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

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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.