in sacrifice (Richman, 2003, p. 34). Key for our study is Bataille's critique of utilitarian thought and more precisely his theory of sacrifice and abundancy. Informed by Mauss's seminal essay on the gift,[12] Bataille challenges the common view that 'the economy' equals the world of calculative reasoning, production and usefulness. Rather what we normally understand as 'the economy' should be understood as a 'restricted economy', that is a society viewed from the perspective of usefulness and characterized by calculation. Both surpassing and encompassing the so-called restricted economy, Bataille proposes what he calls a 'general economy', which is the economy of waste, loss, usefulness, sacrifices and gifts without returns, based not on scarcity but on excess (Pawlett, 2016, p. 86, 87).

Wealth, which includes basically anything, argues Bataille, is radically dependent on the circulation of energy on the earth. This flow of energy finds its origin and essence 'in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy - wealth - without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving' (Bataille, 1988, p. 28). The paradigmatic example that Bataille gives is that of plants. They manifest 'excess' and are 'nothing but growth and reproduction, as 'the energy necessary for their functional activity is negligible' (Bataille, 1988, p.

12 A few words on Bataille's divergence from Mauss are in place. With the aim of countering the prevalence of utilitarian thought Mauss's essay focuses on the social significance of a gift, i.e. what is it that gift exchanges tell us about the people giving and receiving, the meanings of the objects given and received, and what is that practices of giving tell us about social relations? What he considers to be unique about a gift, in contrast to commodities, is that gifts imply an enduring relation between people, whereas a commodity type of relationship is characterized by the lack of an enduring connection between the people and the object in a more alienated and fungible type of relationship (Olson, 2002, p. 352). For Mauss gifts are associated with tribal cultures dominated by kinship and group relations. Commodity exchanges are characteristic of industrial types of societies that are determined by social class and division of labour and in which self-interest, independence of both giver and recipient, and frequent impersonal relationships predominate (Olson, 2002, p. 353). It is however important to note that according to Mauss, the giving of a present to someone is not a voluntary action because any gift involves obligation and self-interest. More precisely, throughout his theory Mauss continually emphasizes the importance of obligation. Not meeting the demands of the obligation to give comes according to Mauss with serious political and social consequences: "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality. Also, one gives because one is compelled to do so, because the recipient possesses some kind of right of property over anything that belongs to the donor" (Mauss cited in: Olson, 2002, p. 354). Hence, Mauss perceives the necessity for a harmonious reciprocity amongst parties in the act of exchanging gifts. For Bataille by contrast, as further elaborated in this chapter, gifts precisely counter orderly society.

27). From the very beginning there is thus an excess of energy that must be dealt with. On the basis of this Bataille argues that it is not scarcity, but surplus that drives economic activity (Bataille, 1988, p. 106). Thus while classical economic thought presupposes that economies are driven by scarcity, Bataille by contrast posits his 'general economy' in terms of the expenditure of an excess of energy and production, 'willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically' (Bataille, 1988, p. 21).

Bataille's account of excess is first of all important for our purposes as it allows us to challenge the ground upon which social sport studies theorize sacrifice in terms of calculative motivations. To be more precise, Bataille exposes that this ground, that is the restricted economy should be understood as a reduction of the general economy in terms of usefulness. Put differently, what the classical model understands with 'the' economy rests on a prior objectification of life that reduces life to its usefulness. Life, that is the general economy is excessive, characterized not by scarcity, but by excess. Second, on this basis, Bataille provides us with an understanding of sacrifices beyond economic terms, resisting formalist or objectivist understandings. Third, on this basis Bataille provides us with an understanding of the experience of sacrifice as an experience of unadulterated freedom. To be more precise, Bataille provides for an understanding of sacrifices as irreducible experiences that place sacrificers in a sphere free from normative monism.

The second reason for considering Bataille's understanding of sacrifice is that, insofar as the excess-driven economy is opposed to the rationalist productive economy, Bataille simultaneously understands it as the condition for the disruption of the latter. More precisely, according to Bataille moments of nonproductive expenditure in the 'general' economy form internal threats to the homogenous order of society (Pawlett, 2016, p. xx). Unproductive expenditure introduces heterogeneity into the homogenous order, consisting of 'everything rejected by homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value', from 'the waste products of the human body', 'words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value', 'the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses', to mobs, aristocratic and impoverished classes, and those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.)' (Bataille, 1986, p. 142). Compared to everyday life, heterogeneous existence can be represented as 'something other', as 'incommensurate' (Bataille, 1986, p. 143).

In this context we must situate Bataille's account of sacrifice. According to Bataille the key characteristic and importance of sacrifices – historically, ritual destruction of goods and persons- is that they withdraw wealth from productive consumption. 'In general,' he writes, 'sacrifice withdraws useful products from profane circulation; in principle the gifts of potlatch liberate objects that are useless from the start' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 76). As a game, he furthermore contends, 'potlatch is the opposite of a principle of conservation: it puts an end to the stability of fortunes as it existed within the totemic economy, where possession was hereditary. An activity of excessive exchange replaced heredity (as source of possession) with a kind of deliriously formed ritual poker' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 76).

What importantly follows is that sacrifices resist formalist or objectivist understandings. To be more precise, for Bataille a sacrifice does not refer to a particular activity done for the sake of some benefit or other - biological, psychological, symbolic etc. - nor to a certain attitude of the one who performs the sacrifice. To be more precise, for Bataille a sacrifice is not a sacrifice to the real world - a sacrifice of the real world to the real world - but by contrast should be understood as a sacrifice to another reality, that is the intimate world or heterogeneous order. 'Sacrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 55). It is for this very reason that Bataille contends that sacrifices resist forms of alienation, or oppression.

Here we arrive at the third reason why we must consider Bataille's theorisation of sacrifice, namely that when sacrificing the subject experiences something that transcends its real-life behaviours, thoughts and motives and is drawn into a sphere that is not of its own making, that is a sphere of freedom. Bataille argues that it is not only the sacrificed object, but the subject who offers the sacrifice as well, that temporarily escapes from the demands of utility. Those who offer sacrifices - from objects, to aspects of their daily life to even their very own existence - become freed from the domain of calculative reason. Heterogeneous experience 'suspends 'the subject', which is a construct of homogeneous society' and pushes it 'beyond the limits of homogeneous society which constitute it as a subject' (Pawlett, 2016, p. xxi). For Bataille, wasteful acts rediscover the intimate participation of the sacrificer and the sacrificed (Bataille, 1988b, p. 55). They must be understood as 'lived-in' experiences that open up the order of the intimate, characterised by immanence, immediacy and non-discursive, non-representable being, and as 'being antithetical to the real world', that is the world of things, or the realm of production (Bataille, 1988b, p. 58). According to Bataille, it is by such escapes that a different ethical self-relation becomes possible, unmediated by the logics of use and usefulness.

What we take this to mean is that the freedom experienced by the sacrificer allows her to arbitrate between two systems of value, that of the dominant reality and that of the play-world, that is, in Bataille's language, the heterogeneous order. The sacrificer, before she has access to an unfettered choice, stands in a normative vacuum and to that extent is free. To be free in this context means to do things out of one's nature, to do a or b because of what one is. Those who perform sacrifices can temporarily live free from societal constraints, that is the demands of useful and future oriented production, and enter the realm of the sacred: 'This useless consumption is *what suits me,* once my concern for the morrow is removed' (Bataille, 1988b, p. 58).

Important for our study is that we shouldn't understand such experiences in positive, but rather in negative terms. For Bataille the experiences of those who offer sacrifices are not those of a coherent identity that can be said to ground knowledge and politics. They are what Foucault once coined limit experiences that transgress the limits of coherent subjectivity as it functions in everyday life. (Foucault, 1991, p. 31). They must be understood as

neither personal, individual, nor fully interiorized experiences, but as obeying their own authority, albeit an authority that always and per definition undermines itself (Bataille, 1988a, p. 6).[13] Recall that we argued in the introduction to this chapter that we are in need of a concept of experience that meets amongst others the requirement of 'pertaining to the subject, neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse'.

Important for our task is, thus, that Bataille understands the freedom experienced in sacrifice as beyond a conceptualisation of the subject as either bearer or product of power-discourse. For Bataille by contrast, in limit experiences, the desire for the object cannot but annihilate the subject of desire as much as the object of desire. The outcome of such phenomena is neither unification, nor progress, nor sublimation, but nothing, disappearance, or even death.[14] Limit experiences transgress the limits of coherent subjectivity through

13 To further elucidate the importance of Bataille's view of 'limit experience', his *Inner Experience* is of help. In this work he first of all contrasts his account of limit experience with mysticism, in so far as mysticism implies a notion of a totalising experience and secondly with ascetic self-fashioning, in so far as such a project demands deliberate and articulable actions, which eventually cannot but depend on well-defined projects. On the first page of this work he writes: 'By inner experience I understand that which one usually calls mystical experience: the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of meditated emotion. But I am thinking less of confessional experience, to which one has had to adhere up to now, than of an experience laid bare, free of ties, even of an origin, of any confession whatever. This is why I don't like the word mystical' (Bataille, 1988a, p.3). Derrida's remarks are here of assistance: 'That which indicates itself as mysticism, in order to shake the security of discursive knowledge, refers beyond the opposition of the mystic and the rational. Bataille above all is not a new mystic. That which indicates itself as interior experience is not an experience, because it is related to no presence, to no plenitude, but only to the "impossible" it "undergoes" in torture' (Derrida, 2005, p. 344). For Bataille, as Derrida observes, in negative experiences there is no hope for a totalising experience that could make the self and the world a harmonious whole, such as allegedly is the case with the ecstasy of the mystics. Rather the experience of intimacy with life is unsettling and upsetting. Secondly, negative inner experience cannot be understood as a project of self-fashioning, or of ascetic self-control. According to Bataille any project of self-fashioning demands deliberate and articulable actions, or, put differently, actions that are depended on projects, which cannot but be informed by discursive, articulable intentions. He writes: 'Discursive thought is evinced by an individual engaged in action: it takes place within him beginning with his projects, on the level of reflexion upon projects. Project is not only the mode of existence implied by action, necessary to action - it is a way of being in paradoxical time: the putting off of existence to a later point' (Bataille, 1988a, p. 46). Inner experience is the opposite of projects of self-fashioning as these are motivated by discursive reason. Inner experience must also not be conflated with ascetic self-control, i.e. attempts to reach a state of oneness with the universe or the divine through self-abnegation. Bataille writes: 'My principle against ascesis is that the extreme limit is accessible through excess, not through want. Even the ascesis of those who succeed in it takes on in my eyes the sense of a sin, of an impotent poverty. I don't deny that ascesis is a conducive experience. I even insist on it. Ascesis is a sure means of separating oneself from objects: it kills the desire which binds one to the object. But at the same time it makes an object of experience (one only killed the desire for objects by proposing a new object for desire)' (Bataille, 1988a, p. 21). In ascesis, of value is not experience as such, independent of pain, suffering, pleasure or excitement, but its outcome in terms of salvation and deliverance. Thus, the problem with projects of self-fashioning and ascesis is that they grant experience with an authority, not on their own account, but in relation to something else.

14 Nancy's engagement with Bataille is here of assistance: '"In" the "NOTHING" or in nothing-in sov-

the practice of expenditure. There is no anticipation, no purpose, no ought, or in short no normativity: 'That which counts is there each time that *anticipation*, that which binds one in activity, the meaning of which is manifested in the reasonable *anticipation* of the result, dissolves, in a staggering, unanticipated way, into NOTHING' (Bataille, 1991, Volume 111, p. 211). In nothing, we repeatedly read in his *Inner Experience*, there is only silence (Bataille, 1988a). This silence is not the silence of inactivity, but precisely the silence of morality. In silence we find: 'Laughter that doesn't laugh, and tears that don't cry', a 'cruelty that isn't harsh and fear that isn't afraid of anything' (Bataille, 1991, Volume 111, p. 441). What this means again is that in the experience of sacrifice, normativity has no say, or no hold on the subject. This for the reason that the sacrificer, as we argued above, stands in a normative vacuum, as arbiter between two scales of value that are not overarched by a third scale.

3.2.2 Sacrifices and freedom

Therefore, the most important lesson that we should draw from Bataille for our understanding of the references to sacrifice as they appear in the data, is that sacrifices point to an irreducible experience that places the subject in a sphere of unadulterated freedom. In effect, this is what the players' experiences of sacrifice amount to. Bataille allows us first of all to theorize that the sacrifices of the players do not refer to activities done for the sake of some benefit or other, biological, psychological, symbolic etc., nor to a certain attitude of the players themselves. To be more precise, Bataille brings into view that the players' sacrifices are not sacrifices to the real world - sacrifices of the real world to the real world - but by contrast should be understood as sacrifices to another reality, the playworld, or in his terms the heterogeneous order. Secondly, Bataille brings into view, that because the sacrificer arbitrates between two scales of value, she is free. When sacrificing, the subject commits to something that transcends its real-life behaviours, thoughts and motives and is drawn into a sphere that is not of its own making. Accordingly, the experience of sacrifice must be understood as an experience that allows something of the individual to escape the diverse modes of oppression related to calculative reason. What it saves from the diverse modes of oppression, must however not be understood in a foundationalist sense. Importantly and by contrast, for Bataille, the experience of sacrifice, understood as a form of limit experience is 'without shape or form' and '*has nothing as its object'* (Bataille, 1988b, p. 189, 190, emphasis in orginal).

Through such escapes a different ethical self-relation becomes possible, independent of the logic of use and usefulness. The subject according to Bataille engages two systems of value or meaning, that of the dominant reality and that of the heterogeneous order. She is

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ereignty-being is "outside itself'; it is in an exteriority that is impossible to recapture, or perhaps we should say that it is of this exteriority, that it is of an outside that it cannot relate to itself, but with which it entertains an essential and incommensurable relation. This relation prescribes the place of the singular being. This is why the "inner experience" of which Bataille speaks is in no way "interior" or "subjective," but is indissociable from the experience of this relation to an incommensurable outside' (Nancy, 1991, p. 18).

an arbiter between two systems of value un-subjected to a third system. Accordingly, the sacrificing subject stands in a normative vacuum and therefore is free. It is for this very reason that Bataille contends that sacrifices resist alienation and oppression.

What Bataille's notion of sacrifice importantly makes visible is that the Foucauldian post-structuralist, cultural studies and Marxist frameworks in social sport studies miss important insights when theorizing athletes' 'willingness' to sacrifice. To be more precise, what Bataille's account makes visible is that the problem with the existing frameworks is that they are committed to a monistic understanding of normativity: whatever value is, and whatever its value, there is, in these models, only one scale of value. Recall that we argued in chapter 2 that the Marxist framework upholds the view that by making sacrifices we either delude ourselves, or risk something for the achievement of a higher good. On the other hand, Foucauldian poststructuralist sport studies make sense of the theme of sacrifice in terms of oppressive modes of self-realisation; it is by making sacrifices that we can become who we are told that we really are, provided that we listen to the knowledge of experts.

Accordingly what these frameworks fail to see is that a sacrifice involves not a rivalry between different 'real' world values (therefore a rivalry between two commensurables, and thereby a rivalry destined to be resolved), but a rivalry between two worlds, that of calculative reason and that, in Bataille's language, of the "heterogeneous order." This insight is of key importance for our task of making sense of the women's references to sacrifice in our interviews. Recall that the players suggest that sacrifices cannot be understood in terms of discipline, obedience or control, in short power, but must be understood in terms of the inarticulable value attributed to football. 'Football is actually not that important, but then at the same time it is.' Following Bataille, players sacrifice not to the real world - a sacrifice of the real world to the real world - but rather they sacrifice to what would be best described as *another reality*. Hence, they find themselves not confronted with competing values *of* the 'real' world, but rather with a rivalry between the values of the 'real' world and that other reality they are committed to. This contrasts with the view upheld by the existing frameworks in social sport studies, according to which sacrifices point at sacrifices of the real world to the real world.

To conclude. Moving beyond the reductionism we find in the existing frameworks, Bataille's theory of sacrifice allows us first of all to understand that there are at least two systems of value or meaning, that is that of the 'allegedly' real world such as accounted for by the existing frameworks, and that, in his language, of the 'other reality'. Players do not sacrifice a certain part of the real world (say, their health) to another (say, money), but to another reality that draws them into another sphere. Secondly, what this suggests is not only a dual model of value, but it circumscribes three existential areas: that of the real world as a certain scale of value, that of play as another, and that of arbitration between the two, which is that of a normative vacuum, freedom.

3.2.3 The limits of the logic of the gift

Yet, as should be clear by now, sacrifices or acts of wasteful expenditure are precisely not what a well-run or well-organised society requires. By contrast, according to Bataille these are necessarily excluded from the profane order of the social. To be more precise, for Bataille 'heterology' concerns an absolute difference that must be expelled or ejected from the world of ordered materiality, organized by the sameness of objects and subjects to themselves (Hynes & Sharpe, 2015, p. 121, 122). Recall that the very possibility of objective knowledge and calculation rests on the notion that we can separate ourselves from both ourselves and our surroundings. It is only by means of this separation that we can logically, scientifically or instrumentally make sense of ourselves and our surroundings. As suggested in the previous section, this is precisely what wasteful acts put at risk. The subject who offers the sacrifice escapes from the demands of utility, finding itself in a state where the logic of scarcity and discourses no longer apply.

However, precisely by positing non-productive expenditure as the other pole of the rational order, we must consider departing from Bataille's conceptualisation of the experience of sacrifice. As stated above, for Bataille 'heterology' concerns an absolute difference; it is the radical Other of calculative reason, the outside, the negative, the irrational. What this implies is that Bataille assumes that a sacrificer will think that a free act is one that offends calculative reason, or violates rationality.

Accordingly, what it means for the subject to be free depends on calculative reason. When the sacrificer attributes a meaning to sacrifice they do so on the basis of what they know it is not: calculative reason. A different way of saying this is that eventually for Bataille, the meaning that we find in sacrifices has no positive origin in the sacrificer. Rather, this meaning is derived from that which calculative reason is not. Thus for Bataille it seems impossible to attribute a meaning to what exceeds calculative reason, on its own terms, that is as something different from the Other of calculative reason. Following Bataille, we should then conclude that we can only say something about the meaning of being immersed in football, on the basis of that which it is not.

What the data of our study indeed points out is that the irreducible commitment cannot be understood in terms of real-life values. However, it does not suggest that the value that motivates this irreducible commitment derives its sense from the regime of the real world. By contrast, sacrifices show that the players play, because they sometimes choose being immersed in football rather than reality. If there was absolutely nothing positive *sui generis* about the player's immersion in football, it becomes hard to imagine why the players started playing football in the first place (see also: Feezell, 2004). In effect, they repeatedly say that their engagement in football gives them joy and satisfaction. Accordingly, our data point out that it is far from impossible to attribute meaning to something that exceeds (even our own) objective recognition. This is what Bataille's model cannot account for: for him, meaning recognition is the necessary condition for meaning attribution and it would be

irrational to attribute meaning to something that exceeds our understanding. We, on the other hand, lack any good reason to think that in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players meaning recognition (believing that X objectively has meaning) is the necessary condition for meaning attribution (granting X meaning in our lives) and that we can only say something about the meaning of being immersed in football, on the basis of that which it is not.

Here we arrive at the crucial point that marks our departure from Bataille. What we need is a theory that doesn't accept the problem of Bataille's understanding of sacrifice, as being meaningless. To be more precise, what we need in order to account for the theme of sacrifice in the context of the experiences of the women's football players is a theory that meets the fourth requirement that we delineated in the introduction to this chapter: playing should be accounted for as intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants.

In effect, it is only under the condition that we meet this fourth requirement that we can meet the congruent requirement. Recall that we are in need of a theoretical framework that allows us to meet the four requirements that we delineated in the introduction, in a way congruent with the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice'. What the limits of Bataille allow us to glimpse, yet not think is that we can only fulfil our task of theorizing the experience of sacrifice in the context of the experiences of the women's football players under the condition that we theorize sacrifice as an irreducible and *sui generis* structure of experience that is both distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', and ontologically anterior to them.

What the analysis of the data has pointed out is first of all that the experience of sacrifice evades moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations yet motivates the players in such a way that it can compete with these, as the players sacrifice not to the real world, but to another reality. However, it is only under the condition that players attribute a certain meaning to this other reality that it can compete with these 'real-life' values. Put differently, in the context of the players' experiences of sacrifice, meaning making precedes or even conditions recognition. Yet, in so far as meaning making is ontologically prior to recognition, we must conclude that the experience of being drawn into this other reality not only evades 'real-life' values, but importantly also precedes them.

3.3 Play: Theorizing sacrifice beyond dualisms

3.3.1 The lessons to be drawn from Bataille's notion of the gift

The final subsection of the previous section allowed us to be more precise about the key lesson that we should draw from Bataille for our aim of giving an account of the women's football players' experiences of sacrifice. Bataille aptly shows that the problem with social sport studies' adherence to the Marxist logic of scarcity and/or the Foucauldian poststructuralist account of the subject lies in their commitment to a monistic system of value, or as Bataille would have it, 'a logic of homogeneity'. This denies the irreducible character of sacrifice as a *sui generis* phenomenon which cannot be reduced to the commitments accounted for by the existing models.

The players themselves tell us that they sacrifice not because of football's culture of obedience or for the sake of material benefit, but for the sake of an irreducible and spontaneous commitment to another reality. What this importantly means is that Bataille allows us to understand that players do not sacrifice to the real world, but in terms of Bataille to the heterogeneous order. For the expression 'Football is the most important thing in the world, and at the same time it is not' amongst others, precisely evidences the players' experience of living a contradictory life, whereby the contradiction points not to conflicting real-life values, but between those of two competing realities.

However, for our purposes, Bataille's attachment to non-productive expenditure is eventually just as problematic as the attachment to its opposite, as it cannot do justice to the realisation that, in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players, it is not irrational to attribute meaning to something that exceeds recognition. As abundance operates, according to Bataille, as the other pole of scarcity, within his account, moments of transgression remain dependent on - derive their sense from - calculative reason and objectivism. For him, the 'No' of limit experience is always a 'No' that remains dependent on calculative reason. As a consequence, Bataille fails to provide us with the adequate tools to give a positive account of the women's football players' experience of sacrifice. For Bataille, sacrifices remain the Other of calculative reason, while we need to theorize the experience of sacrifice as being meaningful on its own terms.

We even argued that it is only under this condition that we meet the fourth requirement that we delineated in the introduction to this chapter: meaningful in terms of the experience it grants, that it will be possible to meet the congruence requirement, that is the requirement according to which the experience of sacrifice must be thought of in a way congruent with the experience of high performance and gender policing.

3.3.2 The Structures of Play

Here we arrive at the main thrust of this thesis, namely that the pre-rational philosophy of play which we find in the works of authors such as Huizinga, Fink and Gadamer offers

us adequate theoretical tools to theorize the experience of sacrifice as both distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', yet ontologically anterior to them. These pre-rational philosophers of play present us with a concept of experience - the experience of play - which both temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causal chains of the dominant reality yet cannot be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, what the pre-rational philosophy of play offers us is an account of experience that precisely resists the distinction between the rational and the irrational, or in terms of the language of play, the playful and the serious. What these authors bring into view is that the distinction between playfulness and seriousness is only a secondary or historical phenomenon. In 'reality', they argue, playfulness and seriousness are united.

What this importantly means, as I shall argue in the following sections, is that the pre-rational philosophy offers us not only adequate tools to account for the players' experience of feeling torn between the imperatives of the dominant reality and, in their language, play, but importantly also of their confusion before this very opposition. One thing that the players say when they say "football is not so important but again it is" is to evidence their sense of living a contradictory life. What the theory of play precisely allows us to understand is that they do not have a sense of living a contradictory life because they really do live a contradictory life (as would follow from Bataille's account) but because they have internalised the historically contingent and artificial separation of play and seriousness. They become unable to make sense of their life and life-choices because they use the ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, or irrationality and rationality. It is hence for this reason that they see, and supposedly only *can* see, their life choices as contradictory. As we shall see, the result is alienation and disempowerment.

In order to establish the required theoretical framework, the following subsections will weave together insights from Huizinga, Fink and Gadamer. The main focus will be on Huizinga's classic work, *Homo Ludens* (1938) and Fink's *Play as a Symbol of the World* (1960) and *The Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play* (1957). These works offer a theorization of the relevance of play in itself for human beings, instead of analyzing it in terms of externally defined functions, that is as games. On the basis of these works, I shall distinguish six characteristics, or structures of play. Together with the irreducibility thesis inherited from Bataille, these six characteristics provide us with a robust framework that allows us to make theoretical sense of our discovery that (i) it is far from irrational, nonsensical, or even pathological that the players should consider football as simultaneously both the most important and the least important thing in the world; (ii) the women's football players suffer from the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness, or the rational and the irrational. The six characteristics of play are: (i) Play is a subjective experience, and should be taken in its primary significance, that is from the perspective of those that experience play; (ii) play is free (iii) play precedes the opposition between seriousness and not-seriousness; (iv) play induces a double consciousness; (v);

play creates meaning, or imparts meaning to action; (vi) play is characterized by rules that are ambiguous. Together these characteristics allow us to give a comprehensive account of the women's football players' experience of sacrifice.

3.3.2.1 Play 'in itself'

As argued in chapter 2, what is central to the experiences of the women's football players is precisely the fact that calculative reason fails them when trying to explain what it is in football that motivates their willingness to sacrifice. For this reason, we argued in the introduction to this chapter that we need a theory that allows for an understanding of the experience of sacrifice that is first. indifferent to power/power-discourse, and second, pertains to the subject as such, though as neither bearer nor as product of power-discourse (for otherwise it could be described in objective language). To this end, we considered Bataille's notion of sacrifice, or more precisely his account of the experience of sacrifice, but concluded that it can only partly fulfil our task.

A different way of saying that calculative reason fails us when trying to articulate a certain experience, is saying that it is impossible to describe that experience from an externalist perspective.

One of the most extensive accounts of play, which precisely starts with this impossibility of describing play from an externalist position, is to be found in Eugen Fink's meditations on play in his *Play as a Symbol of the World* (1960) and the *Oasis of Happiness: Thoughts toward an Ontology of Play* (1957). Fink writes: 'No one is likely to contest that play exists as a human possibility of a special, imaginatively, exhilarated comportment. As an anthropological phenomenon play is considered to be verified, even if controversy may reign over its "phenomenological" interpretations. The indisputable phenomenon of play in no way presents itself as readily evident and transparent; on the contrary: this phenomenon standing more or less on the margins of life offers surprising opposition to conceptual penetration as soon as one undertakes to analyse it structure' (Fink, 2016, p. 43). We are all, as Fink further contends, familiar with play, yet as soon as we reflect on it 'the immediate "use" is disturbed, it loses its fluent "self-evidence" and the light of understanding is clouded' (Fink, 2016, p. 44).[15] Huizinga is here of further assistance, suggesting that play should first of all be taken as the player takes it, that is in its primary significance (Huizinga, 1980, p. 4).

15 Presumably, it is because of this impenetrability of play that it lacks thorough attention in the field of social sport studies. The observation by Halák, one of Fink's commentators, does not then come as a surprise: 'although the way in which Fink elucidates the ontological potential of play has the power to be very instructive even 60 years after it was written', 'the attention it receives in the philosophy of sport does not come close to reflecting this fact' (Halák, 2016, p. 200). While philosophically rich, both in concrete descriptions and structural analyses, 'it is virtually absent in the philosophy of sport literature today' (Halák, 2016, p. 200). For example in the 2013 published volume *The Philosophy of Play*, there is only one, and then marginal reference to Fink (Hopsicker & Carlso, 2013, p. 181).

Importantly for our concerns, Huizinga even argues that it is for the experience play grants that players engage in play, as 'in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening, lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 2, 3). Players thus engage in play for no other reason than to be in play. Thus, when we aim to say something about how it 'feels' to be in play, we are better off using qualitative terms that, as Huizinga points out, resist 'any attempt to reduce it to other terms', as 'their rationale and their mutual relationships must lie in a very deep layer of our mental being' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 6). Similarly, Fink characterises play as a passion of the soul. At play, he further contends, humans are enwrapped in joy, to which he adds that 'the joy arising from play is a singular pleasure, difficult to put your finger on' (Fink, 2016, p.77). As soon as joy disappears, play likewise vanishes.

Important for our concern is thus that play cannot be reduced to anything beyond itself, or described in other terms. For Huizinga any theory of play that perceives play as a response to the necessities of life is misguided:[16] for Huizinga the nature or essence of play cannot be found outside play itself. According to him, in the heart of play resides a very specific meaning, 'a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 1), which resists and escapes any reductionist understanding. In effect, according to Huizinga, it is only from an internalist perspective, that is from the perspectives of the players themselves, that we can grasp the meaning of play.

3.3.2.2 The freedom of play

What does it mean that play must be understood as resisting the demands of utility? It is, according to Huizinga, because of the quality of freedom that play distinguishes itself from the course of natural processes (Huizinga, 1980, p. 7). Similarly, Fink argues that play should be distinguished from other aspects of human existence, as it 'is not linked to other phenomena in a common pursuit of the ultimate end' (Fink, 2016, p.77). What is at

16 We may think here of the multitude of empirical studies, from psychology to anthropology, that focus on the descriptions and functions of play behaviour in animals, children and adults. What binds these functionalist understandings of play is the thrust they put on the benefits that play may have for individual players and groups. Following Spencer's Darwinian interpretation (Spencer, 1970), many psychologists, for instance, argue that play must be seen as a release of energy. Others argue that play should rather be understood as a practice of skills. Groos's well-known historical articulation, according to which children naturally imitate or practise adult activities and thus play as training or pre-exercise for (adult) life (Groos, 2013). Notorious is also the work of Piaget who considered play an important aspect of learning, as it would stimulate the integration of new experiences into motor and cognitive skills (Piaget, 1962). But we should also think here of Winnicott, who considered play as the most important way in which children sustain a coherent ego identity, as it would allow them do deal with unconscious emotions and express, indirectly or symbolically, suppressed feelings and fears (Winnicott, 1971). Differences aside, what these theories share is the belief that something like play exists, as it performs a function one could not do without. At the same time play is only contingently connected to its psychological or developmental functions. Play's function is not an internal quality of playing, it is, rather, derived from playing. In this way perceived playing, experiencing play, or being submerged in play is a vehicle of an extrinsic social function. This thesis, however, describes itself as belonging to the tradition of pre-rational play scholarship and centres on play as it is *in itself*.

stake in play is freedom. When players are playing, they are, in a sense, unconstrained by the restrictions of oppressive reality. It is precisely in this sense that the women's football players' experience of sacrifice evades moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations.[17] To be playing is to be free, or as Huizinga puts it, 'play to order is no longer play; it could best be but a forcible imitation of it' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 7). In this context the argument can be made that one can be forced to play. Such an argument however, overlooks Huizinga's point about subjective experience, which is that playing only happens when one is engrossed and that this engrossing cannot be forced.

17 In the context of our discussion about play as a non-productive and therefore free activity, particularly worth mentioning is Morgan's analysis of Adorno's theory of sport (Morgan, 1988) and in his footsteps that of Inglis (Inglis, 2004). Contrary to Brohm and Rigauer (see chapter 2 of this thesis), for whom Adorno's position vis-à-vis sport, must be understood as a denunciation of the field all together, both Morgan and Inglis give a more nuanced reading of Adorno's theory of sport. Morgan and in his footsteps Inglis, aim to show that Adorno's position vis-à-vis sport opens up an important perspective with which to assess critically its emancipatory pedigree (Morgan, 1988, p. 834). To be more precise, by reconstructing Adorno's scattered comments on this topic, Morgan argues that Adorno can be taken as holding that sport, understood as a form of play, is an activity which to a degree can stand beyond the realm of instrumental-rational activity (Inglis, 2004, p. 91). On the one hand, for Adorno, like most Marxist informed sport theorists, sport must be considered to be an agent of social domination. In the words of Adorno himself: '"Bourgeois sport... want(s) to differentiate itself... strictly from play. Its bestial seriousness consists in the fact that instead of remaining faithful to the dream of freedom by getting away from purposiveness, the treatment of play as a duty puts it among useful purposes and thereby wipes out the trace of freedom in it"' (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 818). However, for Adorno, 'apart from its involvement in the unseemly side of social life', 'sport can and often does serve as an important site of social resistance' (Morgan, 1988, p. 820). First of all, and in correspondence with Huizinga and Fink (see section 3.2.5 of this chapter), Adorno observes that people engaged in sport are characterized by a double consciousness. At the one hand "people certainly consume and accept what the culture industry presents them in their leisure, yet at the same time "they indeed don't simply take it as real" (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 820). On this basis, he concludes that 'the integration of consciousness and leisure has still not completely succeeded. The real interests of the individuals are still strong enough in limits to withstand total integration (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 820). In so far as the illusions 'propagated in or by sport are always accompanied by the disclaimer "but it's only pretend," or "its only a game,"' individuals are reminded that there is always more than meets the eye (Morgan, 1988, p. 820). Accordingly, according to Adorno, sport contributes to the strength of the individual to resist social integration. Secondly, Morgan argues that for Adorno, sport itself as a specific form of praxis carries with it a critical potential. Following Adorno's transcendental brand of immanent critique that redirects the attention to sport itself, i.e. to sport's intrinsic, formal rationality, Morgan argues that for Adorno it is precisely sports' playful dimension that elevates life '"...above the context of immediate economic praxis and purposive behavior"' (Adorno cited in Morgan, Morgan, 1988, p. 824). It is this aspect of play, which Adorno regards as 'its "genuine essence," that is covered over in the social demand that play distract us from our demeaning work' Morgan, 188, p. 824). To be more precise, what is specifically about the nature of sport qua play that for Adorno contests the status quo is it gratuitous character, that is a 'combination of vitality and disinterestedness, of seriousness and uselessness' (Morgan, 1988, p. 824). This combination is integral to the playful logic of sport, which decrees that we take the useless seriously, that we commit ourselves to the resolution of contrived difficulties that in themselves have no ulterior purpose. Hence it is by 'refocusing our energies and attention on tasks stripped of any apparent utility, that sport registers its protest against the fungibility of the real world' (Morgan, 1988, p. 824).

For Huizinga, forced play or play for the sake of extrinsically defined functions is precisely not an expression of freedom, as their value is determined from outside of itself. His references to Aristotle's meditations on leisure are here of help. As stated in reference to Marx's adherence to Aristotle in chapter 2, Aristotle draws a division between activities that are merely useful and those that have value in themselves. Following Aristotle, for Huizinga those activities that are done for the sake of themselves enjoy freedom. Activities whose value is determined from something outside themselves, belong rather to the sphere of necessity. While formalist accounts of play consider taking part in one concrete form of play or another as a means to a certain end, for Aristotle play has its place in *skholē*, 'because nature requires us not only to be able to work well but also to idle well' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 161). This idleness, recounts Huizinga, is for Aristotle the principle of the universe. It is preferred over work; indeed, it is the aim of all work (Huizinga, 1980, p. 161).

For Aristotle, as we saw earlier, all other activities must then serve leisure. In leisure time one contemplates and all other activities (work etc.) appear as necessary for the achievement of contemplation, that is the contemplative life.[18] Hence, concludes Huizinga: 'For the free man, leisure contains in itself all the joy and delight of life. Leisure is neither necessary nor useful, but only serves the passing of free time' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 161). In the footsteps of Huizinga, Novak puts it rather tellingly: 'Play, not work, is the end of life. To participate in the rites of play is to dwell in the Kingdom of Ends. To participate in work, career, and the making of history is to labor in the Kingdom of Means. The modern age, the age of history, nourishes illusions. In a protestant culture, as in Marxist cultures, work is serious, important, and adult. Its essential insignificance is overlooked. Work, of course, must be done. But we should be wise enough to distinguish necessity from reality. Play is reality, work is diversion and escape' (Novak, 1976, p. 41).

For Huizinga, thus, human beings are not determined to play. Rather to be in play is an actualized possibility for the sake of the enjoyment people find in play, wherein 'precisely lies their freedom' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 7). Play is 'free, is in fact freedom' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 8).

3.2.2.3 Play's non-seriousness

However, to say that play is free may wrongfully suggest that Huizinga posits play, as Bataille posits the heterogeneous order, as the radical outside of the order of calculative reason, that is seriousness. The following passage in which Huizinga outlines the formal characteristics of play is of here of help: '...we might call it a free activity standing quite

18 It must, however, be noted that, whereas in ancient Greece, the man of leisure or freedom symbolized self-actualization and liberation, Huizinga laments that after the industrial revolution work and production became the ideal, and then the idol, of the age (Huizinga, 1980, p. 192). As a consequence, those who do not work hard or hard enough belong, in this age, to the category of lazy - instead of Aristotle's 'idle men'. In addition it is important to keep in mind that we no longer live in the Polis, and hopefully also do not desire its return. This, for the very reason that the conditions that made leisure and intellectual life in Ancient Athens possible were precisely dependent on the invisible, yet forced labour by slaves and women (see footnote 3 of this thesis).

consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It prompts the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13).[19] For Huizinga, play is not-serious in the sense that it is separate from ordinary reality. This sense of separateness must, however, not be misunderstood, as play can be engaged in very seriously and must not be understood as unreal or unimportant.

Play is a free activity standing 'outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time it absorbs the player intensely and utterly' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13). Note that the earlier quote derived from our data, follows a similar structure: 'Football is not so important, but then again it is.' Huizinga maintains this description even when discussing games that require players to make rigorous sacrifices or even risk their lives. In effect, for Huizinga the seriousness that we find in play is that which makes play, wholly play. Thus, for Huizinga play includes both playfulness and seriousness (Huizinga, 1980, p. 45)

In the footsteps of Huizinga, although in other terminology, we therefore argue that play is best described as being 'non-serious', indicating its indifference to the disjunction of seriousness and playfulness. Gadamer's remarks on the seriousness of play in his *Truth and Method* amplify Huizinga's argument. For Gadamer, as for Huizinga, the serious character of play troubles purposeful seriousness: 'Thus it can be said that for the player play is not serious: that is why he plays. We can try to define the concept of play from this point of view. What is merely play is not serious. Play has a special relation to what is serious. It is not

19 The distinction that Mihai Spariosu draws between two opposing and competing understandings of the practice of 'as if', i.e. 'rational' and 'pre-rational' (Spariosu, 1989, p. 12) helps to situate Fink's and Huizinga's accounts of play in both the history of philosophy and the larger field of play scholarship. The distinction he draws, fits into the larger way Spariosu contrasts rational with pre-rational play, arguing that play concepts are subordinated to a power principle which has in turn controlled the Western mentality as a whole (Spariosu, 1989, p. 5). According to Spariosu play is either rational, i.e. play as a manifestation of subjective control or pre-rational, i.e. a manifestation of the 'natural forces' dominating the subject. Pre-rational narratives characterize play as vital, untamed and chaotic; it is a chance play related to archaic theories of cosmos as a power game in which a myriad divine, human, and physical forces ceaselessly contend for supremacy (Spariosu, 1989, pp. 12-15). Play is here also strongly connected with bodily affects and powers, as players, contends Spariosu, immerse themselves through direct sensual experience in play. In 'pre-rational' play, players are not fully in control of their actions. They are players and at the same time playthings from the perspective of play itself. Rational play on the other hand, according to Spariosu, separates play from this unmediated power, by limiting the chance element. Rational thought sees play, as 'a form of mediation between what is now represented as the "irrational" (the chaotic conflict of physical forces, the disorderedly eruption of violent emotion, the unashamed gratification of the physical senses etc.) and controlling Reason, or the universal Will to Order' (Spariosu, 1989, p. 12). For Spariosu, then, rational accounts of play, subordinate play to conventions and purposeful behaviour.

only that the latter gives it its "purpose": we play "for the sake of recreation," as Aristotle says. More important, play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness. Yet, in playing, all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 102).

What Gadamer here aptly points out is that it is only from an externalist position that we can say that a player plays because of playfulness, yet from an internalist perspective a player plays for play's seriousness. Seriousness is thus even necessary to make the play wholly play. A different way of saying this is that unless players take their play wholly seriously, the game would not continue. Thus, taking play in its primary significance, that is from the perspective of those that are in play, means taking play in its seriousness. In effect, it is this 'taking seriously' that must be understood as the subjective experience that cannot be forced. On the other hand, taking play from an externalist position, means taking play in its playfulness. Yet, we can only speak of these two different perspectives, under the condition that in reality play is a unity of both seriousness and playfulness (Huizinga, 1980, p. 24), for it is impossible to imagine play without seriousness, as this would mean the end of the game. It is then also precisely for this reason that Huizinga argues that in many cases it is hard or even impossible to differentiate the serious from the playful.

3.3.2.4 The seriousness of the world

That play is both playfulness and seriousness does not imply that it is involved in any sense of objectivity. If this were the case, we'd be left again with an economic understanding of sacrifice. The women's football players sacrifice not to the real world, but following the pre-rational philosophers of play, to play, or the playworld. What this means is that play competes with the imperatives of the 'real' world, though precisely under the condition that play evades moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations.

Importantly for our concerns, according to Huizinga, play derives it serious character not from the seriousness that we find in the 'real' world'. Put differently, the seriousness that we find in play does not mimic or derive its meaning from the discourses that circulate within the 'real' world. By contrast, according to Huizinga, it is the 'real' world that derives its serious character from the seriousness that we find in play (Huizinga, 1980, p. 46, 75). A different way of saying this is that for Huizinga playing is ontologically prior to the distinction between subjectivity and reality. It may make sense to speak of subjectivity and reality, that is to make use of these categories, but only under the conditions that we acknowledge that both are secondary, historical and artificial phenomena. Hence, for Huizinga, it is not playing that needs to be explained in reference to reality and subjectivity, but reality that needs explanation in reference to playing, as he reminds us that all culture, that is all human experience, begins and ends with play (Huizinga, 1980, p. 173)

Put differently, our sense of reality is derived from play and not the reverse. Thus, for Huizinga, importantly moving beyond Bataille, play makes possible the seriousness that we

find in the 'real' world, yet at the same time it finds itself in opposition to the seriousness of the real world as it resists any reductionist, that is formalist understandings that take the distinction between playfulness and seriousness as ontologically primary. For Bataille, sacrifices remain 'not serious', while following Huizinga they should be called 'non-serious', precisely resisting the distinction between seriousness and playfulness.[20]

3.3.2.5 The double experience of consciousness

The above considerations provide us with key insights to make sense of the experience of sacrifice in the context of women's football. To be more precise, the pre-rational account of play allows us to theorize the experience of sacrifice as being both irreducible to the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', yet ontologically anterior to this distinction. Play temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causal chains of the dominant reality yet cannot be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, play resists the distinction between the playful and the serious, that is the rational and the irrational, as in 'reality proper' playfulness and seriousness are united.

Furthermore, Huizinga's position brings into view that the women's football players experience not only being torn between the imperatives of the dominant reality and play, but eventually experience confusion before this very opposition. One thing that the players do when they say "football is not so important but again it is" is to express their sense of living a divided life. This is precisely what Fink means when he argues that play implies a 'peculiar schizophrenia' or 'a splitting of the subject', as all players 'exist in two spheres' (Fink, 2016, p. 24, 25).[21] Players act according to both their understanding of and commitment to the

20 The problem with Bataille is that he stops with what is relative, i.e. the artificial separation between playfulness and seriousness, or reality and subjectivity. As discussed, Bataille posits the general economy as both the condition and the possibility of the disruption of the world of calculative reason. Likewise for Bataille, the general economy and the experience it grants must always be understood in non-utilitarian terms and as such constitutive of human freedom. Yet, by positing sacrifices or acts of wasteful expenditure as the radical Other of calculative reason, he remains committed to what we exposed with Huizinga as the artificial separation between seriousness and playfulness. Hence, within Bataille's account, moments of transgression remain dependent on - derive their sense from - calculative reason and objectivism. For Bataille, the 'No' of limit experience is always a 'No' that remains dependent on calculative reason. As a consequence, Bataille fails to provide us with adequate tools to give a positive account of the women's football players' experience of sacrifice.

21 Fink compares this mixture with an actor playing a role: 'The one who plays, who enters into a game, performs in the actual world a certain kind of activity that is well known in its characteristic features. Within the internal context of the sense of play, however, he takes on a *role*. And now we must distinguish between the real human being who "plays" and the human role within the instance of play. The player "conceals" himself by means of his "role"; in a certain measure he vanishes into it. With an intensity of a particular sort he lives in the role - and, yet again, not like a person who is deluded, who is no longer able to distinguish between "actuality" and "appearance". The player can call himself back out of the role. In the enactment of play, there remains a knowledge, albeit strongly reduced, about his double existence' (Fink, 2016, p. 24, 25). Of importance here is that the role played is not so much an imitation or an 'objective illusion' (Halák, 2016, p. 205), but as what Fink describes as a 'subjective appearance' (Fink, 2016, p. 28). When playing a

playworld and the real world. What Huizinga's insistence on the primary and unitary character of play importantly allows us to understand is that the players do not have a sense of living a contradictory life because their life *is* truly bifurcated, but because they have internalized the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness. To be more precise, the players become unable to make sense of their life and life-choices because they use ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness.

Hence, we are in a better position to explain why we stated in chapter 2 that objective reasons or arguments fail the players when articulating why, even when confronted with a serious head injury, they'd nevertheless continue playing the game. They precisely lack a proper discourse that allows them to make sense of their decisions, because the discourse available to them is informed by the (historical) distinction between playfulness and seriousness. Hence, they see, and supposedly only can see their life choices as contradictory, irrational and meaningless. Thus, what Huizinga's account of play brings into view is that the players precisely suffer from the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness, or the rational and the irrational.

3.3.2.6 Meaning making

Now we must however ask, what does it precisely mean that play makes possible the seriousness that we find in the 'real' world? Put differently, what does it mean to say that play is productive of meaning and that this meaning conditions our sense of reality? While Huizinga has been famously criticized for his agonistic perspective on play,[22] he argues in fact that

role, the player withdraws from objective life, yet at the same time the player knows the difference between the playful and the serious and the real and is capable of moving between the two spheres. Insofar as one is aware of being in play, it is possible to oscillate between a playful and an unplayful understanding of a given situation, which ultimately results in a dual consciousness of the social, viewed both as play and non-play.

22 Caillois for instance laments Huizinga's agonistic account of play, arguing that his definition of play is too limited, but paradoxically also too broad as it engages, according to him, aspects of life that should not be considered play. With the aim of improving Huizinga's account of play, Caillois set himself the task of presenting a more detailed description of playing and games. According to Caillois, all types of play and games can be placed in a model consisting of two axes. The first axis is a continuum between what he calls paidia and ludus, or free-play and games: 'At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term paidia. At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain or attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is completely impractical, even though it requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component ludus'(Caillois, 2001, p. 13). For Caillois, games proper are rules-heavy, while paida (play) on the other hand is characterised by free improvisation. The second axis is a classification of four types: agon or competition; alea or chance; mimesis or role-play; ilinx or sensation. According to Caillois, all types of play and game activity fall somewhere on the continuum between paidia and ludus and can be placed into at

play takes up two different forms under which we encounter it: 'as a contest for something or as a representation of something' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13).[23] While it is the latter which interests us, the word 'representation' in Huizinga's account is clearly in need of explanation, given that to say that play 'represents' seems to oppose the key argument that it is not playing that needs to be explained in reference to reality, but reality that needs explanation in reference to playing. Put differently, insofar as the concept of representation is here in place, it would be better to describe 'reality' as a 'representation of play' instead of the reverse.[24]

Already on the first page of *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga draws attention to a 'very important point'. Play, he argues, has a signifying function: 'In play there is something at "play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means

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least one of the four types above. Key for Caillois is that play becomes 'disciplined' by arbitrary conventions that place restrictions upon the players. However, in the light of the concept of play that I seek to delineate in this chapter, at least two objections should be made against Caillois's classification. First of all, it describes the characteristics of play from, predominantly, an external point of view and thus vis-a-vis the aims of this chapter overlooks the quintessential aspect of play, namely that it is first and foremost a subjective experience. The category of ilinx may form an exception to his classification as it comes closer to an aesthetic phenomena, however the data of the research under scrutiny demands a concept of play that allows for an understanding of ilinx in a heavily rule-bound setting, i.e. competitive football. Following this, the second objection can be made that the experience of play in football fits into both the category of ludus and paidia. What this importantly means is that a neat distinction between games and non-game play cannot be made.

23 According to Huizinga the agonistic element generates the 'tension' necessary for any form of play (Huizinga, 1980, p. 10). Tension, he writes, 'means uncertainty, chanciness; a striving to decide the issue and so end it. The player wants something to "go", to "come off"; he wants to "succeed" by his own exertions'(Huizinga, 1980, p. 10). While outside the range of the good and the bad, tension for Huizinga imparts a certain ethical value (Huizinga, 1980, p. 11). In order to explain what he means with this notion of ethical value, he refers to the old Greek concept of arête, which in its old use meant virtue, yet without normative connotations. It meant 'to be fit or apt for something, to be the true and genuine thing in one's kind', from 'a horse, a dog, the eye, the axe, the bow - each has its proper virtue' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 63). Arête refers to a form of perfection, reached through long and steady exercise. Competition, argues Huizinga, was an integral aspect of this exercise, more precisely 'virtue, honour, nobility and glory fall at the outset within the field of competition, which is that of play'(Huizinga, 1980, p. 64).

24 Surprisingly, even in Plato, argues Spariosu, it would be possible to find a glimpse of the nature of imitation-play. Spariosu points out that we can find a glimpse of mimesis-play in Plato's account of the rhapsode's performance and its impact on the audience. Socrates there describes an archaic audience that totally identifies with the performer through mimetic participation, which is a kind of hypnotic trance that brings catharsis (Spariosu, 1989, p. 19). Combining the auditory-visual with emotion-action and collective participation, the performer is given power over his audience, allowing him to move it freely at will to laugher or tears. While this power in the archaic period remained unconscious, being attributed to the Gods and shared collectively, it later became conscious and self-servingly by amongst others, politicians, priests, and teachers (Spariosu, 1989, p. 19). This power, stresses Spariosu, came to appear as irrational and arbitrary when mimesis-play lost its cultural function. While glimpses of mimesis-play are to be found in Plato, it was at the same time Plato himself who turned mimesis-play into mimesis-imitation, by separating it from immediate power and subordinating it to the rational, mediated, and non-violent pleasure of philosophical contemplation (Spariosu, 1989, p. 19)

something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, "instinct", we explain nothing; if we call it "mind" or "will" we say too much. However we may regard it, the very fact that play has a meaning implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 1). Play is something that signifies and involves a reference to a 'reality' which is neither univocally present in material reality nor in the mind of the player, but should be understood as emerging from both.

This we may understand in the way that words and sentences refer to something which is itself not present in them: 'Take language, for instance that first and supreme instrument which man shapes in order to communicate, to teach, to command. Language allows him to distinguish, to establish, to state things; in short, to name them and by naming them to raise them into the domain of the spirit. In the making of speech and language the spirit is continually "sparking" between matter and mind, as it were, playing with this wondrous nominative faculty. Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 4). Signifying words and sentences direct one's attention to something they are not. In the same way, play brings forth a reality that precedes the abstract or dominant reality of the real world.

Play thus brings forth a reality that cannot be found in the objective state of affairs and is novel in relation to the actual state of affairs. However this does not mean that this reality simply exists in the individual minds of players; rather is has a real substrate in the playing human beings and the playthings. Players are, as Fink likewise reminds us, at the same time 'enraptured in the irreal sphere and have therein a communal "intersubjectively" recognized continuity of sense depending in each case on the overall sense of the instance of play' (Fink, 2016, p. 112). What this means is that it is paradoxically not language, poetry, or art that allows us to understand what play is. By contrast, according to Huizinga, it is through play that art, poetry, language and all other phenomena that we construct, destruct and deconstruct are possible. In a similar way, Fink urges us to pay attention to the actual action of play itself, instead of concentrating on what is supposedly depicted by it (Halák, 2016, p. 209).[25]

I am now in a better position to explain the argument that I made in the previous section to the effect that play should be considered ontologically prior to the distinction between playfulness and seriousness. What Huizinga precisely means with this is that play should be understood as the originary ground of human's meaningful relationship with the world, from which we subsequently institute the abstractions of subjectivity and reality, or seriousness and playfulness: for Huizinga play denotes our fundamental intentional relation-

25 It is here however important to keep in mind that, notwithstanding his emphasis on the creative character of play, eventually, according to Fink, what play produces remains at the level of appearance. Playing he writes,' exists as the producing of playworldly appearance'(Fink, 2016, p. 114).

ship with the world. A different way of saying this is that in play we experience the autotelic character of our activities, that is the meaning of an activity as being intrinsic to itself.

Play characterizes a way of being for which the alleged fundamental division between subject and object, between self and world is denied. These categories must be understood as abstractions that can only falsely be taken as the starting point of analysis, as they themselves must be explained in reference to play, seen as our inter-relationship with the world.

3.3.2.7 The ambiguity of rules

On the basis of our previous discussions, and thus with the help of Bataille's thesis of irreducibility, we must conclude that in its primary sense play is what might be called pure play. This implies that playing does not demand a distinct play-sphere, such as the football pitch, within which play is experienced. Yet, insofar as the elite women's football player's experience of play takes place in a rule-governed and enclosed space - the stadium and the football pitch - the experiential situation becomes much more complicated. In fact, this is the moment that the experience of gender policing and high performance comes into play. The interviews have shown, however, that even though the elite women's football players are subjected to both high performance and gender normalisation, their experience of play is still profoundly real.

On the face of it, Huizinga seems, however, to argue that what makes play wholly play must also be understood through something that is not play, that is: rules: 'All play has its rules. They determine what "holds" in the temporary world circumscribed by play' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 11). Rules establish what Huizinga calls the 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 11) and it is precisely within the 'magic circle' that a patch of grass becomes a football field and a person a player. Rules determine what is and is not allowed and form the condition under which a distinct play sphere comes into existence.[26] Importantly for Huizinga this is not the end of story. While rules are certainly made and not given they can neither be reduced to the real world, nor to the playworld. Rather they belong to both spheres at once. For, it is by way of rules that play comes with the illusion[27] not to be play. Yet at the same time, from the perspective of the real world, this illusion cannot be obtained. Like a Möbius strip, rules initiate both the separation between seriousness and playfulness and at the same time ensure their unity, as it is from a non-game perspective that a game is said to be only a game, and from a within the game perspective that the game is seen as serious. A different way of saying this is that rules are ambiguous, or liminal. They can

26 The nature of the rules may however be different. For instance, the rules of children playing with dolls or hide and seek differ from the rules that determine a football game or a play of chance. Playing with dolls does not allow for a winner, whereas in football the whole game is structured in such a way that a winner may emerge. Yet in both cases, rules determine what holds in the playworld and what does not.

27 As Huizinga reminds us, 'illusion', stemming from 'inlusio, illudere or inludere' literally means 'in play'(Huizinga, 1980, p. 11)

neither be reduced to the subject's inside nor to the subject's outside.[28] Thus, even when play becomes organized and separate from ordinary reality by virtue of its playworld, it is still profoundly real to the participant who engages in the activity.

Huizinga even contends, referencing the poet Paul Valery: "No scepticism is possible where the rules of a game are concerned, for the principle underlying them is an unshakable truth" (Valery cited in: Huizinga, 1980, p. 11). The 'unshakable truth' here precisely points to play's indifference to external facts. At play the world is a child and a doll or a football. Or as Huizinga contends: 'In his magic dance the savage is the kangaroo' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 25). This is precisely what it means when the women's football players say that football is the most important thing in the world. Thus, it is from a within the game perspective that we experience the game as wholly serious, that is the most important thing in the world that allows for no doubt, yet it is from an out of the game perspective that we can understand our game as being constructed by rules. By saying that football is not important and yet important, the players take both views at once.

3.4 Conclusion

Chapter 2 of this thesis argued that the existing theoretical frameworks in sport and gender studies are insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the experience of the elite women's football players, as these cannot account for the women's football players' references to sacrifice in the data. Contrary to the understanding within the dominant theoretical frameworks, what the women's football players' references to sacrifice reveal, is that sacrifices cannot be explained either on the basis of an argument of power, or on the basis of an argument of scarcity. Accordingly, we argued that in order to account for the women's football players' references to sacrifice, we cannot rely on the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist informed theoretical frameworks in social sport studies alone, but we must complement these models with a theoretical framework capable of making sense of the experience of sacrifice as an irreducible structure of experience.

More precisely, in this chapter we have argued that we are in need of a theoretical framework that allows for an understanding of the experience of sacrifice that is: i) not reliant on power/power-discourse, as the experiences of sacrifice can't be explained in terms of modes of subjection; (ii) pertaining to the subject as such, though neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse, for if this were the case, it could be described in terms of

28 Important to note is that our position here clearly differs from formalist game scholarship, according to which it is impossible to experience the freedom of play in rule-bound settings. In game scholarship it is commonly agreed that we should make a distinction between play and games, as we do play games, yet not all play is said to consist of games. What is said to differentiate games from non-game play is that games are precisely constituted and governed by a rigid and explicit set of rules. Perceived like this, a little boy playing with a doll would be engaged in non-game play, while football players would be engaged in game play. We find this position in the work of Caillois (Caillois, 2001, and see footnote 21 of this thesis).

real-life objective values; (iii) incommensurable in value, as it can't be understood as a trade-off; (iv) intrinsically meaningful in terms of the experience it grants, as it cannot derive its meaning from real-life objective values. Yet, in so far as the women's football players experience 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in conjunction with one another, we secondly argued that the model that can account for the above requirement must be congruent with the understanding of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

To this end, we first considered Bataille's an-economic theory of sacrifice and argued that this model allows us to develop the first three requirements of the concept of the experience of sacrifice we are in need of, as being: i) not reliant on power/power-discourse; (ii) pertaining to the subject as such, though neither as bearer nor as product of power-discourse; (iii) incommensurable in value. First of all Bataille allows for a theorization of sacrifice beyond the logics of scarcity. For Bataille a sacrifice does not refer to a particular activity done for the sake of some benefit or other - biological, psychological, symbolic, etc. - rather for Bataille a sacrifice is not a sacrifice to the real world - a sacrifice of the real world to the real world - but should be understood as a sacrifice to another reality, that is the heterogeneous order. It is for this very reason that Bataille contends that sacrifices resist forms of alienation, or oppression. Secondly, Bataille allowed us to theorize sacrifice as an experience that saves something of the individual from the diverse modes of oppression related to calculative reason. What it saves from the diverse modes of oppression, must however not be understood in a foundationalist sense. Rather, according to Bataille, the experience of sacrifice radically destabilizes the self-coinciding subject.

However, based on the experiential accounts of the women football players, we concluded that by positing non-productive expenditure as the other pole of scarcity, that is as the irrational, Bataille fails to meet the fourth requirement that we delineated: he cannot make sacrifice intrinsically meaningful, as for Bataille the meaning of sacrifices remains dependent on calculative reason.

We argued by contrast that it is only under the condition that we do not consider it irrational that players attribute a certain meaning to this other reality that it can compete with these 'real-life' values. This brought into view that, at least in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players, the experience of being drawn into this other reality not only evades 'real-life' values, but importantly also precedes them, as the players attribute meaning to something that escapes immediate recognition.

This realization brought us to the central argument of this chapter, namely that the pre-rational philosophy of play offers us the required account of sacrifice as play. What the theory of play offers, is a concept of experience, that is the experience of play, which must at the same be distinguished from and posited prior to existing systems of value or meaning and their corollary dichotomies between playfulness/seriousness, irrational/rational. By contrast according to Huizinga these oppositions are only secondary phenomena, while in play

they are united. The creative characteristic of play allows us to further elucidate this point. As argued, what the experiences of the football players' show, is that meaning-attribution precedes recognition. Play according to Huizinga is involved with the production of new meanings. Put differently, play institutes meaning and therefore it is not subjected to any scale of value. Play both precedes and conditions the production of objective knowledge or calculative reason.

On this basis Huizinga allows us to understand that women's football players do not have a sense of living a contradictory life because their life is in fact bifurcated, but because they have internalized the historical and artificial separation of play and seriousness. In very concrete terms this means that the players become unable to make sense of their life and life-choices, precisely because they use ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, irrationality and rationality, subjectivity and objectivity. Thus, Bataille importantly allows us to theorize sacrifice as an irreducible structure of experience. What play allows us to understand over and above Bataille's notion of sacrifice, is that this experience must be considered ontologically prior to the distinction between rationality and irrationality, or playfulness and seriousness.

For this reason the theory of play not only provides us with the required model to theorize the experience of sacrifice as an irreducible experience of the elite women's football players, but correspondingly will allow us to meet our criterion of congruence, that is the criterion according to which the experience of sacrifice must be congruent with the experience of gender policing and high performance. What the theory of play allows us to understand, is that we can only fulfil our task of theorizing the experience of sacrifice in the context of the experiences of the women's football players under the condition that we theorize sacrifice as an irreducible structure of experience that is both distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', and ontologically preceding them.

Chapter 4

A synthesized understanding of post-Marxism and the theory of play

4.1 Introduction

The advances made by Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist social theory have enabled social sport studies to further think the relation between language, the body and the subject. These insights have provided us with the necessary tools to account for the elite women's football players references to 'high performance' and 'gender policing' in the data. However, we argued that the existing accounts of players' experiences are not sufficient to theorizing the experience of being an elite women's football player, as they forget play. The references to 'sacrifice' in the data cannot be reduced to the instrumental level of explanation, but must be understood as a reference to play. Along with the categories of 'gender policing' and 'high performance', 'play' must be understood as an irreducible structure of the experiences of the football players.

In chapter 3 we outlined the appropriate theory of play, by weaving together insights from the pre-rational playologists, most notably Huizinga, but also Fink and Gadamer. Following their insights we argued that play refers to an ontologically distinct category and draws the (football) players into a sphere that is not of their own making and importantly escapes both the workings of power and the logics of scarcity. The play holds players under its spell and allows them to experience something that transcends their 'real' life behaviours, thoughts and motives. Perceived in this way, play points at an irreducible structure of experience that should be understood as a proper object of philosophical inquiry.

Accordingly we argued that the women's football players' 'willingness' to sacrifice indicates that play is taking place. Put differently, we argued that the players' willingness to sacrifice must be understood in terms of their irreducible commitment to play. Thus, in contrast to the view upheld by the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist informed theoretical frameworks, according to which sacrifices should be understood as sacrifices to the real world, that is a sacrifice of the real world to the real world, we argued that sacrifices must be understood as placing the real world and the play world in competition.

This means first of all that the women's football players experience not so much being torn between the diverse imperatives of real life, but between those of the dominant reality and play. They are operating according to at least two systems of meaning, that is that of the dominant reality and play. However and importantly, we argued with Huizinga that in reality properly conceived, both are united. The distinction between the two is by contrast always and already contingent and historical. What this allowed us to bring into view is first of all that the players' sense of living a contradictory life does not come from any supposed fact that life is bifurcated, but from the historical and artificial separation of playfulness and seriousness. Secondly it allowed us to bring into view that the players precisely suffer from this historical separation between playfulness and seriousness. To be more precise, the theory of play allowed us to bring into view that the players become unable to make sense of their real life and life choices because they use ideological tools

informed by the disjunction between playfulness and seriousness. Accordingly, it is for this reason that they see, and supposedly only can see their real-life choices as contradictory, and perhaps therefore, as reprehensible.

When we take seriously these insights provided by the theory of play, we must first of all conclude that eventually play makes visible that the existing approaches to the social study of athletes' lives are not sufficient and fail to account for a richer understanding of subjectivity and agency. Play makes visible that the Foucauldian poststructuralist, cultural studies and Marxist informed accounts in social sport studies miss important insights into theorizing the athletic subject. One of the important consequences is that the element of resistance and emancipation involved in play is overlooked. To be more precise, as these frameworks are monistic about value systems they reduce or minimize the notion of agency: either we act in order to meet our physical needs, or because of some internalised law. Put bluntly, in these frameworks the subject is simply trapped, an object amongst many other objects that serve very precise and univocal goals, alongside chairs and footballs. Moving beyond the reductionisms that we find in the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigms, what the theory of play tells us is that we can do things that exceed immediate purposes, as we always have access to living our life according to at least two systems of meaning, that is that of the dominant reality and that of play. What this, in very concrete terms, means is that the theory of play tells us there is always room for manoeuvre. We can always play, we can always challenge the normative scales imposed on us structurally by placing them in competition with the scales of play. More philosophically, the theory of play upholds the position that there is always the possibility of moving from subjection, the disciplinary definition of a subject by discourse, to subjectification: the self-creation of a new subject-position. In other words, play is what resists alienation/oppression.

Secondly we must conclude that the theory of play already provides us with the minimum conditions necessary to determine what the introduction of play into the existing frameworks in social sport studies demands from us. Recall that we are in need of a theoretical framework that can do justice not only to the references to 'sacrifice' in the data, but does so in conjunction with those of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'. Yet, in so far as the experience of play must be understood as ontologically primary, yet distinct from the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', we cannot simply complement the existing frameworks with the concept of play, but we must *rethink* these through the theory of play. Accordingly we must establish a method or framework that integrates those theses of the existing frameworks that are indispensable for making sense of the themes of 'high performance' and 'gender policing' and those relevant theses of the theory of play. By contrast, if we simply complemented the existing frameworks with the theory of play, we would run the risk of method incompatibility or incongruence.

What the establishment of the required framework demands from us is first of all a rejection of the totalizing views of the existing theoretical accounts in social sport studies. Second, we must determine which elements of these frameworks are indispensable for theorizing the themes of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'. Third, we must determine how these theses can be made congruent with the account of play that we established in chapter 3. When these qualifications have been met, we will be in a good position to establish the required integrative theoretical framework, or model.

In order to fulfil this task, I shall first of all in 4.2 recall which theoretical insights of the existing frameworks in social sport studies are indispensable in reference to the themes of 'gender policing and 'high performance'. Already in chapter 2 of this thesis a number of insights were introduced. The object of 4.2 is however to systematically review those insights and determine which are indispensable for theorizing the themes of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'. I shall, however, argue that these are best understood by returning to Marx himself in the context of Marxist-informed sport studies and to Foucault himself in the context of Foucauldian poststructuralist-informed sport studies. Subsequently, we must critically assess the possibility of overcoming the alleged insurmountable differences between the materialist and the poststructuralist premises such as we find in the field of social sport studies. To this end I shall in 4.3 first assess the cultural studies paradigm in social sport studies. Second, based on our turn to both Marx and Foucault in 4.2, I shall provide a post-Marxist reading of both materialism and Foucauldian poststructuralism that is both respectful of differences, yet overcomes dogmatic claims. Following his interpretation of Marx, I shall argue that notably Foucault himself could be read as a post-Marxist, which subsequently allows for a more nuanced reading of both frameworks.[29] Then, in 4.4, I shall determine how the theory of play forces us to rethink the established post-Marxist framework anew.

4.2 Sociological theses on sport and the athletic subject

4.2.1 A brief summary of the main theoretical claims of Marxist social sport studies

In chapter 2, we noted that social sports studies found in Marxist social theory both tools for analysing the facts about exploitation in sports and to write about athletes' subjectivity - their state of consciousness, their subjective frameworks for understanding the world they inhabit, and the ways in which their identities are formed. While chapter 2 introduced a number of theoretical insights, the object of this section is to systematically review those theses of Marxist-informed social sport studies indispensable to our aim of establishing a theoretical framework that can account for the experiences of the elite women's football

29 As this thesis is neither concerned with exegetical projects nor aims to contribute to either the Marx or the Foucault reception, but aims to make sense of the women's football situation, my arguments are suggestive in character and more importantly limited in scope.

players. Two comments must here be made. First, as it would be foolhardy to attempt to review Marxist-inspired social sport studies as a whole, in this section I shall limit the discussion to the most prominent contributions within the field.[30] Second, as there are many post-Marxist articulations, we should not overlook the articulations by Marx himself.

Following the insights of Marxist social sport studies, five theoretical claims can be identified that inform the field of study: (i) labour makes humans what they are and defines the parameters of human society; (ii) the study of class explains the concrete realities of social life; (iii) under the capitalist mode of production labour becomes alienated and alienating; (iv) the relationship between owner and producer is immediately influenced by cultural forms; (v) ideology explains enduring forms of social and economic inequalities.

An opportune expression of the first two Marxist insights applied to sports can be found in Jarvie and Maguire's *Sport and Leisure in Social Thought*: 'Within the capitalist labour process the means of production, teams, cartels, leisure organisations, are purchased in the market by the capitalist. So too is labour power. The athletes, the teams, the music star, and the box-office film hero/heroine perform the work under the supervision of the capitalist with the product of that labour remaining the property of the owner of the means of production. The purpose of the capitalist labour process is to produce profit, or at least produce commodities whose value exceeds the sum of the values of labour power and the means of production consumed in the process of production' (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 92). Central to this expression is first of all the analysis of sport in terms of the process of labour and secondly Marx's core critique that this process is structured by class contradiction. In this view, athletes or sport workers with their labour power to sell, and be sold, are no different from other agents in the labour market. However, the most prominent adaptations of Marx's critique of labour in capitalist society to the context of professional sports are Rigaur's *Sport and Work* (1969), Hoch's *Rip Off the Big Game* (1972) and Brohm's influential *Sport: A Prison of Measured Time* (1978), which we already mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis. For these theorists, modern sport presents a microcosm of modern capitalist society and an integral aspect of its culture of domination and exploitation. To be more precise, locating sport within a discussion of the ideological and repressive state apparatus, they view sporting practices as part of the process through which a structure in dominance is being secured or reproduced. Perceived in this way, sport provides: 'a stabilising factor for the existing social order', 'a basis for reinforcing the commodity spectacle', 'a basis for reproducing patriarchy', 'a basis for regimenting and militarising youth' and 'a set of hierarchical, elitist, authoritarian values' (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 96). Sport, states Brohm, 'as an activity characteristic of bourgeois industrial society, is an exact reflection of capitalist categories. And as Marx explained, economic categories reflect the structures and principles of organisation of the capitalist mode of production. The verti-

30 Hence I leave aside here the various post-Marxist sport studies, amongst which are black Marxist and feminist Marxist articulations.

cal, hierarchical structure of sport models the social structure of bureaucratic capitalism, with its system of competitive selection, promotion, hierarchy, and social advancement. The driving forces in sport—performance, competitiveness, records—are directly carried over from the driving forces of capitalism: productivity, the search for profit, rivalry and competitiveness' (Brohm, 1978, p. 49, 50). According to Brohm, modern sport should be understood as an expression of the interests of imperialist capital, governed by the principles of competition and by the exact measurement of space, time and output. 'For Brohm sport is the rational organisation of human output, and in a most useful formulation he calls sport the Taylorisation of the body; in other words the scientific means for producing maximum output from the human body. This gives him a means of applying the principle of labour power and surplus value to athletic performance' (Horne, Tomlinson, & Whannel, 1999, p. 220).[31] In a similar vein, Rigauer allies sport and work in his *Sport and Work*. In a later article Rigauer summarizes his own position as follows: 'According to his [Rigauer's] central sociological thesis, under conditions of industrial capitalism sport as an integral part of the superstructure (culture, ideology) reproduces features of social behaviour that are functionally and normatively ingrained in capitalistically-organized processes of working, marketing, rationalization, scientification, communication and socialization. All these social processes are reduced in sport to the quantitative principle of "ideal" and "material surplus value" (reification, alienation). On the one hand, the central ideological function of sport consists in transposing its base-related (economic) superstructural relation and interdependence into societal practice. On the other hand, it also has to blur this very structural correspondence ideologically in a way that allows the idea of sport as a socially autonomous area to be maintained. The main purpose of a Marxist sociological theory of sport should be to explain the real societal functions of sport with the help of informed analyses focused on culture and ideology. In addition, a Marxist sociology has to generate concepts that relate sport to the aim of political emancipation, thus contributing to the defeat of capitalism' (Rigauer, 2000, p. 40, 41). In the footsteps of both Brohm and Rigauer, social sport studies have incorporated the notions of the division of labour in several ways (see: Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 93).

Important to keep in mind here is the insight that the position of the owners of teams or athletes enables them not only the power to hire, but also to establish such factors as the length of the season, the number of exhibition games, the timing and length of training camps and the structure of post-season play (Beamish, 1988, Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 91). This can loosely be understood in reference to what Marx called the passage from the formal subsumption to the real subsumption of labour under capital (see: Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 25; Negri, 1991). What Marx means by this is that the production process produces the worker herself and not only commodities.

31 Particularly worth mentioning here is Guttmann's *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sport* (1978) in which he analyses modern sport as being dominated instrumental rationality. In modern sport, he argues, *Homo mensor* reigns , as it is characterized by 'the almost inevitable tendency to transform *every* athletic feat into one that can be quantified and measured'(Guttmann, 1987, p. 47)

Here we arrive at the third thesis of Marxist theory, namely that under the capitalist mode of production labour becomes alienated and alienating. Recall that according to Marx, it is by means of labour that people are to achieve their potential. To be more precise, according to Marx it is through labour that humans exteriorise their consciousness in the objective world, and it precisely this act that distinguishes human from mere animal life. However under the capitalist mode of production (wo)men become removed from their 'species-essence', that is the possibility of expressing their individuality. Philosophically, Marx's notion of alienation can be traced back to Feuerbach, who sought to explain 'religious alienation', that is 'the fact that real, sensuous men represent salvation and perfection to themselves in another supra-sensuous world (as a projection of their own 'essential qualities' into imaginary beings and situations - in particular, the bond of community or love which unites 'humankind')' (Balibar, 2007, p. 15). Subsequently by way of consciousness raising, human beings can become capable of reappropriating their essence which has been alienated in God and live out fraternity on earth (Balibar, 2007, p. 15). What Marx takes from Feuerbach's model is the realisation that alienating forces induce experiences of dispossession common to the human condition. Marx then extends this insight to the sphere of politics, but unlike Feuerbach without grounding alienation in an idealist conceptualisation of the political sphere. Rather he focuses on the diverse ways alienation arises from real-life social conflicts: 'in present economic conditions, labour's actualisation carries with it the worker's loss of actualisation, labour's objectification is the worker's loss of the object and servitude to it, and instead of appropriation, there is for the worker estrangement [Entfremdung], alienation [Entausserung]' (Marx, 2007, p. 71). Thus for Marx the social relations of production produce the worker's alienation. What Marx concretely finds in his analyses of capitalist societies are four aspects of alienation: (1) alienation of the worker from the product; (2) alienation from the labour process; (3) alienation from one's social nature; (4) most importantly, alienation from species essence, that is the worker's essence as a free, social, self-directed creator (Marx, 2007, pp. 73-76). Alienation is a form of domination and exploitation that shapes the capitalist mode of production, in which labour creates commodities without owning the means of production and without controlling the conditions and the results of production. Following these insights, the argument in the field of social sport studies has been that when a sports player sells her labour to an employer the opportunity for creative self-actualisation becomes restricted (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 94). Another dimension of alienation engages the question of how players help to create the structure which actually works against them or their interests, as 'players rarely own the stadia, the teams, or the leagues in which they play and therefore rarely promote their own labour, unless they are up for sale.' The players 'produce a product which they do not own, a product which has the potential for returning high profits for the owners while at the same time involving minimal risk to the owners, which "leads to alienation"' (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 94).

Important to note here and as already suggested in chapter two of this thesis, Marxist-informed sport studies not only condemn elite competitive sports, but eventually all forms of leisure, viewing these as false techniques of escapism from reality (Gruneau, 1983, pp.

34-39). Recall that we argued in chapter 2 that for Marx eventually the labourer's leisure or free time served servitude, allowing labourers to satisfy their physical needs, instead of contributing to self-realization. Particularly worth mentioning here is Lefebvre's critique of leisure and the leisure industry: 'The case against leisure is quite simply closed - and the verdict is irreversible: leisure is as alienated and alienating as labour; as much an agent of co-optation as it is in-itself co-opted; and both as assimilative and assimilated part of the system (mode of production). Once a conquest of the working class, in the shape of paid days off, holidays, weekends, and so on, leisure has been transformed into an industry, into a victory of neo-capitalism, and an extension of bourgeois hegemony to the whole of space' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 383, 384). For Lefebvre leisure is an illusion, 'sold by a capitalist industry, which profits from selling this myth of the possibility of an escape from the control and alienation of the everyday' (Crawford, 2015, p. 577).[32] Thus, for Marxist-informed social sport studies, sport must be considered alienating when dominated by the values of capitalist society (private property, exchange value, etc.), or as an illusory domain that falsely promotes freedom, at the expense of overcoming the alienation found in labour.

Secondly, it is important to note here that Marxist-informed social sport theorists do not in general perceive the unmasking of different forms of self-alienation as an end in itself but rather as a step towards radical revolution, a realisation of communism and de-alienation. Noteworthy here is the task that Morgan sets for himself in his overview of Marxist sport studies '*Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction*': 'The signs of the degradation of sport are all around us. The mania for winning, the widespread cheating, the economic and political trivialization of sport, the thirst for crude sensationalism and eccentric spectacle, the manipulation of the mass media, the cult of athletic stars and celebrity, and the mindless bureaucratization are just some of the more ominous signs. These signs are too pervasive to deny, too steeped in our milieu to pass off as anything other than social pathology, and too entrenched in our present social configurations to require anything short of a wholesale revamping of our major social institutions. This picture of sport can hardly be ignored - not, that is if a more humane and civil form of sport is to be salvaged. Indeed, I am convinced that the social rehabilitation of sport is critical to the rehabilitation of society itself' (Morgan, 1994,p. 1). What a more human and civil sport would look like is hardly ever envisioned by these authors. Marx himself is however clear on this point. For him, as we noted in chapter 2, in the envisioned classless society sport would have no objective beyond itself and would thus belong to the sphere of freedom.

Before turning to the fourth thesis of Marxist theory, we must however emphasize here, as we did in chapter 2, that Marx does not speak only negatively about alienation. Rather for Marx individual and collective alienations are sometimes necessary for the achievement

32 Lefebvre position here is immediately linked to that of Althusser, according to whom, any escape from capitalist ideology is impossible, while being in ideology gives the impression that one is or can be outside of it (Crawford, 2015, p. 577, 578).

of a better society in which improved material conditions can realize the promise of an unalienated life for all. Put differently, for Marx sacrifices and losses, in short alienations, may be necessary to achieve a greater good. This is paradoxically precisely the grand theme of liberalism; sacrifices of individual freedoms are essential for the realisation of collective freedoms, which are thought to be of benefit to all.[33] While we acknowledge that making sacrifices is part and parcel of the lives of athletes, we refuse to understand sacrifices by way of an instrumental level of explanation. To be more precise, to say that we make sacrifices is something radically different from giving it explanatory value in pursuit of a man-made defined goal. Thus, paradoxically, when speaking positively about alienation, Marx, like his much detested capitalists, makes smart use of our capacity to play.

However, let us now turn to the fourth thesis of Marxist theory, that is, that the relationship between owner and producer is immediately influenced by cultural forms. As noted already above, for Marx the starting point of historical materialism is social life, that is real living individuals as they live in concrete social formations. More precisely, according to Marx the 'innermost secret of capitalism' is neither abstract nor mono-causal but rather a structure that is both necessary to capitalism and always historically inflected: 'It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers . . . which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relations of sovereignty and dependence, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic base—the same from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural, environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc.— from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances (Marx cited in: Hennessy, 2018, p. 17).

The challenge Marx, however, set for himself is 'how precisely to encompass historical specificity, as well as human agency, while recognizing within it the logic of modes of production' (Wood, 1995, p. 59). In the wake of this challenge we must situate the various post-Marxist sport studies, amongst which are black Marxist and feminist Marxist articulations, which I shall address in the next sections. Convenient expressions faithful to the centrals claims of Marxist thought can however be found in the work of Wood and Hennessy (Hennessy, 1993a, 2018; Wood, 1995). Hennessy describes her position as follows:

33 The irony behind Marx's praise of revolutionary capitalism, Shaviro contends in a Deleuzian-inspired Battaillan mode is the irony of the capitalist system itself: 'For capitalism's dirty little secret is that it cannot endure its own abundance. This is the key to Marx's theory of crisis. Again and again, Marx and Engels say, "there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of over-production." The wealth that capitalism actually produces undermines the scarcity that remains its raison d'etre. For once scarcity has been overcome, there's nothing left to drive competition. The imperative to expand and intensify production simply becomes absurd. In the face of abundance, therefore, capitalism needs to generate an imposed scarcity, in order to keep the system going' (Shaviro, 2005, The Pinocchio Theory, accessed 24 September, 2020, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog>).

'In historical materialism we have a way of knowing that recognizes that the accumulation of surplus value or profit on which capitalism depends is fundamentally based on human relations of exploitation, and that also recognizes that these relations are never lived in economic terms alone, leaving aside as less real the norms, the concepts, the cultures around which this mode of production is organized' (Hennessy, 2018, p. 15).[34] Similarly, Wood argues that the challenge of a middle ground requires first of all an understanding of the 'economic', not as a 'regionally' separate sphere which is somehow 'material' as opposed to 'social', but rather as itself irreducibly social - indeed, a conception of the 'material' as constituted by social relations and practices. Secondly it requires that we consider the process and relations of production, not as simply economic, but also as embodied in juridical-political and ideological forms and relations (Wood, 1995, p. 61).

Social sports studies found in Marxist theory not only apt tools for analysing the facts relative to exploitation in sports, but also tools to write about athletes' subjectivity—their state of consciousness, their subjective frameworks for understanding the world they inhabit, and the ways in which their identities are formed. Here we arrive at the fifth and final thesis of Marxist theory that has proved indispensable in the field of social sport studies, namely the thesis that ideology explains enduring forms of social and economic inequalities. While the concept of ideology is often used loosely to refer simply to any set of beliefs, in its strict classical Marxist usage it involves two definite assertions: (1) that beliefs and ideas, or more generally the ways people perceive the world, are socially determined and (2) that beliefs and ideas are informed by class interests (see also: Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 97). The first of these claims can be found in a plurality of sociological and philosophical traditions, while the latter is more specifically rooted in the work of Marx, although having parallels in other traditions of thought (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 97).

Let us start with the first claim. Predominantly in his early political writings, Marx himself articulated how ideas and thoughts structure one's experience of the world and the ways in which these mental structures are influenced by social relations. These insights are well captured in the famous quote that 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their existence that determines their social consciousness' (Marx, 1970, p. 21). What Marx himself in this context particularly aims for is the formulation of a sociology of consciousness, that is an understanding of the way historical circumstances, economic structures, and social relations of production influence or determine the features of consciousness. This in turn would allow him to give a materialist account of the various ways

34 Hennessy herself aims then also to articulate a middle ground between what could be called a totalizing Marxist perspective and a focus on the local. According to her, a feminism that aims to understand the discursive construction of women along different axes of difference requires an analytical framework that can explain the connection between discursive constructions of difference and the exploitive social arrangements that shape them (Hennessy, 1993, p. 65, 66). It is her contention that feminism cannot ignore a totality such as patriarchy which continues to organize people's lives in systematic and oppressive ways (Hennessy, 1993).

the interests of those that are in power, shape the consciousness of those who are not.[35] In this context the question however arises what makes social and economic inequalities so persistent, or how should we understand enduring forms of social and economic inequalities from a materialist perspective? Here we arrive at the second meaning of the term ideology, namely as distorted false consciousness. According to Marx, under the capitalist mode of production the class that controls material production subsequently controls mental production and in any area the prevailing ideas and values are likely to be those of the dominant class. In this way social differences become naturalised, legitimating human relations of exploitation and domination, thereby offering humans an imaginary relationship to the material inequities they live. The idea that forms of sport and leisure have contributed to a state of false consciousness is an assertion that has been made by several Marxist scholars. Noteworthy here is Miliband's *Marxism and Politics*, in which he not only argues for the need for a Marxist sociology of sport, but also that working-class involvement in sport impaired the development of class-consciousness (Miliband, 1977, p. 51, 52). Jarvie and Maguire list five ways the notion of ideology has been used in the context of sport: '(i) the idea that sport and leisure interests help to mask a number of competing social, economic and political ideologies is a common critique of statements which tend to suggest that people's experiences of sport and leisure are universal, natural, and harmonious; (ii) the idea that sport and forms of leisure are themselves sites of ideological struggle not just about sport and leisure but about the type of world we should live in; (iii) the idea that the ability of consumer driven capitalism to produce a range of leisure goods and experiences carries a range of ideological implications when compared with the poorer sections of the world; (iv) the idea that sport and leisure can help to distort and constrain social reality and progress; (v) the idea that sport and leisure practices contribute to a process through

35 Unsurprisingly, Marxist theory played an important role in feminist epistemologies (e.g. Harding, 1986; Hartsock, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, Hennessy, 1993a, 2018; Mohanty, 2015). Hartsock's formulation of a feminist standpoint is particularly worth mentioning, as it consists of detailed analyses of the alleged importance of Marxian theory to further feminist aims. More precisely Hartsock works out the theoretical forms appropriate to each of the two levels of reality when viewed not from the standpoint of the proletariat but from a specifically feminist standpoint. To this end, she explores and expands the Marxian argument that socially mediated interaction with nature in the process of production shapes both human beings and theories of knowledge. Of key importance here is that the Marxian conception of labour would allow to cut through the dichotomy between nature and culture and thus help feminists avoid 'the false choice of characterising the situation of women as either purely natural or purely social'(Hartsock, 1983b). Within feminist theory there is however little agreement about whether the standpoint should be considered a structural position or rather a structured process. Secondly, and this obtains specifically for feminist materialists, a much debated question is how precisely to accommodate difference without losing the claim of uncovering a truer reality (Hekman, 2014, p. 110). As Hekman points out, the difficulty for feminist materialists is as follows. Insofar as it is true that the material reality of women's lives structures their concept of self, it is argued that the focus should no longer be on the experience of women in general, but on the differences between women. Insofar as one accepts this position - women inhabit many different realties - this has enormous implications for feminist truth claims. If realties are multiple, one cannot appeal to one reality to ground a claim about social reality. But insofar as there are multiple realities, there must be multiple truths that correspond to them (Hekman, 2014, p. 105, 106).

which particular interests are represented as universal interests that should be adopted by society or humanity as a whole'(Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 98)

Having presented the key theoretical claims that are to be found in Marxist-informed social sport studies, we must now identify which of these are indispensable for giving a comprehensive account of the experiences of the elite women's football players. In short, what the Marxist perspective offers to our analyses of the experiences of elite women's football players is a theory of alienation. To be more precise, what Marx offers us is a critique and understanding of the historical separation between work and leisure, which is in terms of the language of play, playfulness and seriousness in the context of elite women's football. This needs further elaboration. In chapter 3 we argued, with Huizinga, that play, understood as the originary ground of human experience consists of a unity of playfulness and seriousness. The seriousness that we find in play is that which keeps the game alive, for as soon as one fails to take the game seriously, one ruins the game. It follows that play without seriousness is impossible. Hence, play must consist of both playfulness and seriousness and the separation of playfulness and seriousness must be understood as contingent and historical. What this concretely means in the context of elite women's football is that what we perceive as objective reality and meaning is not given, but made. What the Marxist framework allows us to recognize is the concrete historical circumstances in which the separation of playfulness and seriousness took place in the context of elite women's football. Thus, it is with the institutionalisation and the move towards commercialisation, instrumentalisation and rationalisation that women's football ceased to be simply played for the experience it produces but became played for the sake of externally defined values such as national heroism, prestige, (symbolic) capital etc. It is easy to imagine a world in which winning a football match is solely meaningful as such. Today however, winning a football match is first and foremost meaningful in relation to externally defined values.

Similar sentiments can be find in Huizinga's discussion of modern sport, in which he argues that it is with the increasing systematization and regimentation of sport that 'something of the pure play-quality is lost' and 'the spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 197). In sport we could find an activity 'nominally known as play, but raised to such a pitch of technical organization and scientific thoroughness that the real play-spirit is threatened with extinction' and however 'important it may be for the players or spectators, it remains sterile', the 'old play factor' having 'undergone almost complete atrophy' (Huizinga, 1980, p. 198). In this context, the players are means to certain ends and treated as such. Their activities matter not in or by themselves, but solely in terms of their usefulness, or in relation to other useful activities. This is exactly what Marx means with the notion of alienation: to be robbed of the playing part of the self, the meaning-making part of the self, or as he puts it one's true self that can do 'one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic' (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 53).

Accordingly, the women's football players seem only capable of making sense of their life choices in terms of football's language of use and usefulness, that is, its instrumental scale of values. To be more precise, insofar as play, according to our understanding, consists in the unity of playfulness and seriousness, the women's football players seem only capable of making sense of their life choices in terms of the ideological tools inherited from the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, or irrationality and rationality.

There are, however, at least two distinct reasons we must depart from the unilateral application of the Marxist understanding of alienation to sport. First, while we observe numerous cases of profit-maximizing in sports, at least at the present time, elite women's football clubs in the Low Countries cannot produce any profit. This does not mean that there is no relation between elite women's football and capital, but that it takes a different form. Important to mention here is Hargreaves's quintuple analysis of the forms that the relation between sport and capital can assume within commercialisation. The first he lists is profit maximising, with examples being professional boxing and horse-racing. However, as Hargreaves points out, many sports have no real aspirations to make profits and simply hope to break even. Thus, the second form of relationship is the attempt to remain financially viable through various survival strategies such as fund raising. The third form of relationship sees sport stimulating the accumulation of capital indirectly, providing a market for goods and services: sport helps to produce the sports equipment, clothing and gambling industries. In the fourth relationship, sport aids capital accumulation indirectly, by offering opportunities for advertising and sponsorship. Finally, sport attracts a degree of investment for non-economic reasons. Directors of football clubs are often motivated by prestige, the desire to have local influence or to use the club for corporate entertaining (Hargreaves, 1995 and see: Scambler, 2005, p. 148). Second, if we take seriously the experiences of the players as reflected on by themselves, we have no reason to believe that, even in a different form, the economic factor is determining in the last instance, and that in the context of elite women's football gender oppression is derivative of class oppression. Rather, next to the theme of 'high performance' the theme of 'gender policing' must be understood as a key structure of the experience of elite women's football that is not reducible to purely economic factors and therefore evades the Marxist framework. This irreducibility of identity exclusion to class oppression, amongst other things, is a core theme of the Foucauldian poststructuralist literature.

4.2.2 A brief summary of the main theoretical claims of Foucauldian poststructuralist sport studies

As in the case of the Marxist perspective, the Foucauldian poststructuralist framework is particularly useful for the analyses of the working lives of athletes and how they cope with authoritarianism, the culture of obedience in their sporting practices. Following up, the perspective subsequently is extremely useful in the attempt to understand the social construction of gendered and sexualised bodies in sport. In the previous section we concluded that the Marxist framework provides us with a theory of alienation. However, we

also concluded that for our purposes, Marxist theory places too much emphasis on economic forces and assumes too hastily that elite women's football is informed by capitalist interests. Secondly, we concluded that Marxist theory cannot sufficiently account for the women's football players references in the data to the theme of 'gender policing'. However, this does not mean that we have to do away with the Marxist critique of the subject under alienation, but that we should complete it with different theoretical resources to accommodate for difference and cultural specificity. It is here that we should turn to the theoretical theses of Foucauldian poststructuralist-informed sports studies.

While chapter 2 already introduced a number of theoretical standpoints, the object of this section is to systematically review those theses of Foucauldian poststructuralist theory that are indispensable to the aim of this thesis, that is, for making sense of the experiences of the elite women's football players.

What must however be noted is that an extensive part of poststructuralist informed social sport studies is guided from the outset by normative questions concerning the challenges and opportunities of sport for social justice. However, I argue that it is imperative to take into account the fact that Foucault refrained from any explicit normative claims if we are to arrive at a proper understanding of those of his insights that inform the field of study (see for a similar agument: Pringle, 2014, p. 398). In addition, it must be emphasised that this thesis differs from explicit normative projects.

At least four theoretical positions can be distinguished that inform the Foucauldian poststructuralist research programme and that are relevant for the data that emerges from the interviews. They all refer to the issue which I grouped under the heading of "gender policing": (i): power works at the level of the local; (ii) within discourses objects obtain meaning and become objects of knowledge; (iii) discourses discipline and produce the subject; (iv) resistance is a matter of resignification. Characteristic of Foucauldian poststructuralist sport theory is first of all the move away from the totalising narratives of Marxist theory by shifting the attention from global to local issues of power. Whereas Marxist informed sport studies predominantly understand disciplinary practices in terms of relatively static class antagonisms between capital and the proletariat, poststructuralist informed sport studies, shifted the attention to the theorisation of forms of oppression and exclusion in sport related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race and, increasingly, also ability (for helpful articulations of the diverse forms of dominance and subordination in sport, see Hargreaves, 1982, 1994). Accordingly what the Marxist framework confines to the private sphere is understood by poststructuralist sport studies as profoundly political, traversed by power relations that not only oppress or restrain athletes, but rather produce them as political subjects. This then allows us to theorize the references made to gender in relation to the social significance of being and becoming an elite women's football player as a key structure of the experiences of the players.

Second, at the heart of discussions amongst poststructuralist informed sport studies is the Foucauldian insight that it is within discourses that objects obtain meaning and become objects of knowledge. Foucault's first account of discourse or discursive formation is to be found in his *Archeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1972). In this work, Foucault describes the archeological method he used in his first three books of history (*Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*) (Smart, 2002, p. 29). In a nutshell, the archeological method aims to reveal the structures that underlie thought and make possible particular kinds of knowledges at specific historical moments. These structures that underlie thought are what Foucault calls discursive formations, agglomerates of different representations (from statements to images) that circulate and create meaning about specific topics and govern what can be said. Discourses, in Foucault's words, are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). A discourse gives meaning to experiences, and likewise organizes and structures these meanings. Thus roughly conceived, the concept of discourse provides us with an understanding of the production of recognizable and meaningful acts and knowledges. Subsequently, coining the phrase power-knowledge, Foucault argues in direct reference to Nietzsche that knowledge is both the creator and the creation of power (Smart, 2002, p. 69): 'power produces knowledge . . . power and knowledge directly imply one another . . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (Foucault, 1995, p. 27). Accordingly, discourses both structure and constrain how people perceive reality. Thus, as we saw in the data emerging from the interviews conducted in this study, the various discourses surrounding elite football work to 'objectify' football as a masculine activity.

Here we arrive at the third thesis, namely that discourses discipline and produce the subject. In order to examine social struggles, Foucault does not ask 'What is power?', or 'Where does power come from?'; rather he argues in the 'Subject and Power' that his primary concern is to analyze how power is exercised and what happens when power is exercised in this or that way (Foucault, 1983, p. 217). To be more precise he is interested in the analysis of diverse relationships of power in order to understand the 'ways in which certain actions modify others' (Foucault, 1983, p. 219). These actions do not always act directly and immediately on others but could also relate to the circulation of ideas (for example, workings of discourse) and systems of communication (Pringle, 2014, p. 400). Importantly, Foucault further states that discourse is a medium through which power relations not only regulate, but also produce the subject. The individual, according to Foucault, is always and already the *effect* of the workings of a form of power. Hence Foucault's famous assertion that power not only acts as law (through prohibition and exclusion) but is first and foremost productive: '*We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production*' (Foucault, 1995, p. 194). The subject, as Foucault suggests is both the effect of discourse or the bearer of

power-knowledge and subjected to discourse. To put it differently, the subject is made, constructed and not given and can accordingly neither ground meaning, knowledge or morality, nor be considered the agent of social or epistemic changes. In this respect, Foucault examines how certain forms of power are exercised to understand how 'certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals' (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

As will be argued in 4.4 of this chapter, Foucault acknowledges multiple forms of power. However, much social sport scholarship, in line with Foucault himself, extensively focuses on what he calls *disciplinary power*: a form of power that controls and normalises individuals so that they are 'destined to a certain mode of living' (Foucault, 1980, p. 94). Important to stress here again is that for Foucault disciplinary technologies are not inherently good or bad. His concern is not the disciplinary techniques *per se*, but their creative effect. Drawing on Foucault's insight about disciplinary power, various sport scholars analyse how disciplinary techniques are employed in sport and produce normalised bodies (e.g. Helstein, 2003; Howe, 2007; Kreft, 2009; McLeod et al, 2014; Roderick, 2006; Shogan, 1999). Particularly worth mentioning here is Shogan's prominent work *The Making of High Performance Athletes: Discipline, Diversity, and Ethics* (Shogan, 1999), to which we referred in chapter 2. In this work, she draws on Foucault's work to unravel the technologies of disciplinary power in the context of sport. These technologies include the 'individuation of private space; codification of "correct" actions in relation to a strict timetable; routinization of activities according to a training schedule of increasing difficulty, followed by an examination to test abilities; and synchronization of individuals into a collective' (Shogan, 1999, p. 19). These technologies are commonly employed in sport training contexts, for example: fitness work is often based on the overload principle, coaches plan periodised timetables, athletic ability is measured via the stopwatch, and coaches video athletes to access and develop correct technique. These various training technologies help produce, what Shogan called, the *docile athletic body*, that is, a body that is a highly efficient sport performer but also one that conforms to athletic conventions, ignores degrees of pain, provides automatic responses in sporting situations, and is subject to repetitive and often tedious training sessions.

Important for our concerns is that Shogan extends her analyses of the making of high performance athletes to an understanding of what she calls 'hybrid athletes', who are simultaneously subject to multiple and competing identity discourses, such as those related to gender, sexuality and ethnicity. According to Shogan, the process of becoming identified as 'female' or 'male' could similarly be thought of as a disciplinary process that requires an extended period of training, conforming and (self-) examining in relation to a specialized form of embodied knowledges. Shogan adds, however, that competitive institutionalized sport is a discursive context within which masculine values, gestures, actions and interactions 'are practised and normalized' (Shogan, 1999, p. 54). Yet, in contrast to explicit feminist sport studies, she doesn't conclude that sporting context is inherently problematic for women athletes.

As already suggested in chapter 2, it is precisely this question that guides feminist theorists working in the poststructuralist paradigm, indicating subsequently the turn to Butler's account of the sexed subject (see also Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988, 1993). At least three Butlerian insights have proved to be relevant for theorizing sport situations; gender is (i) performative; (ii) normalising; (iii) open for resignification. First, Butler understands gender as a performative (see for an encompassing understanding of gender performativity: Butler, 1993, p. 1-23, 1999). In short as a performative, gender must be understood as 'the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1999, p. 43). These more or less forced and repetitive doings of gender produce the fiction that an individual has a stable gender, which they are in fact performing in their actions. For example, feminine identity, manifest in dress, ways of walking and behaving, does not exist outside of these modes of action but is the product of them. It is acquired by performing discourses of femininity that constitute the individual as a feminine subject.

Second, lived as ontological truth, according to Butler gender forces one to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards for identity. 'Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions — and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress' (Butler, 1999, p. 178). Particularly worth mentioning is the study of Cox and Thomson (Pringle, 2014, p. 399) that explores via in-depth interviews, how members of a premier women's football team 'experienced their bodies within the discourses of sport, gender and heterosexuality' (Cox & Thompson, 2000, p. 5). They conclude that their results supported Butler's notion of the heterosexual matrix in that the 'homophobic climate of sport puts pressure on all female athletes to present a heterosexual image of femininity' (Cox & Thompson, 2000, p. 16). In addition they argue that this conclusion could be liberating as individuals might recognise that they do not have to perform a 'restrictive set of "natural" traits' (Cox & Thompson, 2000, p. 18). This brings us to third Butlerian insight, namely that gender is open to intervention and resignification. Insofar as gender does not mimic sexual difference, according to Butler, one can play with the symbolic attribution of allegedly feminine and masculine characteristics (Butler, 1999, 175, 176). Informed by this insight, a significant amount of gender and sport scholarship focuses on the way that performativity serves as a possible site of subverting and displacing naturalised and reified notions of gender in the context of sport (see for instance: Azzarito, L., & Katzew, 2010; Pringle, 2008; Cox & Thompson, 2000). Accordingly we arrive at the fourth thesis that informs Foucauldian poststructuralist sport studies, namely that insofar as they speak or speculate about resistance, they understand it as a matter of resignification.

What we should take from the poststructuralist framework is first of all the Foucauldian insight that the analyses of power relations must recognize how these are constitutive of the subjects involved in them. While the Marxist theory effectively allows us to expose forms of alienation, it fails to account for the precise ways in which the elite women's football players are constituted. The Foucauldian insight, by contrast, allows us to theorize and understand what in reference to Shogan could be called the making of an elite women's football player, through their everyday footballing practices, from daily training regimes, dietary restrictions etc. Yet, while Shogan extends her analyses of disciplinary techniques to the operations of gender, it must not be overlooked that Foucault himself argues that the processes that constitute normalized subjects cannot be reduced to the disciplinary practices aiming to produce docile workers, or in our context docile athletes. For this reason he draws the distinction between 'normation' and 'normalisation'(Lazar, 2007)(Lazar, 2007) (Lazar, 2007) (Oksala, 2015 and see: Foucault, 2009, pp. 83-91). 'Normation' refers to the disciplinary techniques used for the training of students, workers, soldiers etc. It 'consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result' (Foucault, 2009, p. 85). It 'analyzes and breaks down; it breaks down individuals, places, time, movements, actions, and operations', 'such that they can be seen, on the one hand, and modified on the other' (Foucault, 2009, p. 84). Where normation is the technology deployed to make individuals behave, to be efficient and productive workers, normalisation is deployed to manage populations, for instance with regard to reproduction or the health of a workforce. Normalisation works, however, exactly in the opposite fashion to 'normation'. It requires knowledge of the normal understood as a scientific average: 'The normal comes first and the norm is deduced from it' (Foucault, 2009, p. 91). Normalisation is thus the process that produces other forms of the subject aside from workers, in relation to gender, ethnicity, ability etc. It is here that the importance of Butler for our purposes makes itself visible, as she precisely allows us to theorize the experiences of the elite women's football players in reference to the normalising discourses concerning gender.

4.3. A synthetic account of Marxist and Foucauldian post-structuralist insights

4.3.1 The limits of the cultural studies paradigm in social sport studies

In the previous sections we assessed those theses of both Marxist and Foucauldian post-structuralist informed sports studies that are indispensable for giving an account of the experiences of the elite women players, as reflected on by themselves. To sum up, the Marxist theory addresses the "high performance" aspect of the athlete's experience. It provides an account of alienation by way of a critique and understanding of the historically contingent separation of work and leisure. The poststructuralist paradigm addresses the "gender policing" aspect of their lives. It allows us to theorize the precise ways that the elite women's football players are constituted as subjects in terms of both 'normation' and 'normalisation'. We must now, however, test the compatibility between these two views: can we keep the necessary insights of each paradigm without conflict? In particular, we

must ask to what extent the Foucauldian poststructuralist critique of the subject may be a problem for our adherence to the Marxist notion of alienation. First, the orthodox reading of the subject under alienation is based on the premises that class has an objective status, while for Foucauldians it must be conceived of as a construct, to be more precise a construct constituted by the same political practices that it was supposed to found. Second, it is based on the premises that there exists something that we could call 'human nature' or a 'true self', while for Foucauldians the subject is always already historical and contingent.

With regard to the first question, we must first of all situate the cultural studies paradigm in social sport studies that largely draws upon the post-Marxist insights of Gramsci (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 50). As the various attempts to re-interpret the ideas of Marx in the context of sport have been many, a comprehensive study falls beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead we follow here the leading voices in the field, starting with Horne et al.'s evaluation of Hargreaves's *Sport, Power and Culture* (1986) and Gruneau's *Class, Sport and the Modern State* and his *Class, Sports, and Social Development* (1983). These are readings that are 'marked by a greater degree of sophistication and sensitivity to the complexities and contradictions immanent in the complex economic processes underlying lived cultural practices' (Horne et al., 1999, p. 251).

What makes these studies especially sophisticated is their Gramscian turn. Key for them is Gramsci's conceptualisation of hegemony as 'a process of experience, negotiation and struggle by individuals in real-life situations', 'never complete and fixed, but always "diverse and changing", rather than one in which subordinate groups are simply duped by dominant ideologies' (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 50). Following Gramsci's insights, both Gruneau and Hargreaves view hegemony as a process and sport 'as a part of the contestation of meanings that arise in class society.' However, eventually most sport studies that follow the path of Gramsci, including those of Hargreaves himself, ended up prioritizing class relations at the expense of other social categories (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000, p. 54, 55). Yet as, we argued in the previous sections, the data of this research does not allow for this prioritisation.

In the context of the cultural studies paradigm we must also situate the various post-Marxist sport studies, amongst which are black Marxist[36] and feminist Marxist articulations that question the eurocentrism and sexism of classical Marxism. Given the central role of gender

36 Following the insights of theorists such as William Dubois, C. L. R. James, Richard Wright and Angela Davis, at least three concerns are central in the work of Black-Marxist inspired sport studies: (1) that the whole basis of Marxism as a Western construction is a conceptualisation of human affairs and human development which has been drawn from the experiences of European peoples; (2) that Marxism fails to consider or question the existence of modern slavery or specific forms of exploitation born out of, for example, black poverty in America; (3) that Marxism has paid little attention to the way in which racism mediates the organisation of labour, or racism itself as an expression of alienation, or the specific contribution to revolutionary or reformist change born out of the struggle of African peoples (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994, p. 101).

in this study, we will limit ourselves here to a discussion of feminist Marxist critiques. As outlined in chapter 2, in the wake of Marxist critiques some feminist sport studies aimed to develop analyses of the complex ways class relations are cross-cut by gender difference (see for instance: Theberge, 1981). As women do not fit into Marxist theory it followed that the theory needed to be changed in such a way that the situation of women would become a core theoretical element (for a similar argument see for instance: Young, 1981). However and as suggested in chapter 2 of this thesis, socialist sport and gender studies often ended up centring on the ideological significance of sport as a gendered institution and thus paradoxically moved away from the central premises of historical materialism that the profit making relationship on which capitalism depends should be considered the determining force in theorizing the social (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 37).

The challenge thus remains: how we can still effectively speak about class, while questioning its objective status? While this thesis is neither concerned with exegetical projects, nor aims to contribute to the Foucault, Marx - or any other author - reception, there are good reasons to believe that, paradoxically, Foucault himself allows for a more 'sophisticated' reading of Marx (see: Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004, 2011; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, Oksala, 2016). To be more precise, in the next section I will suggest that Foucault could be read as an early post-Marxist[37]. In short the difference between 'neo- Marxists' and 'post Marxists' lies in the fact that neo-Marxists claim that class is only one of many factors (along with gender, race, sexuality, nationality, etc.) that shape social life, whereas post-Marxists take this step further and claim that class and relations of labour have no objective existence outside the discourses that constitute them (Hennessy, 2018, p. 11). Of course, these arguments are merely suggestive in character and limited in scope, and a detailed analysis of them falls far outside the scope of this thesis.

4.3.2 Real subsumption, normation and normalisation

In an interview published under the title of '*Considerations on Marxism, Phenomenology and Power',* Foucault explicitly situates his work in the lineage of Marx's genealogy of capitalism (Oksala, 2016)*:* 'As for myself, what interests me about Marx, at least what I can say has inspired me, is Book 2 of *Capital*; that is to say everything that concerns the analyses of the genesis of capitalism, and not of capital, that are first of all historically concrete, and secondly the analyses of the historical conditions of the development of capitalism particularly on the side of the establishment, of the development of structures of power and of the institutions of power. So if one recalls, once more very schematically, the first book

37 In the context of our Marxist reading of Foucault, particularly worth mentioning is also the work of Marcelo Hoffman. In his analysis of the Marxist underpinnings of Foucault's political practice, most notably the work done by the The Prisons Information Group (GIP), he shows that Marxism was not 'an exogenous moment in Foucault's political practices, one opposed to something preordained as authentically and essentially "Foucauldian"', but 'inhabited Foucault's political practices and propelled them in unique directions, thereby producing whole new configurations' (Hofmann, 2016, p. 182).

[on] the genesis of capital, the second book [on] the history, the genealogy of capitalism, I would say that it is through Book 2, and for instance in what I wrote on discipline, that my work is all the same intrinsically linked to what Marx writes' (Foucault, 2012, p. 100, 101). Furthermore in a 1976 lecture, published under the title '*The Mesh of Power*', Foucault even argues that he developed his notion of productive power out of insights he gained from Marx (Oksala, 2016). 'How', asks Foucault, 'may we attempt to analyse power in its positive mechanisms'. To which he responds that we can find these elements in Marx, essentially in the second volume of Capital: 'It's here, I think, that we may find some elements that I will use for the analysis of power in its positive mechanisms' (Foucault, 2016, p. 4).

According to Foucault, four crucial insights concerning productive power can be found in *Capital*. First, a society is not a unitary body, in which one and only one power is exercised, but is rather the juxtaposition, the link, the coordination and also the hierarchy of different powers that nevertheless remain in their specificity. Society is an archipelago of different powers. 'Marx places great emphasis, for example, on the simultaneously specific and relatively autonomous – in some sense impervious – character of the de facto power the boss exercises in a workshop, compared to the juridical kind of power that exists in the rest of society' (Foucault, 2016, p. 4). Second, these different webs of power cannot, and must not, simply be understood as the derivation, the consequence of some kind of overriding power that would be primary. Marx does not recognise 'the schema of the jurists', that is the model of the social contract. On the contrary he shows 'how, starting from the initial and primitive existence of these small regions of power – like property, slavery, workshop, and also the army – little by little, the great State apparatuses were able to form. State unity is basically secondary in relation to these regional and specific powers; these latter come first' (Foucault, 2016, p. 4, 5). Third, these specific regional powers have absolutely no primordial function of prohibiting, preventing, saying 'you must not.' Rather the original essential and permanent function of these local and regional powers is, in reality, being producers of the efficiency and skill of the producers of a product. Marx has 'superb analyses of the problem of discipline in the army and workshops' (Foucault, 2016, p. 5). With the division of labour, it became obligatory to invent a new discipline of the workshop, yet inversely the discipline of the workshop was the condition of possibility for achieving a division of labour. 'Without this discipline of the workshop, which is to say, without hierarchy, without surveillance, without the appearance of foremen, without the timed control of movements, it would not have been possible to achieve a division of labor' (Foucault, 2016, p. 6). Fourth, these procedures of power must be regarded as techniques, that is procedures that were invented, perfected and unceasingly developed. 'Here, once again, we can easily find between the lines of the second volume of Capital an analysis, or at least the outline of an analysis, which would be the history of the technology of power, such as it was exercised in the workhouses and factories' (Foucault, 2016, p. 6).

What these insights make clear, is that post-Marxism, if understood properly, already provides us with the required synthesis of Marxism and Foucauldian poststructuralism.

Recall that we need to find congruence between Marxism and Foucauldian poststructuralism, in order to establish a methodologically sound framework that can account for the experiences of the elite women's football players. In effect, Foucault reads Marx as a kind of post-Marxist, who recognises first of all the heterogeneous nature of power relations, and secondly that power has profound subject effects (Oksala, 2016). Importantly, Foucault even strongly positions himself against those readings that inscribe Marx in the juridical theory of power: 'It appears to me, in fact, that if we analyzed power by privileging the State apparatus, if we analyze power by regarding it as a mechanism of preservation, if we regard power as a juridical superstructure, we will basically do no more than take up the classical theme of bourgeois thought, for it essentially conceives of power as a juridical fact. To privilege the State apparatus, the function of preservation, the juridical superstructure, is, basically, to "Rousseauify" Marx' (Foucault, 2016, p. 6).[38] Thus according to Foucault, Marx is not so much concerned with theorizing institutions, but with concrete practices. Foucault's own response to those critics who demanded him to 'Rousseauify' his own work is well known by now: 'Well, I would reply, yes, I do, I want to, I must do without a theory of the state, as one can and must forgo an indigestible meal' (Foucault, 2008, p. 76, 77).[39] Foucault, however, takes the insights that he finds in Marx concerning the idea of productive power much further than Marx (Oksala, 2016). As already suggested in the previous section, throughout his work Foucault repeatedly stresses the difference between those processes that constitute docile workers and those that constitute normalized subjects, that is normation and normalisation. Without too much ill-will 'normation' can be understood

38 In addition, Foucault allows us to understand the difference between the micro and the macro level of power as, not a difference in kind, but as a technical difference (Rose, 1999) To govern, Foucault argues, 'is to structure the possible field of actions upon others. The relationship proper to power would not therefore be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary linking (all of which can, at best, only be the instruments of power), but rather in the area of the singular mode of action, neither warlike nor juridical, which is government'(Foucault, 1983, p. 221). What follows is that a 'macro-actor' is not different in kind from the 'micro-actor', but is merely one who has a longer and more reliable 'chain of command' – that is to say, assembled into longer and more dispersed networks of persons, things and techniques (Rose, 1999, p. 5). This in turn means that the same style of analyses as deployed in, for instance, *Discipline and Punish* – the micro-physics of power – could also be used to analyse the techniques and practices for governing populations of subjects at the level of political sovereignty over an entire population (Rose, 1999, p. 5).

39 For Foucault, the state is neither an existing thing, nor an illusion, an error or an ideology (Foucault, 2008, p. 19). By contrast the state, 'is nothing else but the effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual stratification [étatisation] or stratifications, in the sense of incessant transactions which modify, or move, or drastically change, or insidiously shift sources of finance, modes of investment, decision-making centers, forms and types of control, relationships between local powers, the central authority, and so on '(Foucault, 2008, p. 77). Lemke directs attention to an insightful passage in the *Birth of Biopolitics*, where Foucault uses the concept of 'transactional reality' (Foucault, 2008, p. 297; Lemke, 2007, p. 48). Understood as a transactional reality, an entity like the state is born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them, at the interface, so to speak, of governors and governed (Foucault, 2008, p. 297). For Foucault the state is a dynamic set of relations that produces both the institutional structure of the state and the knowledge of the state. Such an analysis allows, then, for an understanding of how the borders between the state and civil society, the public and the private come into being and what marks these borders - as these are not given but made.

to correspond to Marx's notion of 'real subsumption' (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 25; Oksala, 2016). Recall that with the term 'real subsumption' Marx refers to the ways that capital not only takes over an already existing labour process (formal subsumption), but completely transforms its nature and, by extension the labourers themselves. Normalisation on the other hand introduces an aspect of subjectification that is given less attention in Marxist theories and to a certain extent can be said to correspond to false-consciousness and ideology (Oksala, 2016). Normalisation refers to those processes that produce other forms of the subject beside labourers, which can but do not necessarily intersect with normation.

Hence, what we should take from post-Marxism is the concern with two forms of struggle. First, the struggle against the diverse forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious). Second, the struggle against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce. These are the struggles against subjection and against forms of subjectivity. While the Marxist informed sport theoretical framework focuses predominantly on the second struggle, insightfully coined 'extractive power' (Patton, 1998, p. 64), post-Marxism takes both forms of struggle seriously.

4.3.3 The key lessons of post-Marxism

As I argued in section 1 of this chapter, the Marxist framework provides us with an account of alienation, that is an understanding of the historical separation of work and leisure, in the context of women's football. Yet, whereas Marx's critique of alienation is often understood in normative terms, the post-Marxist view that we established allows us to theorize it in practical terms. To be more precise we argued there are good reasons to believe that eventually both Marx's and Foucault's perspectives on the subject are much closer than is commonly suggested. For Marx species essence is the product of social relations, which parallels Foucault's account of the historically constituted subject. The Foucauldian poststructuralist view allows for a theorisation of the precise ways that the elite women's football players are constituted as subjects in terms of both 'normation' and 'normalisation', in the context of their experiences, that is the training field, the stadium etc. Yet, while the poststructuralist focus on the local is in general perceived to be antithetic to the Marxist position, we suggested, by contrast, to read Foucault as a post-Marxist in the sense that his analysis of the disciplines would be an elaboration of Marx's idea of real subsumption. In addition, the suggestion has been made that Marx himself already recognises the diffuse and heterogeneous nature of power and the constitutive nature is has with the subject. It has however also been argued that eventually Foucault develops the idea of productive power much further than Marx, as he repeatedly emphases the difference between normation and normalisation.

Thus, by moving towards a synthesis of the key theses of Marxist and Foucauldian poststructuralist informed sport studies, first of all the attempt has been made at effectively speaking about alienation under poststructuralist theoretical conditions. Secondly, the

attempt has been made at speaking effectively about both normation and normalisation without losing sight of the Marxist critique.

4.4 The synthesis of social sport studies and the theory of play

4.4.1 Play and the limits of post-Marxism

Given our task of the establishment of a framework that can give a comprehensive account of the experiences of the elite women's football players, we must now integrate those insights that we reviewed as indispensable for making sense of the data that emerged from the interviews. More particularly, we must now integrate the core insights that we delineated in the previous sections of this chapter and those of the theory of play. As argued, it is only by adding the theory of play that the establishment of the required theoretical framework can be accomplished, for without it, the third axis of the experience of the elite women's football players, namely the experience of sacrifice would be overlooked. For this purpose we must first of all determine what the theory of play demands from us with regard to existing methods.

Prior to this, it is useful to recall the key lessons that we should draw from the theory of play, such as established in chapter 3 of this thesis. In short, what the theory of play offers is a concept of an experience, that is the experience of play, that which must be distinguished from existing systems of value or meaning and their corollary dichotomies between playfulness/seriousness, irrational/rational, the subject's inside/the subject's outside. By contrast these oppositions are only secondary or historically contingent phenomenon, while in play these poles are united. This however does not mean that play is engaged with any sense of objectivity. It is not play that should be understood in reference to reality, but rather calculative reason, reality or objectivity that should be understood as derived from play. The creative characteristic of play further elucidates this point. Play produces novelty, or put more precisely, it is the condition under which new meaning appears. The novel must however not be understood as something radically new, neither can it be confined to the subject's inner world. Rather the novel should be understood in terms of the subject's reciprocal relation with her environment.

Thus, I argued in chapter 3 that play should be understood as a key structure of the experiences of the elite women's football players that can account for the references to sacrifice in the data. Recall that we argued that we are in need of a theoretical framework that (i) allows for a theorisation of sacrifice as evading moral, material, physical and social pressures and obligations yet motivating the players in such a way that it can compete with such demands; (ii) posits the experience of sacrifice as distinct from, yet ontologically prior to, these modes of subjection, as the players attribute meaning to something that escapes immediate recognition. The theory of play allows us to meet these requirements, as it precisely points to an experience that is both distinct from, yet ontologically prior to the diverse modes of subjection.

What the theory of play demands from us is a rejection of the normative monism that we find in the existing social sport studies paradigms. The theory of play shows us that we have the ability to engage with at least two incommensurable scales of values. First, with regard to the Marxist-informed paradigm, what the theory of play makes visible is that the monistic paradigm problematically takes the separation of work and leisure as a given, or more precisely de jure, when it becomes the object of critique. We know that Marx dreams of a situation in which the separation between the sphere of work and leisure is overcome, when we can fish without becoming a fisherman or hunt without becoming a huntsman and, where we can play for the sake of play, without becoming a professional player. The theory of play makes us realize that in his capitalist critique he takes *de facto* separation to be *de jure*. Subsequently, when Marxist-informed sport studies talk about the alienating effects of the commercialisation and instrumentalisation of modern sport they fail to see, or rather, forget that even a fisherman always and already fishes without being a fisherman. Presumably Marx himself knows that. If not, he wouldn't be capable of making the separation of work and leisure the linchpin of his critique of capitalism nor its undoing the key to a new way of the world. Yet, when the *de facto* separation becomes the object of critique, social sport studies, taking their cue from Marx, take it to be *de jure*. Accordingly, Marxist-informed sport studies fail to see that a reference to the culture of obedience in elite sports does not exhaust the experiences of the elite women's football players. Indeed, they fail to see that the quote 'football is not important, yet it is the most important thing of the world' and others to the same effect, do not refer to any internal contradiction within the dominant reality between values that can be measured in terms of costs and benefits. Rather, they refer to the women's football players' innermost experience of living a dual existence, that is of being both player and plaything. More particularly, they fail to see that the women's football players' sense of living a contradictory life results from the forgetting of play.

Accordingly, what this makes visible is that the theory of alienation in terms of exploitation itself generates oppression. For, eventually the elite women's football players feel they are being regarded as irrational when they are in play. The following quotes that we presented in chapter 1 are exemplary: '*If I really think about it, I would quit playing football.* ***It's madness****. But then I do*n't'; '*But asking your brother-in-law to change his wedding date is for me actually* ***too bizarre*** *to believe; I fully devote myself to football. What you see is that I adjust my work to football and not the other way around. A lot of people call me* ***mad'.*** Being made to feel irrational when one is not, or more precisely is in play, is precisely a mode of oppression. More particularly, it is a form of subjective or spiritual alienation. What I precisely mean with this is that the produced incapacity to make sense of themselves, results in self-doubt and feelings of powerlessness and impotence. The players literally feel incapable of taking possession of a power they believe they do not have.

Thus, for the elite women's football players, eventually the forgetting of play results in subjective or spiritual alienation. Importantly, this doesn't mean that the objectivist theory

of alienation doesn't have something to tell us. Nor does it mean that alienation should then be perceived as an ontological condition of the subject as such. Concerning the latter, the theory of play upholds, by contrast, the position that the separation between playfulness and seriousness is historical and contingent. However, in contrast to the Marxist critique, it also upholds the position that (i) in reality they are united, and (ii) that this unity is not endowed with any sense of objectivity, and therefore (iii) freedom and the possibility of resistance and emancipation remains.

What eventually follows from these considerations against the monistic view implicit in Marxist-informed social sport studies is that alienation cannot be understood in terms of exploitation alone, but first and foremost refers to the women's football players *produced* incapacity to make sense of their life and life choices. In effect, the theorisation of alienation in terms of exploitation rests on a prior objectification of the subject that reduces the subject to the level of objective, or instrumental reason. Accordingly, insofar as we take seriously the experiences of the elite football players as reflected on by themselves, we must conclude that the forgetting of play not only causes modes of oppression, but itself *is* a mode of oppression. More particularly the forgetting of play is a conceptual mode of oppression that causes ethical forms of oppression.

Second, while the Foucauldian poststructuralist perspective is particularly helpful in theorizing the specificities of the diverse modes of subjection, in terms of not only normation, but also normalisation, what the theory of play makes visible is that the problem with this perspective is that it never even entertained the thought that humans do also play. Of the Marxist-informed account it could be said that it forgot the play element, when making the separation between work and leisure the object of critique. The poststructuralist-informed paradigm, informed by Foucault's work on disciplinary power, seems to completely overlook it. Presumably this is for the very reason that the poststructuralist-informed paradigm tries to stay away from any reference to real or authentic selves. Recall that in this view any reference to a real self or authentic interests is considered a fallacious conflation of cause and effect. However, it does overlook that we always retain the ability to operate according to at least two systems of meaning, that is that of the dominant reality and that of play, and that we can achieve freedom by playing them against each other. Thus, likewise this view on subjectivity eventually rests on a prior objectification of the subject. Accordingly, the question of the subject's self-constitution remains tied to the options or alternatives imposed by objectivist or instrumental reason, which in turn can only limit the subject.

To conclude, the problem with the existing frameworks in social sport studies, including our attempt at a synthesis, is that they are eventually all monistic about systems of values, reducing all experience to the regime of objectivist reason. In these frameworks the subject is simply trapped, an object amongst many other objects that serve very precise and univocal goals. There is nothing in or about the subject that is immune to subjection, in terms of both normation and normalisation. As a result, any experience that cannot be

explained in objectivist terms bears the mark of irrationality. It is for this reason that we argued that the forgetting or overlooking of play must be understood as a conceptual wrong that causes forms of oppression.

Accordingly, what this makes visible is that in the existing theoretical frameworks the notions of freedom and resistance are problematically based on the same objectivist reasoning as the calculative and instrumentalist reasoning that is held responsible for alienation. In these frameworks, resistance equals the introduction of new modes of subjection that in turn can only limit the subject. Moving beyond the reductionism that we find in the existing paradigms, the theory of play tells us that insofar as our experiences cannot be reduced to the instrumental level of reasoning, we should think of resistance in different terms. More particularly, what the theory of play minimally tells us is that even though systems of good reason may tell us otherwise, we can always play.

In short, play is precisely that which resists alienation.

4.4.2 The playing subject, freedom and indetermination

The question that must now be addressed is how play subtends a theory of resistance, and prior to this, how should we precisely understand that part of the subject that is immune to oppression?

Starting with the latter, we must first of all recall that the irreducible commitment to play cannot be considered in a dichotomous fashion along with the diverse modes of subjection - normation and normalisation. This, we argued, follows from Bataille's notion of sacrifice. By contrast, following Huizinga, I argued that in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players the experience of play cannot be posited alongside the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing', but should be understood as distinct from, yet ontologically prior to this distinction. According to Huizinga the experience of play precedes these distinctions, as in reality play contains both playfulness and seriousness. Insofar as play points to an experience of which the meaning is intrinsic to itself, the dichotomies between playfulness/seriousness, irrational/rational, the subject's inside/the subject's outside should be understood as secondary and historical phenomenon. More particularly, it is only under the condition of the inseparability of the players and their contexts that play can be meaningful in terms of itself. For as soon as they become separated, the meaning of play can be attributed to something outside it.

What importantly follows from these considerations is that the theory of play implies a radically different understanding of subjectivity than those we find in the existing theoretical frameworks in social sport studies. More particularly, in so far as the meaning of play must be understood as intrinsic to itself, the theory of play rests on a pre-objective notion of experience that understands the subject to be reciprocally related to its environment or context. What this means concretely is that players are both makers and receivers of

meaning. Thus, in the context of our study, participating in football exposes the elite women's football players to a set of meanings that constitute the world of football. However, this meaning can only occur through the players' active participation in the world of football, that is through their capacity to give meaning. What this means is that the subject cannot be perceived as an object that is pushed around and shaped by its surroundings without contributing to its meaning. This would amount to the account of subjectivity that we find in the existing frameworks in social sport studies. Neither can the subject be perceived as the single and unique cause of meaning-making. This would return us to the notion of the sovereign subject resting on pure consciousness that we find in the idealist tradition.

Against these views, the theory of play tells us that it is only from an outside position, that is an out of the game perspective, that it is even possible to speak about a first person perspective, as it is only from an outside position that demarcations between the subjective and the objective are possible. Accordingly, it is only from an outside position that an individual can be said to be the cause of meaning making, or said to be determined by her environment. These demarcations are, however, always misleading attributions of the constitutive capacities to either one of the two poles.

Hence, for the theory of play, it is not determination, but indetermination that characterizes the subject. Indetermination is what exceeds the terms and functions outside the constraints of the oppositional understanding of the subject, as either resting on pure consciousness or being fully constituted by the outside world. Thus, the playing subject is a subject of indetermination.

What follows from these considerations is that the playing subject cannot be oppressed, that is the playing subject is immune to oppression. Put differently, insofar as she is playing, oppressive structures have no hold on the subject. This does not mean that oppression does not exist, far from it. What we are saying is that oppressive structures have no hold on the playing subject, insofar as it is playing, precisely because the playing subject is not an object. In fact only objects can be oppressed, that is entities whose values are determined by something outside them. Accordingly the playing subject must be a free subject, yet in a very peculiar way.

What we know already is that the freedom of the playing subject cannot be understood in a historical sense. Second, we know that it should be distinguished from Bataille's understanding of the term as self-loss through excess and fusion with a more real oneness. For Bataille's free subject, free as in being free from all constrains, has arguably lost its capacity to respond to the dominant reality. Yet, to be capable of responding to the dominant reality demands rations of subjectivity. To be more precise, without such rations one is fully taken over by a state of excess - drunkenness, illusion, madness etc. and incapable of differentiating the realm of excess and that of real-life.

Contrary to Bataille's subject of sacrifice, the playing subject, as we argued in chapter 3, can call herself back out of her role, as in the 'enactment of play, there remains a knowledge, albeit strongly reduced, about his double existence' (Fink, 2016, p. 24, 25). Hence, it is this capacity to call oneself back out of one's role that keeps a sufficient quantity of rations of subjectivity for the playing subject to respond to real life. Correspondingly the player who doesn't play can call herself into play. What this, in very concrete terms, means, is that the freedom of the playing subject consists in the fact that she is capable of choosing worlds, that is between that of the dominant reality and that of play.

Thus, contrary to the existing frameworks in social sport studies that tie the question of freedom to the functioning of the oppressive and dominant other and correspondingly link the question of freedom to a concept of emancipation understood as the liberation from or of an oppressive or unfair form of constraint, the theory of play advances a positive notion of freedom where freedom is understood as the capacity to choose between multiple available worlds. The word choice must here, however, be treated with caution, as it is does not refer to the notion of choice understood as a selection of options outside the subject that are independently available to it. This would lead us back to the domain of instrumental reason. The freedom of the playing subject is not the freedom of selection, but a freedom of choice that is connected to inalienable part of the self.

More particularly, it is the inalienable capacity to call oneself back from and into play, without being subjected to power and discourse or material necessities. As we argued, the arbitration between the two scales of value belongs under no scale of value (there is no third, overarching scale of value). As a result, the player falls into a normative vacuum, and therefore a zone that is not subjected to power or discourse, or to material necessities: a zone of freedom. Hence, the playing subject is a free subject because she has a choice between worlds, free from the demands made upon her.

However, in contrast to the oppositional pairing of freedom and oppression, this capacity has no given content and cannot be defined. Put differently, there is nothing inherently good or bad about the playing subject's capacity to choose between worlds. This is because it is not a quality or attribute, of which the meaning is determined by something outside it. By contrast, the freedom brought to us by playing must be understood as a consequence of indetermination, the very indetermination that characterises the subject. By contrast, every negative definition of freedom gives determinism the last say.

4.4.3 Foucault's subject of freedom

Before continuing our discussion, we must not overlook that it was paradoxically Foucault himself, one of social sport's studies key authors of inspiration, who, predominantly in his later work, advances a positive notion of freedom and questions the possibility of the move from subjection to subjectification, that is the creation of a new subject position. This is in contrast to the unilateral focus on Foucault's work on disciplinary power that we find in the

field of social sport studies. In fact, based on his earlier distinction between a repressive hypothesis of power and a positive understanding of power as that which enables or produces, in his later work, Foucault argues that his starting point of analysis is not oppression, but freedom, understood as the concrete capacity of humans to act. Freedom, he argues, should be understood as the precondition of both politics and ethics (Foucault, 1983).

What this first of all means is that it is only under the condition that people are free that domination can occur. In short, what Foucault means by freedom is the ability of people to act in a variety of ways, that is of having the power to act in several ways or of not being constrained in such a fashion that all possibilities for action are eliminated. This is well captured by Patton: 'the subject of freedom is in effect a subject of power in the primary etymological sense of that term' (Patton, 1998, p. 62). Accordingly, what Foucault understands by power in the primary sense of that term is a capacity to do things (Foucault, 1983, p. 216; Patton, 1998, pp. 61-63). Every human subject, regardless of what else she, they, or he may be, has a capacity to do certain things. The capacity to do things, or put differently agency, should not be understood in terms of a voluntarist, Hobbesian or Nietzschean notion of the will (Patton, 1998, p. 63). Instead, power conceived of as a capacity to do things involves not so much involuntary, but rather voluntary bodily movement that is intended to serve some purpose. Actions of which human agents are capable are 'intentional, goal oriented movements of dispositions of forces' (Patton, 1998, p. 63). What follows from this understanding of freedom, is that domination eventually only makes sense insofar as people have a certain capacity to act.[40] Put bluntly, one can only be silenced when one is capable of speech.[41] Thus, even when his work on disciplinary power may have suggested otherwise, eventually for Foucault, as for us, freedom should not be understood in opposition to oppression. More particularly, for Foucault, freedom should not be understood as being tied

40 Patton's remarks concerning *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality,* volume 1, are here particularly insightful, as he suggests that it is precisely in order to dress bodily forces that the techniques of discipline are deployed: 'It is precisely because there is nothing natural about such constructions and because they are fabricated upon an active body, a body understood in terms of primary capacities and power, that is accompanied by resistance (Patton, 1998, p. 62).

41 What secondly follows from this understanding of freedom is that subjects can also limit power. Insofar as freedom consists of one's capacity to do and to make, the subject is accordingly provided with the capacity to act on certain limits. To further elucidate this point, we need to consider the diverse forms of power that Foucault distinguishes: Power over, or strategic games between, liberties and domination (Foucault, 1997, p. 299). What Foucault means by "power over" is precisely the concrete capacities of individuals to do and to make. Accordingly they are inescapable features of social relations (Patton, 1998, p. 63). Domination by contrast is a particular type of power relationship that stabilizes and fixes power relations. In cases of domination, power relations are asymmetrical leaving subordinated persons little room for manoeuvre because their capacity to act is limited (Foucault, 1997, p. 283). Domination, however cannot but be realised in a field of power relations and should therefore always be conceived of as a secondary result. What this, in very concrete terms, means is that domination can never be complete or exhaustive, for as soon as this becomes the case there would no longer be a power relation. As Foucault put it, 'at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom' (Foucault, 1983, p. 221).

to a negative concept of liberty. Freedom does not mean to be liberated from an unfair form of constraint or limitation. Rather for Foucault freedom should be understood as 'freedom to', that is the concrete capacity to act. Perceived in this way, freedom enables and limits oppression.[42] However, what precisely does it mean for a subject to act on certain limits? To enact one's freedom should for Foucault always be understood in a historical sense.[43]In fact, it is precisely by studying concrete practices that Foucault allows himself to say that freedom also limits power. The women's movement, the anti-apartheid movement and the Seattle protests, all show in a very concrete way that domination can never be exhaustive.

4.4.4 Play, therapy and resistance

While it is important not to overlook that it was paradoxically Foucault himself, who is his later period advances a positive notion of freedom, understood as acts without particular qualities, we must remain faithful to the insights provided by the theory of play. For it is not the later Foucault, but the theory of play that allows us to make sense of the references to sacrifice that we find in the data of this study. To recall, what the playing subject has revealed over and above the existing frameworks in social sport studies is that their adherence to an oppositional understanding of freedom and oppression is far from innocent,

42 Foucault, however, argues that his analysis of power should not be mistaken for a theory of power, as power for him should always be understood in a historical sense. 'I never spoke of Power, I never did an analysis of Power, I never said what Power is, which was interpreted by certain active minds to mean that I was making a kind of absolute of it, of transcendental power, of hidden divinity, etc. Okay, when we look at things, if I never define power, and so if I don't speak about Power, what do I do instead? I study things like a psychiatric asylum, the forms of constraint, exclusion, elimination, disqualification, let us say, the reason that is always precisely embodied, embodied in the form of a doctor, a medical knowledge, a medical institution, etc., exercised on madness, illness, un-reason, etc., what I study is an architecture, a spatial disposition, what I study are the disciplinary techniques, the modalities of training, the forms of surveillance, still in much too broad terms, but… what are the practices that one puts in play in order to govern men, that is, to obtain from them a certain way of conducting themselves? That is to say that each time it is something precise, concrete, that is of the order of domination, constraint, coercion, etc. all things that one could put, if one likes, under the category of power, but this notion of power repels me much more than those who reproach me for using it, and it is precisely as a way of undertaking a real, concrete, precise critique of this shadowy notion of power that I speak of these different things, and that I study them' (Foucault, 2012, p. 105). Accordingly for Foucault, all there is are relations of power and practices.

43 Even in his work on the ethical self-relation, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* and the interviews "On the Genealogy of Ethics" and "The Ethics for the Concern of Self as a Practice of Freedom", Foucault argues that the ethical practice of 'care of the self' always takes place in a relational and historical context (Foucault, 1986, 1990, 1997 and see Oksala, 2005 pp. 157- 169). Recall that in these works, Foucault, shifts his focus from the analyses of normation and normalisation to a third axis of subjectification, i.e. the self-constituted subject and the relation between the subject as both constituted and self-constituting. Based on the Greek ethical experience, the central thought that Foucault puts forward is that the practice of freedom requires the adoption of a 'creative' stance or attitude toward self-understanding. It is an ethics of acts and deed, however neither in the face of a pre-set goal, nor based on pre-established knowledges that one has about oneself, but must be understood as an ongoing process of experimentation (Oksala, 2005, p. 168). Such practices of freedom, as Foucault suggests, allow one to overcome or unleash what has become stratified or frozen in the ethical self-relation. It allows for the experience of some sort of novelty perceived from the established forms of self-understanding and as such a different relation of the self to the self.

both ethically and politically. By contrast, the analysis of the playing subject brought into focus that the conceptual distinction between freedom and oppression is itself imposing modes of oppression. As long as elite women's football players make use of tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, they can only see themselves or their life and life choices as irrational. Secondly, the playing subject has revealed that as long as freedom remains tied to a negative concept of liberty, it remains tied to the options or alternatives provided by objectivist or instrumental reason, which in turn can only limit the subject.

If we take these insights seriously, we must conclude that the theory of play brings us not only conceptual discoveries that function outside the constrains of the existing framework in social sport studies, but importantly also brings about a form of relief. It could even be more ambitiously said that play is curative and brings about health. On the face of it, appealing to theory to alleviate suffering might appear as a category mistake, yet insofar as it is precisely the forgetting of play that results in subjective modes of oppression, we can likewise assume that a self-understanding through play is potentially an emancipatory experience. Arguably, a self-understanding through play would allow the elite women's football players to overcome the feeling of being irrational, when they are in fact free.

Accordingly, we are drawn into the conclusion that such a curative self-understanding through play is a concrete model of resistance in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players. To be more precise, what the self-understanding through play makes visible is that we should understand resistance not in terms of the duality of oppression/alienation, but rather as resistance to this very opposition. For, recall, this is the duality that is oppressive. Put differently, the concept of resistance shouldn't be understood in opposition to domination—resistance as directed against domination—but as directed to the false choice we are presented with: to perceive ourselves as either subjects or objects. To posit the subject as a ground for change is a misleading attribution of a constitutive capacity to the subject. Similarly, to posit the subject as an object amongst other objects, incapable of meaning-making, is a misleading attribution of a constitutive capacity to the environment.

Thus, what the theory of play makes visible is that resistance is resistance against normative monism, or reductionism. Concretely, it is resistance to the idea that the elite women's football players cannot both want to win and stay healthy. Should we still want to speak of a revolutionary subject in the context of women's football, we would then be referring to a player who refuses to make a choice between infernal alternatives: to suffer or to quit (see also: Heuvel, van den, 2017, p. 134).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the introduction of the theory of play forces a reconsideration of the existing frameworks in social sport studies. It has been made apparent that each of the paradigmatic models has something to offer to our analysis of the data that emerged from the surveys undertaken for this study. Yet, taking seriously our discovery in chapter 3 that the theory of play accounts for the references to sacrifice in the data and that play must be understood as an irreducible structure of the experiences of the elite women's football players, we can only maintain them in the mode of synthesis. This should not be mistaken to be a mere eclectic approach that mixes and matches at the risk of method incongruence. Thus, in this chapter we have sought to fashion an internally consistent theoretical framework that is cognizant of the varied and even contradictory theses of the diverse insights it appeals to and a novel contribution in its own right.

To this purpose we have first of all determined which of the theoretical insights of the Marxist and Foucauldian poststructuralist frameworks in social sport studies are indispensable for the theorisation of the two themes that we distinguished in chapter 1: 'High performance' and 'gender normalisation'. Second, we have tested the compatibility between these two frameworks. To be more specific, we have asked to what extent the poststructuralist critique of the subject is a problem for our adherence to the Marxist notion of alienation. This required an assessment of the move towards a synthesis provided by the cultural studies paradigm in social sport studies. We argued that for our purposes the cultural studies paradigm eventually places too much emphasis on economic forces in their account of the subject under alienation. However, we also argued that by turning to both Marx and Foucault himself, a more nuanced reading of both Marxism and Foucauldian poststructuralism becomes possible that is best describes as 'post-Marxist'. To be more precise we have argued that there are good reasons to believe that Marx's and Foucault's perspectives on the subject are much closer than is commonly assumed. While the poststructuralist focus on the local is in general perceived to be antithetic to the Marxist position, we proposed to read Foucault's analysis of the disciplines as an elaboration of Marx's idea of real subsumption. Conversely, I suggested that Marx himself already recognised the diffuse and heterogeneous nature of power and the constitutive nature it has with the subject. Both of which are mainstays of Foucault's work. It has however also been argued that eventually Foucault develops the idea of productive power much further than Marx, thanks to his repeated emphasis on the difference between normation and normalisation.

Once this post-Marxist framework has been established, we arrived at the following conclusion: (i) the Marxist side of the framework allows us to adequately make sense of the theme of 'high performance', by way of a theory of alienation; (ii) the Foucauldian poststructuralist side of the framework allows us to make sense of the theme of 'gender normalisation' by providing the necessary tools to theorize the diverse modes of subjection in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players; (iii) the theory of play

allows us to adequately make sense of the theme of sacrifice. Concerning the latter, recall that we observed in chapter 2 that the theme of sacrifice involves an experience of a conflict between discrete value systems. Accordingly, we argued that the experience of sacrifice points to an experience of the co-existence of value systems. Insofar as the theory of play precisely posits experience in terms of a dual consciousness, we argued that the theory of play allows us to account for the theme of sacrifice. However, we also argued that insofar as the women's football players use ideological tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, they can only sense their life and life choices as being contradictory. These are, as stated before, the two meanings of the quote 'Football is actually not important, but then it is' (as well as several others, reviewed in chapter 1).

Third, insofar as the theory of play challenges the monistic view that we find on both sides of the post-Marxist framework, we have analysed in this chapter how the theory of play forces us to think this framework anew. We have argued that by overlooking or forgetting the play element, both the Marxist and the Foucauldian poststructuralist sides are limited to a monistic understanding of the subject. Both sides overlook the fact that there is something in or about experience that is neither ideological nor discursively constructed, that is the experience of play. Accordingly, both sides overlook that eventually the subject retains the constant possibility of engaging with at least two systems of values, that is that of the dominant reality and of play.

What this brought into view is that the framework cannot provide a notion of resistance outside the objectivist logics that it holds responsible for oppression. To be alienated, we argued, means to be robbed of the playing part of the self. Which accordingly means to be objectified by instrumental reason. Yet, instead of returning to play, resistance is sought within the domain of objectivist reason itself. Accordingly, both sides eventually only risk triggering further modes of oppression, as it is far from clear how such new modes of subjection may be emancipating.

The theory of play brought us the anthropological discovery of a new type of subject: the playing subject. And with this, eventually a new way of thinking about freedom and resistance that is lacking within the existing frameworks in social sport studies. As the theory of play places subjectivity in the pre-objective realm, the playing subject should be understood as a free subject, yet in very particular way. To be free, as we learned from the later Foucault, means not to be free from constrains, but to be capable of enacting a certain room for manoeuvre. Yet, we also learned that eventually for Foucault the capacity of an individual to do and to make should always be understood in a historical sense. The freedom of the playing subject should by contrast be understood in an ahistorical sense, albeit one radically different from the ahistorical notion of freedom as sovereignty that we find in the idealist account of subjectivity resting on pure consciousness. Neither should it be mistaken for Bataille's glorification of excess, as the subject of excess has lost the necessary rations of subjectivity to be capable of differentiating the realm of excess and that

of real life. By contrast, as the world of play and that of the dominant reality are exposed to each other, the playing subject can always choose between the two worlds. Accordingly, it is this availability of choice that marks the inalienable freedom of the playing subject. In short, we argued that the playing subject is a free subject insofar as she has a choice within the two worlds.

Insofar as the freedom of the playing subject resides in her capacity to choose within the two worlds, this makes visible that we can no longer posit resistance against domination. Worse still, it makes visible that this opposition is itself oppressive, as made apparent in the context of the experiences of the women's football players. As long as the players can only make sense of their life and life choices in terms of opposing systems of values they'll understand their existence as being pathological. Accordingly, they can only understand themselves as irrational or mad. Recall again the following quotes: 'If I really think about it, I would quit playing football. It's madness. But then I don't'; 'But asking your brother-in-law to change his wedding date is for me actually too bizarre to believe; I fully devote myself to football. What you see is that I adjust my work to football and not the other way around. A lot of people call me mad'.

Presumably if they had been provided with the tools to understand that they are not mad—but playing—subjects, they'd no longer be submitted to the false choice: to either find an answer (the truth) inside themselves, or in the dominant reality. What they would discover, rather, is a higher type of resistance, which is resistance to the false choice: to perceive oneself as committed to one system of values or to another. They'd discover our discovery that resistance is resistance against monism.

Let me conclude on my move towards an internally consistent account of the experiences of the elite women's football players such as described by themselves that synthesises the insights provided by the theory of play and the post-Marxist framework. First, what the Marxist side of the post-Marxist framework provides are the necessary tools to situate the separation of leisure and work in the context of developments of elite women's football. Second, what the Foucauldian poststructuralist side of the framework provides are the necessary tools to theorize the various modes of subjection in the concrete context of the players' experiences. Third, what the theory of play provides are first of all the necessary tools to understand that insofar as the sphere of leisure and work are in reality united, it is wrong, theoretically, ethically and politically, to reduce the experiences of the elite women's football players to the sphere of work, or of instrumental reason. To be more precise, it allows us to understand that regarding the *de facto* separation as *de jure* is not simply a conceptual fallacy but one that has grave ethical and political consequences. Second, the theory of play allows us to theorize the athletic subject in a radically new way, which opens the doors to a theory of freedom and resistance that is lacking in the field of social sport studies. Importantly, although it competes with it, the scale of value of play is not disconnected from the scale of instrumental reason. Accordingly, it is affected by it.

However, the playing subject cannot be determined by it, as she can always choose to play. Indeed, the elite women's football players are subjected to football's culture of obedience, yet at the same time their irreducible commitment to the game and the concomitant sacrifices, reveal that the themes of 'high performance' and 'gender policing' do not exhaust their experiences. They sacrifice not a certain part (say, their health) of the real world to another (say, money), but to play. The results are playing subjects occupying what Fink calls a particular schizophrenic position, one side engaged with the dominant reality and the other with the world of play.

A self-understanding through play is potentially a liberating experience, as it would allow the women's football players to understand that their commitment to the game is anything but irrational. This is in concrete terms what resistance would look like in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players. Importantly it must however be noted there is nothing inherently good or bad about the playing subject's capacity to choose between worlds. In short, there is nothing inherently good or bad about the inalienable freedom of the playing subject. In fact only objects can be called good or bad, as the value of objects is precisely determined by something outside them. By contrast, the value of being in play is intrinsic to itself.

Let me here emphasize once more that I am not arguing that oppression does not exist. Neither am I arguing on the practical level that players should embrace their own oppression. What I am saying, is that the kinds of pressure that the club owners and coaches put on players, are unable to force them effectively because the players always have an unassailable access to choice. Put differently, they play on their own terms. Club owners and coaches may benefit from it, but this is epiphenomenal.

Conclusion

Towards a feminist playology

Now we are directing ourselves towards a conclusion, we must ask once more what the theory of play offers to our understanding of the data that emerged from the interviews over and above the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigms that we find in the field of social sport studies. More particularly, we must conclude how the integration of the insights provided for by the theory of play and our establishment of a post-Marxist framework, provides us with the required model or method for making adequate sense of the experiences of the elite women's football players, such as expressed by themselves. To this end, it is worthwhile recapitulating both the empirical and theoretical findings of the preceding chapters.

In the first 3 chapters of this thesis, I have presented my fieldwork of elite women's football in the Low Countries as a critical perspective on contemporary dynamics and intersections of gender, ethnicity/race, sexuality and athleticism in modern sports. The empirical study looked at the social significance of elite women's football in the context of two related developments in elite women's football, as set out in the introduction to this thesis. First, women's football has seen enormous growth over the past years in terms of levels of participation and media attention. Second, the sport is no longer solely an amateur one, but became semi-professional with increasing levels of facilities, sponsorship and support systems. Both developments should, however, be understood in relation to the still dominant image of football as a masculine sport.

In order to give an account of the social significance of elite women's football, I first of all gave an overview of the theoretical frameworks in the field of social sports studies. On this basis, I delineated three paradigms that currently inform the field of social sport studies: Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism. Central to the Marxist-informed framework is the theorisation of the experiences of elite athletes in reference to labour, that is the reproduction of material existence. For Marxist-informed sport theorists, elite sport is a derivative phenomenon growing out of alienated labour in which those positive values that are usually associated with leisure and sports are either negated as a result of the dominance of the values of capitalist society or recognized in an illusory fashion. Accordingly, in Marxist-informed sport studies, the experiences of elite athletes are either understood in terms of the alienated character of work, or in reference to an illusionary realm that is falsely equated with the realm of freedom. Central to the cultural studies paradigm is the explanatory value attributed to Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Accordingly, in this framework power is not conceptualised in terms of coercion, but as more subtle forms of ideological dominance. However, I argued that in congruence with the Marxist paradigm, the cultural studies trajectory eventually overlooks the relevance of sport to sexual politics. This irreducibility of identity exclusion to class oppression is a core theme within the Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigm. Central to the poststructuralist paradigm is the emphasis on the local or in short localities as the site for the theorisation of the workings of power. Accordingly, this framework allows for an analysis of the diverse modes of subjection in relation to gender, race/ ethnicity and sexuality in elite sports.

Second, informed by the insights provided by the existing frameworks in social sport studies I analysed the data that emerged from the interviews. The analysis pointed out the necessity of both a confirmatory and complementary stance towards the existing frameworks. As regards confirmation, the data of this research supports the established view that both the experiences of 'policing of gender' and 'high performance' are central for elite sport players. The theme of 'high performance' is accounted for in those social sports studies that, taking their cue from the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist frameworks, interrogate the modern instrumental approach to sport and its neoliberal development. The theme of 'gender policing' is accounted for in all those social sport studies that, drawing upon cultural studies and (feminist) poststructuralist frameworks, focus on identity construction and the question of gender-normalization, transgression and compliance in relation to high performance sport.

Concerning the need for supplementation, a key part of the data that emerged from the interviews, namely those encompassing references to sacrifice, cannot be accounted for by the existing frameworks in social sport studies. More particularly, it was made apparent that in contrast to the view upheld by the existing frameworks in social sport studies the themes of 'gender policing' and 'high performance' do not exhaust the experiences of the elite women's football players, as these reveal that their 'willingness' to make sacrifices cannot be explained in terms of football's culture of obedience.

Third, on this basis, I concluded that the existing frameworks in social sport studies are not sufficient for this study and formulated the central research question this research poses: **How should we conceptualize the experiences of the elite women's football players in order to do justice to the experience of sacrifice that always accompanies it?** I argued that our task of giving a comprehensive account of the experiences of the elite women's football player cannot rely on the existing theoretical frameworks alone, but must be complemented with a theoretical framework that (i) allows us to make sense of the theme of sacrifice and (ii) allows us to theorize the experience of 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' as unified. For the women's football players experience 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice' in conjunction with one another.

Fourth, to this end I considered two related, yet distinct theories that are promising for an account of sacrifice. These are the an-economic theory of sacrifice, such as we find in the work of the main figures of the Collège de sociologie, amongst whom are Caillois, Michel Leiris and most notably Georges Bataille, and the pre-rational theory of play that we find in the works of Fink, Gadamer, and Huizinga. Regarding the an-economic theory of sacrifice, it has been made clear that this understanding is important for our task, as it allows us to theorize the experience of sacrifice as a limit experience, and secondly counters the logic of scarcity. However, it was also made clear that we must depart from Bataille's notion of sacrifice, as it is incompatible with the themes of 'high performance' and 'gender policing.' We are in need of a concept of experience that allows for an understanding of 'sacrifice'

congruent with the experience of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'. Subsequently we argued that the theory of play provides us with the required tools to give a theoretically sound account of the references to sacrifice in the data of this study. The theory of play offer us a concept of experience—the experience of play—which both temporarily suspends the rules, regulations and causalities of the dominant reality, yet cannot be understood as the other side of reason. By contrast, according to the pre-rational philosophy of play, the distinction between the rational and the irrational (or in terms of the language of play, the playful and the serious) is only a secondary or historical phenomenon. In 'reality proper', they argue, playfulness and seriousness are united. Finally, I have concluded that the pre-rational theory of play provides the theoretical model needed to conceptualize the experience of sacrifice, as being distinct from, yet bound to the experiences of 'high performance' and 'gender policing'.

In chapter 4 I looked at the philosophical significance of the introduction of play into the existing frameworks in social sport studies. More particularly, as the theory of play has made visible that the existing frameworks miss important insights in theorizing the subject, I have argued that we must establish a method capable of giving a comprehensive account of the data that emerged from the interviews with the elite women's football players. To this purpose I read the existing frameworks in social sport studies through the theory of play and questioned how the theory of play forces us to think them anew. First, I argued that each of the paradigms has something to offer to our analysis of the data that emerged from the surveys. More particularly, on the basis of our establishment of a post-Marxist framework, I suggested that; (i) the Marxist side of the framework allows us to make adequate sense of the theme of 'high performance', by way of a theory of alienation, albeit not explicitly normative: (ii) the Foucauldian poststructuralist side of the framework allows us to make sense of the theme of 'gender normalisation' by providing the necessary theoretical tools to theorize the diverse modes of subjection in the context of the experiences of the elite women's football players; (iii) the theory of play allows us to make adequate sense of the theme of 'sacrifice'.

Second, I argued that by forgetting or overlooking play, both sides of this framework result in a normative monism that forecloses the possibility of a proper understanding of the references to sacrifice that we find in our data. In contrast to the normative monism that we find in the existing frameworks, I show that the experience of sacrifice points to an experience of the co-existence of value systems, that is that of the dominant reality and play. The elite women's football players do not sacrifice a certain part (say, their health) of the real world to another (say, money), but to play. The results are playing subjects occupying what Fink calls a particular schizophrenic position, one side engaged with the dominant reality and the other with the world of play. Accordingly, I argued that the theory of play forces us to consider not determinacy, but indeterminacy as the defining characteristic of the subject.

Third, on this basis, I argued that the theory of play offers us a new model of the subject: the playing subject and with that a new way to think freedom and resistance that is lacking in the field of social sport studies. Lacking, as the theory of play exposes the conceptual, ethical and political wrongs of positing determination as the true principle of life and by extension take an active part in normalisation. First, insofar as the existing frameworks in social sport studies adhere to normative monism, they make the players' engagement in play inexplicable even to themselves, resulting in self-alienation and self-pathologisation. Second, given the adherence to normative monism, in these frameworks, resistance is sought within the domain of objectivist reason itself, which risks triggering further modes of oppression.

Thus, the playing subject has revealed that the understanding of subjectivity and freedom that we find in the existing frameworks in social sport studies not only begs the theoretical question of normativity, that is how can supposedly normalised selves counter their own normalisation, but is far from innocent, both ethically and politically. By contrast, our analysis of the playing subject brought into focus that the conceptual distinction between freedom and oppression itself is imposing modes of oppression. We argued that as long as the elite women's football players make use of tools informed by the belief in the opposition between playfulness and seriousness, they can, and supposedly only can, see their life and life choices as irrational. In addition, the analysis of the playing subject has revealed that as long as freedom remains tied to a negative concept of liberty, it remains dependent on normative monism, which in turn can only limit the subject.

For the playing subject, freedom does not consist of the elimination of constrains, but must be understood as the condition or capacity for choosing worlds. Thus, instead of thinking freedom as 'freedom from', where freedom is considered negatively as the elimination of constrains, the theory of play advances a positive understanding of freedom as the capacity to choose worlds. The word choice must here however be treated with caution, as it is does not refer to the notion of choice understood as a selection of options outside the subject that are independently available to it. This is the domain of instrumental reason. The freedom of the playing subject is not the freedom of selection, but a freedom of choice that is connected to an active self. More particularly, it is the inalienable capacity to call oneself back from and into play.

Hence, we argued that the playing subject is a free subject because she has a choice between scales of values. Regardless of its modes of subjection, the playing subject is gifted with this capacity to choose between worlds. Yet, in contrast to the oppositional pairing of freedom and oppression, this capacity has no given content and cannot be defined. This is because it is not a quality or attribute, of which the meaning is determined by something outside it. By contrast, the freedom brought to us by the playing subject must be understood as an expression of indetermination, the very indetermination that characterises the subject. On the other hand, every positive definition of freedom gives determinism the last say.

Accordingly, the playing subject revealed that if we still want to speak about resistance we must radically alter the common understanding of the term. Insofar as it is indetermination that liberates our lives from the forces that bind us, we can no longer adhere to the notion of resistance as *opposition* to power. By contrast we emphasised that resistance must be understood as resistance against monism, that is determinism. Resistance is the practice of living in several worlds; resistance against the false choice we are presented with: to consider ourselves as either subjects or objects. The playing subject is always both, that is both player and plaything.

Having recapitulated both our empirical and theoretical findings we are now in a better position to conclude what the theory of play offers to our understanding of the data that emerged from the interviews over and above the Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigms that we find in the field of social sport studies. More particularly, we are now in a better position to conclude on the characteristics of our method or framework. The dominant view upheld by social sport studies is that elite football is a form of work, that is, it is considered an environment where instrumentality and productivity prevail. Accordingly, athletes are considered to be intending sports in an objectivist mode. However, this thesis has revealed that we must reconsider the prevailing idea that sport's culture of obedience would exhaust the experiences of the elite women's football players. More particularly, what the references to sacrifice have brought into view is that even though the elite women's football players are subjected to both normation and normalisation, a key part of their experiences are lived and regarded as their own reward. This, we argued, is the experience of play. Whether the initial intention to be involved in football was instrumental or not is however not determinative of the experience of play. In this regard, the world of elite football has proved itself to be a fertile terrain for subjects to live the uniqueness of play, albeit temporarily.

While this may sound promising, what this study has also brought into view is that even though the elite women's football players may have some tacit understanding of their experience of being in play, eventually within the concrete context of their experiences they are denied the conceptual recourses to make full sense of their experiences. It is precisely for this reason that a self-understanding through play may bring about emotional or spiritual health. What this importantly means is that the philosophy of play should not be understood as being merely a theoretical framework. It must also be understood as a therapeutic exercise that invites players to attend to the relation between reality and the self. Accordingly, the therapeutic potential of the philosophy of play consists of the fact that it allows for self-discovery.

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English Summary

This project started with the aim to develop knowledge about the social significance of the experiences of elite women's football players in the Low Countries. More precisely, it aimed to understand how elite women's football players experience football as both an emancipatory and oppressive practice. It asked this in the context of two related developments. First, women's football has seen enormous growth over the past years in terms of levels of participation and media attention. Second, the sport is no longer solely an amateur one, but has become semi-professional with increasing infrastructure, facilities, sponsorship and support systems. Both developments should, however, be understood in relation to the image of football as a masculine sport which remains dominant. It was only in 1971, with the end of the ban on organized women's football in Europe, that women's football players could officially occupy a place on the field, and in 1979, that the Dutch football organization enshrined girls' football in its regulations.

The data that emerged from the empirical part of this study revealed that the usual questions concerning the diverse ways that elite women's football players are constituted as subjects must be complemented with another question: how can we account for the willingness of players to make sacrifices in terms of health, social life and financial security?

While the making of sacrifices seems part and parcel of any elite sportsperson's life, remarkably the insights that we find in the current literature in social sport studies are not able to make sufficient sense of the elite women's football players' experiences of sacrifice. These insights, largely informed by Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism, address the willingness of players to make sacrifices in terms of instrumental reason. The data of our study point out that this understanding overlooks a deeper level of experience that cannot be understood with reference to instrumental reason: the irreducible lived meaning of playing football.

The thesis put forward in this research is that the existing Marxist, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralist frameworks of social sport studies must be supplemented by the theory of play inherited from Johan Huizinga, Eugen Fink and Hans-Georg Gadamer for both theoretical and ethical reasons. I argue that the theory of play allows us to make sense of the experiences of sacrifice. More precisely, understanding play as an independent, irreducible structure of experience, allows us to make sense of the women's football players' experiences of sacrifice in a way complimentary to and compatible with the indispensable insights of Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism. Secondly, I argue that the theory of play shows that the existing frameworks miss important insights into theorizing the subject and, by extension, introduces a notion of freedom and resistance that is currently *lacking* in the field of social sport studies. The new model this thesis establishes is called 'feminist playology'.

Feminist playology synthesizes the key theoretical insights that we find in Marxism, cultural studies, Foucauldian poststructuralism and the theory of play into a new model. To be more precise it consists of a two-step synthetic account. First, it establishes a synthesis of Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism under the label of post-Marxism and secondly, it establishes a synthesis of post-Marxism with the theory of play. It argues first of all that the Marxist side of the post-Marxist framework provides the necessary tools to situate the historical separation of play and work in the context of elite sports. Secondly, it argues that the Foucauldian poststructuralist side of the framework provides the necessary tools to theorize the diverse modes of subjection in the concrete context of the experiences of elite sportspeople. Thirdly, it argues that the theory of play provides the necessary tools to think subjectivity, freedom and resistance that are lacking within the existing theoretical frameworks. And, it is called 'feminist' as it offers an account of resistance to normativity in general taking gender normativity as its paradigm.

Feminist playology advances a conceptualisation of freedom that is independent from a reference to instrumental reason. By contrast, it is based on the anthropological discovery of a new kind of subjectivity: the playing subject who engages both the dominant reality and play, in the absence of a third overarching scale of value. Hence, it argues that it is not determination, but indetermination that characterises the playing subject. Indetermination is what exceeds the terms and functions outside the oppositional understanding of the subject, as either resting on pure consciousness or being fully constituted by the outside world.

To be more precise, feminist playology advances the thesis that the playing subject is a free subject as she has a choice between at least two worlds. This choice is expressed as the inalienable capacity to call oneself back from and into play, without being subjected to power and discourse or material necessities. Feminist playology argues, however, that there is nothing inherently good or bad about the playing subject's capacity to choose between worlds. This is because it is not a quality or attribute, of which the meaning is determined by something outside it. By contrast, the freedom brought to us by playing must be understood as a consequence of indetermination, the very indetermination that characterises the subject.

In addition, the playing subject reveals that any talk of resistance should be revised. Insofar as it is indetermination that liberates our lives from the forces that bind us, we can no longer adhere to the notion of resistance as *opposition* to power. By contrast, feminist playology emphasises that resistance must be understood as resistance against monism, that is determinism. Resistance is the practice of living in multiple worlds.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Het oorspronkelijke doel van dit promotieonderzoek was kennis te ontwikkelen over de maatschappelijke betekenis van de ervaringen van topvrouwenvoetballers in de Lage Landen. Het richtte zich specifiek op het inzichtelijk maken van de ervaringen van vrouwelijke topvoetballers in termen van zowel emancipatie als onderdrukking. Deze vraag werd gesteld in de context van twee aan elkaar gerelateerde ontwikkelingen. Ten eerste heeft het vrouwenvoetbal in de afgelopen jaren een enorme groei meegemaakt op het gebied van participatie en media-aandacht. Ten tweede wordt de sport niet alleen meer op amateurniveau beoefend, maar is het semiprofessioneel geworden met een groeiende infrastructuur en een toename van faciliteiten, sponsoring en ondersteuningssystemen. Beide ontwikkelingen moeten echter worden begrepen in relatie tot het nog steeds dominante imago van voetbal als een mannelijke sport. Pas sinds 1971, met het einde van het verbod op het georganiseerde vrouwenvoetbal in Europa, kon vrouwenvoetbal een officiële plaats bemachtigen op het veld en in 1979 werd het meisjesvoetbal door de Nederlandse voetbalorganisatie vastgelegd in haar reglementen.

De data die voortkwamen uit het empirische deel van deze studie lieten zien dat de gebruikelijke vragen over de diverse manieren waarop voetbalsters gesubjectiveerd worden, aangevuld moeten worden met een andere vraag: hoe kunnen we de bereidheid van spelers om offers te brengen op het gebied van gezondheid, sociaal leven en financiële zekerheid duiden? Hoewel het maken van offers een wezenlijk onderdeel lijkt uit te maken van het leven van topsporters, is het opvallend dat de inzichten die we in het huidige sociale sportonderzoek vinden, ontoereikend zijn om een adequate duiding te geven van de opofferingsbereidheid van de voetbalsters. Geïnspireerd door onder meer Marxistische, en Foucaultiaanse poststructuralistische inzichten en inzichten uit de culturele studies duidt de huidige sportwetenschap de bereidheid tot het brengen van offers in termen van de instrumentele rede. De data van mijn studie toont echter dat daarmee een dieper gelegen ervaring over het hoofd wordt gezien die niet kan worden begrepen aan de hand van de instrumentele rede, namelijk de onherleidbare geleefde betekenis van voetballen.

De thesis van dit onderzoek is dat de bestaande op marxistische, culturele studies en Foucaultiaanse poststructuralistische leest geschroeide inzichten die we vinden in het huidige sportonderzoek moeten worden aangevuld met de filosofie van het spel van Johan Huizinga, Eugen Fink en Hans-Georg Gadamer vanwege theoretische en ethische redenen. Ik bepleit ten eerste dat de filosofie van het spel ons toestaat de opofferingservaringen van de voetbalsters te verklaren. Meer specifiek stel ik dat het spel, begrepen als een onafhankelijke en onherleidbare structuur van de ervaring, ons in staat stelt de ervaring van opoffering te duiden op een manier die congruent is met de onmisbare inzichten uit het marxisme, culturele studies en Foucaultiaans poststructuralisme. Ten tweede beargumenteer ik dat de filosofie van het spel ons laat zien dat de bestaande kaders belangrijke inzichten missen in de theorievorming omtrent subjectiviteit. En, ter aanvulling introduceert het een notie

van vrijheid en verzet die momenteel nog ontbreekt binnen het sportonderzoek. Het nieuwe model dat dit proefschrift voorstelt heet 'feministische ludologie'.

De feministische ludologie brengt de belangrijkste theoretische inzichten die we vinden in het marxisme, culturele studies, Foucaultiaans poststructuralisme en de filosofie van het spel samen tot een nieuw model. Om precies te zijn bestaat ze uit een synthese in twee stappen. Ten eerste vormt ze een synthese van marxisme, cultuurstudies en Foucaultiaans poststructuralisme, onder de naam post-marxisme en ten tweede een synthese van post-marxisme en de filosofie van het spel. Allereerst stelt de feministische ludologie dat de marxistische zijde van het postmarxistische kader de noodzakelijke theoretische instrumenten biedt om de historische scheiding tussen spel en werk te situeren in de context van topsport. Ten tweede stelt ze dat de poststructuralistische zijde van het kader de noodzakelijke instrumenten biedt ter duiding van de verschillende vormen van subjectivering in de concrete context van de ervaringen van topsporters. Ten derde stelt zij dat de filosofie van het spel de benodigde instrumenten biedt om op een nieuwe, in het huidige theoretische kader ontbrekende, manier na te denken te denken over subjectiviteit, vrijheid en verzet. En, dit model wordt 'feministisch' genoemd omdat het een verklaring biedt van weerstand tegen normativiteit in het algemeen, waarbij gendernormativiteit als paradigma wordt gehanteerd.

Feministische ludologie brengt een conceptualisering van vrijheid naar voren die onafhankelijk is van een verwijzing naar de rede. Daarentegen baseert ze zich op de antropologische ontdekking van een nieuwe subjectiviteit; het spelende subject dat zowel betrokken is op de dominante werkelijkheid als op de spelwereld - in afwezigheid van een derde overkoepelende waardeschaal. Vervolgens beargumenteert de feministische ludologie dat het subject niet door bepaaldheid, maar door onbepaaldheid gekenmerkt wordt. Onbepaaldheid stelt het subject buiten een oppositioneel begrip ervan, dat het beschouwt als iets berustend op een puur bewustzijn of geheel gevormd door de buitenwereld.

Meer specifiek bepleit de feministische ludologie de stelling dat het spelende subject een vrij subject is omdat ze een keuze heeft tussen ten minste twee werelden. Deze keuze bestaat uit het onvervreemdbare vermogen van het subject om zichzelf in en uit het spel te roepen, voorbij de onderworpenheid aan macht en materiële behoeften. De feministische ludologie stelt dat er niets inherent goed of fout is aan het vermogen om tussen twee werelden te kiezen, omdat het geen kwaliteit of eigenschap is waarvan de betekenis wordt bepaald door iets extern eraan. Daarentegen moet de vrijheid die we ervaren in het spel opgevat worden als een gevolg van de onbepaaldheid die het subject kenmerkt.

Als gevolg daarvan toont het spelende subject ons een nieuwe opvatting van verzet. Voor zover het indeterminiatie is die ons bevrijdt van de krachten die ons binden en begrenzen, kunnen we ons niet langer beroepen op een begrip van verzet als gericht tegen de macht. Daarentegen benadrukt de feministische ludologie dat verzet moet worden opgevat als verzet tegen monisme, oftewel determinisme. Verzet is de praktijk van leven in meerdere werelden.

Appendix: Overview data collection and data

Table 1. Overview data collection[44]

Method	Objectives	Settings	Activities
Content Analysis media material	Reconstruction of the public debate and tracking down networks of informants and key stakeholders.		
Semi-structured interviews	Eliciting in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of elite women's football players.	At interviewees' homes, club cantinas and offices, and a few at my office or via skype.	In total 31 interviews. 15 with current elite football players, 12 with elite players active between the 70s and the 90s, 2 with (former) male coaches of the Dutch/Belgian national teams and 2 with female managers, one working at national and the other at club level. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, but they generally tended towards two hours.
Observations during club visits and matches	Establishment of rapport with gatekeepers and eliciting insights into the experiences of sponsors and relatives of the players.	Elite women's football clubs based in either the Netherlands or Belgium.	In total 10 of the 15 clubs taking part in the Dutch-Belgian transnational competition were visited. Eight clubs based in the Netherlands and two clubs based in Belgium. Some Dutch clubs were paid several visits.
Week of participant observations	Immersion in the settings, cultural practices, and daily activities of elite women's football players and eliciting insights in what the interviewees believe and why and how they experience the place of football in their lives.	An elite women's football club located in the Netherlands.	

44 To protect confidentiality, I have made agreements with the interviewees that the interview transcripts will not be made available to third parties, not even in anonymized form. Elite women's football is a 'small' world, meaning that even in anonymised form, interview transcripts run the risk of revealing the identity of the interviewees.

Table 2. Evaluation Matrix: Matching data collection to key themes

Key Themes	Content analysis media material	Semi-structured interviews	Observations during club visits/ matches	Week of participant observation
Sports biography	x	x		
Social networks		x		
Everyday life		x		
Gender identity	x	x	x	
Physicality		x		x
Media		x	x	
Future plans		x		
Group behaviour			x	x
Relationship between staff and players			x	x

Table 3. Distribution of current players according to their experience with national A teams and (inter)national club football

	Dutch club level	Belgian club level	International club level	
Current players with a position in national team	5	2	3	
Current players without a position in national team	4	1		
Total				**15**

Table 4. Distribution former players according to their experience with national A teams and (inter)national club football

	Dutch club level	Belgian club level	International club level	
With a position in national team	7		5	
Without position in national team				
Total				**12**

Table 5. Distribution of coaches and managers according to their experience with national/ club level football

	National level	Club level	
Coaches	2		
Managers	1	1	
Total			**4**

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees in terms of gender and ethnicity

	Dutch ethnic background	Belgian ethnic background	Non-European Ethnic background
Current Women's football Players	12	2	1
Former Women's football players	11		1
Male coaches	1	1	
Male managers	1		
Female managers		1	
Total			**27**

Table 6. Overview of the interview data and key findings

Major categories	Associated concepts
High performance	Culture of competition, Working attitude, Structures of control, Public expectations and surveillance concerning performances, Fragility and uncertain nature of football career, Post football plans
Gender Policing	Youth experience, Club culture, Gender identity, Negative view of Femininity, Sexualisation, Female Apologetic, Cynicism and self-protection.
Sacrifice	Football versus real-life values, Disempowerment

Table 6 presents the major results of the coding analysis of the interviews conducted with former and present elite women's football players. The table shows three superordinate and 15 subordinate categories emerging from the analysis of the experiences of elite women's football players. The superordinate categories include 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice'. The table also indicates that six subcategories are associated with the major category 'high performance', seven with the 'gender policing' and two with the major category 'sacrifice'. All players discussed the superordinate categories 'high performance' and 'gender policing' and the overall majority 'sacrifice'. However no individual player discussed all the 15 categories in describing their experiences of being and becoming an elite women's football player.

Curriculum Vitae

Nathanja van den Heuvel was born in Ede, the Netherlands. She studied Cultural Studies and Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Literary Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Nathanja started her PhD project at the Institute for Philosophy, Leiden University. In addition she held a seat at the University Council of Leiden University, was a founding board member of the PhD council of the Institute for Philosophy, Leiden University and of the OZSW study group Feminist Philosophy and a board member of the Dutch Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP.NL). She secured diverse grants from the Leiden University Fund for the organisation of conferences and from the Prins Bernard Cultuur Fund for the Open Performance Academy (OPA), a research and presentation platform for performance arts. Nathanja has published several articles and book chapters on eco-feminism, queer pedagogies and the philosophy of play and sport. In 2019, Nathanja started the research and development project Multiform, an emancipatory education programme, in collaboration with Studio Fontana, Rotterdam-based primary and secondary schools and co-funded by Rotterdam CityLab. Nathanja worked as a lecturer at Leiden University, ArtEZ University of the Arts and the Willem de Kooning Academy and developed and taught courses on eco-philosophy, feminist philosophy and aesthetics. In addition she supervised both bachelor and master theses.